

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program Frequently Asked Questions

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I. Collaborating with Community Partners

A. Faith-Based Partners

1. Can a district contract with a faith-based agency to provide SWVPP?

Yes, school districts may partner with a faith-based religious preschool for the provision of SWVPP as long as the faith-based agency meets the requirements of [281--Iowa Administrative Code 16](#), is located within the school district boundaries and as long as the SWVPP funding supports instruction that is "secular, neutral, and non-ideological."

All faith-based partners must ensure that, from the time instruction supported by Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program funds starts until the time such instruction ends, no religious instruction takes place. There is to be no interruption (no "sprinkling") of such religious instructional time for any faith-based purpose. An arrangement with a faith-based entity or organization to provide Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programming shall not violate the following:

- First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause (i.e., a child is not compelled to participate in any religious instruction or activity);
- First Amendment's Establishment Clause (i.e., public funds are not used to support religious instruction).

Pursuant to Article I, Section 3 of the [Iowa Constitution](#), religious instruction is restricted during the time that is funded through state dollars: "The general assembly shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; nor shall any person be compelled to attend any place of worship, pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing places of worship, or the maintenance of any minister, or ministry.

B. Community Partners

1. What are the procedures for adding a community partner? Consider the following:

- An agreement/28E would need to be developed between the district and the partner. See also Q1 under the Partners section of the [SWVPP Finance FAQ](#).
- The new partner would be considered part of the district's program and the district would be responsible for ensuring that the new partner meets all program requirements and a set of approved program standards immediately upon operation as a SWVPP location.
- The District would add information about the new partner to the School Information Update under EdInfo during the spring prior to the fall that it will begin operation as a SWVPP location. This would create a unique building ID number for the new partner.
- In the first fall of the new partner's operation as a SWVPP location, the district would create new sessions in the Preschool Desk Audit-Session ID Information under the new SWVPP location.
- 4-year-old children at the new location would be included in the district's fall certified enrollment count/the district's fall Student Reporting in Iowa file.
- No tuition may be charged for SWVPP instructional hours for 4-year-old's, including for a community partner's first year operating as a SWVPP location. The district may offer carryover or existing funds to support the cost of start-up for the new partner. See also the Expanding Capacity section of the [SWVPP Finance FAQ](#). If the district is interested in using a Flexibility Account to support start-up costs at the community partner, see also the Flexibility Legislation Guidance under the [General Fund](#) heading or contact Song Luong: Song.Luong1@iowa.gov.

Either the new partner will need to begin a subscription with Teaching Strategies via the SmartTeach™ platform. If the partner will be under the district's SmartTeach™ license, a new site and enough child portfolios will need to be added to the district's license to account for the children who will attend the new partner location (based on the agreement with the district). See pp. 2-3 of the [Iowa Assessment Procedures](#) for more information or contact Mary Breyfogle: mary.breyfogle@iowa.gov.

2. May a school district change the community partners identified in their application?

A district may add community partners; however, all programs must meet the assurances and requirements of [281--Iowa Administrative Code 16](#). It is expected that districts maintain partnerships established at the time of the original application. If a partnership is unable to be maintained, the district is to document the multiple attempts made to maintain the relationship.

3. Does a community partner need to be located within the district boundaries in order to collaborate to provide the SWVPP?

Yes, a community partner (private preschool/child care center, faith-based preschool or accredited nonpublic school) must be located within the district boundaries in order to participate with the district in the provision of the SWVPP.

4. **When additional preschool programs (community or district-based) are added as part of the district’s SWVPP, what is the period for meeting program requirements?**

Newly added classrooms (community or district-based) are expected to meet the same assurances, and requirements as the programs included in the district’s original application. Districts are encouraged to maintain and expand their community partnerships to increase access to quality preschool programs and to meet the needs of the community. As community partnerships increase, additional preschool programs will have their children counted as part of the Certified Enrollment to generate SWVPP funds for the subsequent year.

For example, if a district adds a preschool program in their second year, the program must immediately meet program standards, have a certified teacher, and meet all of the requirements and assurances of [281--Iowa Administrative Code 16](#) if the district plans to count the children in this program on the Certified Enrollment count which must be certified by October 15. This would be the same as a district adding a section of first grade; they would meet the district requirements for a certified teacher and other requirements expected of an accredited school district.

II. Enrollment / Eligibility

A. Eligible Child for SWVPP

1. Who is eligible to participate in SWVPP?

A child may participate in the preschool program if s/he:

- Is a resident of Iowa; and
- Is four years of age on or before September 15 of the current school year.
- If space and funding are available, a child younger or older may participate; however, the child shall not be counted for state funding purposes.

Note: Children on an instructional service IEP may be included as part of a SWVPP but will not generate SWVPP funding.

256C.3(1), 256C.4.(2), Finance FAQ for the SWVPP

2. Does the preschool program need to be available for children with special needs?

Yes. Federal guidelines (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act or IDEA-2004) require the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to be considered for every child eligible for special education services. The child may attend the preschool program, and would be included in the staff to child ratio and maximum class size, but would not be funded through the SWVPP (supporting funds would be provided through IDEA).

256C.3(3)d., 281--16.3(13)

3. Are children on a support only IEP considered to be eligible children?

Yes. Children on a support only IEP are considered to be eligible children for the SWVPP. If they are four-years-old on or before September 15 they will generate SWVPP funding. Support only services would include speech, occupational, or physical therapy, etc.

4. What should a district do if there are more families of four-year-old children wanