

Policy for Local School Systems

To establish early childhood education and parent involvement programs of high quality, the State Board of Education adopts the following policy:

1. Subject to the rules, regulations, policies, and guidelines of the State Board of Education, local school systems are encouraged to establish early childhood education programs which serve pre-kindergarten aged children. (Such programs may not use any state funds appropriated for grades Kindergarten through 12 or local funds required for participation in the state funds designated for grades Kindergarten through 12.)
2. Programs supported by state or federal funds designated to serve pre-kindergarten aged children will first be directed to children who are at risk due to economic disadvantages. The goal of the *Master Plan for Tennessee Schools: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century* is to provide a stable, increased funding source so all at-risk four-year-old children have the opportunity to attend a high quality early childhood education program and to extend opportunities to all four-year-old children as funds become available.
3. All programs established by local school systems to serve pre-kindergarten age children and funded by state early childhood education allocations will reflect the principles of high quality programs.
4. State funds available for early childhood education programs will be made available to local school systems through a proposal approval process. Proposals will be reviewed and funded using criteria developed by the State Department of Education and based upon the policies and guidelines of the State Board of Education.
5. Local school systems may operate programs for pre-kindergarten aged children through a number of arrangements including direct management, contracted management, subcontracting of program, consortium with other agencies, or combinations of these as approved by the State Department of Education.
6. Local school systems will be accountable under the policies and guidelines established by the State Board of Education for the performance and management of programs established by the local school systems to serve pre-kindergarten aged children.
7. Local school systems will cooperate with other community agencies to develop programs for at-risk, pre-kindergarten age children. New programs will complement existing programs, such that all income eligible children will be served in a coordinated fashion within each community.

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Principles of High Quality Programs

To bring about gains in children's learning, early childhood education programs including pre-k, and family engagement programs in Tennessee should be of high quality and reflect the following principles in planning, design, and delivery:

Family and Community Focus:

The focus should be to assist families and the community in providing developmentally appropriate support and services for young children at home and in community settings. All program services must be designed to recognize the importance of parents to a child's continuing growth and development.

All program services must be designed to recognize the importance of the family to a child's continuing growth and development. The focus should be to assist families and the community in providing developmentally appropriate support and services for young children at home and in community settings.

Developmentally Appropriate:

All aspects of early childhood education, pre-k and family engagement programs must be developmentally appropriate in terms of any expectations of the children. Programs must focus on the age and the needs of the individual child and address all areas of a child's development including cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and communication. Program curricula must align with the Tennessee Early Learning Development Standards. Program services must be delivered with an interactive and integrated approach.

Quality Standards for Program Performance:

All programs should exemplify developmentally appropriate practices and adhere to state operating standards. State standards are comparable to those recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Association for Children Education International, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Family Engagement

Programs should focus on family services which involve the family as a whole. The needs of the participating families will define the parameters of the core services provided. The core services available to all enrolled children and their families should be comprehensive and provided and delivered in a coordinated fashion between various agencies and program units. Programs should encourage the development of partnerships among the family, program, school(s), and the community. Families should have the training and the opportunity to participate effectively in program operations as well as program decision making.

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Interagency Collaboration:

All pre-k programs should collaborate with other agencies and programs to maximize resources and coordinate services. Local public school systems and related community agencies are encouraged to develop interagency agreements at the local level which focus on the delivery of essential services to all children and families eligible for enrollment in the early childhood education and family involvement program.

Programs sponsored through the Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Initiative should complement, not supplant, effective programs currently in operation through other federal, state, or local agencies. Participating education agencies shall create and appoint community pre-k advisory councils. The pre-k advisory councils shall include members representing the local board of education, families, teachers, non-profit program providers, for-profit program providers, the business community, local government agencies, and related service providers. Local education agencies and related community agencies are encouraged to develop interagency agreements which focus on the delivery of essential services to participating children and families.

Staff Selection and Development:

The selection and support of well-qualified staff is critical to the effective implementation of this program. Programs should establish staff selection, evaluation, and development standards established by the State Department of Education, State Board of education and consider recommendations of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of Elementary Principals, and the national Head Start program.

The selection and support of well-qualified staff is critical to the effective implementation of pre-k programs. Programs should align staff selection, evaluation, and professional development standards approved by the Tennessee Department of Education, the State Board of Education and consider recommendations of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Association for Children Education International, the National Association of Elementary Principals, and other organizations using rigorous research as a basis for developing excellence in early childhood education.

Screening:

PreK programs will screen all students to identify and developmental, visual, or hearing weakness. These screenings should identify any child who may need further examinations to determine if they have any condition that may place them at-risk for failure and in need of intervention.

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Assessment:

Assessment of young children enrolled in a pre-kindergarten childhood education program and family engagement program should be on going and include anecdotal observations and screening designed to support the delivery of an individualized, developmentally appropriate program. Assessments must not be used for program entry or exit purposes unless required by federal funding sources.

Early Childhood Unit:

All programs should demonstrate a continuum of programs from pre-k through kindergarten and primary grades. The National Association of State Boards of Education recommends that early childhood units be formed within local school systems to ensure this continuum of services to children and families and to incorporate the concepts of non-graded, early childhood primary programs.

Planning:

All programs should be guided by long-range strategic plans, endorsed by the local pre-k advisory council. The long-range strategic plan should demonstrate measurable goals and objectives and the coordination of community services for children and families. The program's annual operation plans should align with the long-range strategic plan.

Evaluation and Accountability:

Annual, local program evaluation shall be instituted to include the following areas: environment, program efficacy, and teacher quality. Feedback should be provided to administrators, program staff, pre-k advisory council members, and families to assist in program planning and improvement.

Ongoing comprehensive, outcome-based evaluations should be conducted in accordance with the State Department of Education directives and the long term evaluation model.

Funding:

State funding, when made available, must be coordinated to prioritize development of enrollment capacity to meet the needs of at-risk children. Numerous factors, in addition to family income may place children and families at-risk of educational failure and in need of the early childhood education and family engagement program. Pre-kindergarten capacity should be incrementally expanded to meet the goal of providing access to all four year old children on a voluntary basis. Local communities and school systems are encouraged to expand capacity by utilizing additional funding sources.

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Guidelines for Local Programs

In the planning, design, and delivery of state funded local early childhood education and parent involvement programs, community agencies and local school systems must work together to address the following requirements:

Staff Organization and Development:

Staff positions required:

Director or supervisor*

Lead teacher for each group (maximum of twenty children)

Educational assistants based on need to maintain adult/child ratios of 1:10 (1:8 if more than half are three-year-olds)

Personnel to provide or give access to transportation services, health and nutrition services, parent involvement, counseling services and special services for children with disabilities

- * Supervisor or director must provide knowledgeable guidance in early childhood education practice, staffing, staff evaluation, and oversight to ensure program compliance with state and local early childhood education policy and state regulatory rules. A plan to provide quality supervision must be developed for pre-kindergarten programs. The plan should define on-site supervision and administrative supervision. The plan for supervision may be accomplished by existing administrative personnel of local school systems and other agencies.

Job requirements:

The **director or supervisor** will have at least a bachelor's degree with substantial preparation and experience in child development and early childhood education.

The **lead teacher** will hold a bachelor's degree and a teacher license approved by the State Board of Education appropriate for pre-kindergarten teaching.

Early childhood education teachers will hold an appropriate teacher license approved by the State for teaching pre-kindergarten.

The **educational assistant** will have a high school diploma or have successfully completed the GED (General Education Development Test), and will complete specific job training within a defined period. Hiring preference will be given to individuals with the Child Development Associate credential or an associate degree in early childhood education.

The **individuals coordinating health/mental health services, nutrition services, parent involvement, counseling services and services for children with disabilities** will have appropriate training and experience.

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The program staff will complete performance evaluations based on existing state standards and assessment instruments when applicable.

Professional development and training opportunities will be available to all staff.

Topics for staff development including early childhood education best practices, curricula, classroom management, developmental learning standards, authentic assessment and program evaluation will be available to all staff.

Facilities and Transportation:

The facilities used to provide group experiences and education programs for young children must meet the state fire safety, and health standards as defined by Chapter 0520-12-1.

Pre-kindergarten education programs must develop a student transportation plan based on availability of transportation to and from the program. The transportation policy and practice must address child safety on entering the vehicle, child safety during transport, supervision during transport, time in transit and child safety on exiting the bus. State vehicle safety standards will be met by all vehicles and drivers when providing transportation for children enrolled in the program.

Developmental Learning Program:

The developmental learning program will address all areas of a child's development: cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and communication as defined in the Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards. The program will provide learning experiences in each developmental area and be delivered in an integrated fashion which provides daily active learning through exploration and play.

Materials and equipment used will be appropriate in size and complexity to the age of the children. All materials and equipment will provide for concrete, real and relevant experience and allow for a wide range of developmental interests, abilities and cultural diversity reflective of the children in the class.

The daily routine will provide for a minimum of 5 1/2 continuous hours (excluding nap periods) of appropriate experiences.

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The room arrangement, equipment, and materials used for the developmental learning program will provide for learning centers which facilitate both small group and individual child use.

The organization and delivery of the daily activities and the developmental learning program will be based upon teacher anecdotal observations and recordings of each child's special interests and developmental progress.

The developmental learning program will emphasize learning through an interactive process. The learning environment will be prepared so children can learn through active exploration and interaction with adults, other children, and appropriate materials.

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The developmental learning program will meet and challenge the varying individual learning needs of each child in the class.

Standardized or formalized testing of young children may only be used to diagnose disabilities for the development of adapted, remedial, modified, or program services to support the mainstreaming of children with disabilities into the regular educational environment, or to meet the federal program eligibility requirements of compensatory programs. The State Department of Education will provide a list of appropriate tests and assessment and screening instruments.

Family Engagement:

The program will incorporate procedures to identify needs and connect families to available services, including education, health/mental health, nutrition, social services, and job counseling.

The program will provide parents with the opportunity for education and training for meaningful participation in program operations and decision making.

Strategies will be implemented which enable family members to become active and effective partners in providing meaningful educational experiences for their children.

The program will provide a wide range of parent and family involvement options to promote the strengthening and the best interests of families. In addition to parent involvement in program delivery, family engagement activities should include guidance, information, and training in parenting skills, personal development, and child development concepts which foster learning in the home.

Service coordination and interagency agreements for early childhood education and parent involvement programs will ensure cooperation and collaboration in meeting the needs of individual children and families.

Health/Mental Health/Nutrition Services:

The program will provide access to available community health and nutrition services including medical, screening for vision and hearing, dental, mental health, and daily food supplements.

The daily program for the children in a group setting will provide for the serving of breakfast, lunch, and snacks that meet the federal recommended daily requirements for the nutritional needs of young children.

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The program will provide information and education to all adult family members regarding the health/mental health and nutrition needs of children and the services available in the community to assist children and families.

Services for Children With Disabilities:

The program will coordinate services with the state's plan of educational services for all children (ages 0-5 years) with disabilities.

Pre-k programs should include children with disabilities eligible for services under Public Law 99-457 in pre-k programs with their non disabled peers. Additional staff needed or other services required to meet the child's individual educational program (IEP) may be supported through other local, state, and federal funds.

The state will seek to take advantage of any federal and private funding to be used in combination with state funds to assist local school systems in providing services to children with disabilities and their families.

Governance and Administration:

Pre-kindergarten programs funded through the Voluntary Pre-K Act will be approved by the Department of Education and administered through one local agency for each community, county, or consortium of counties. A local school system or Head Start program may be the agency designated. All local programs will coordinate with existing early childhood education programs in the community to utilize administrative structures, community resources and available facilities, and to encourage diversity of children in each group setting.

The local school system will be responsible for convening and facilitating a pre-kindergarten advisory council for the purposes of developing a plan for the pre-kindergarten program development within the community. The pre-kindergarten advisory councils will encourage partnership and coordination with existing early childhood education programs within the community to utilize administrative structures, community resources and available facilities.

Program supervision will be provided in accordance with the plan developed through the partnership agreement. Supervision must include providing knowledge in early childhood education best practices, staff evaluation, and responsibility for program compliance with policy and state regulatory rules. Supervision may be delegated to the appropriate agency in pre-kindergarten programs created through partnership agreement. The pre-kindergarten program will have an on-site, full-time director or supervisor. The program director or supervisor and the administrative agency are ultimately accountable for the use of program funds and the provision of required services.

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The pre-kindergarten advisory council will review the educational needs of young children and will develop plans to address those needs through coordinated services for submission to the local education agency. Annually, the pre-K advisory council will review local program evaluations and make recommendations for program improvement to the local education agency (LEA). The pre-K advisory council will be composed of members of the local school board, parents, teachers, non-profit providers, for-profit providers, Head Start, the business community and local government funding bodies. The Director of Schools will serve as chair of the pre-K advisory council and coordinate the activities of the council.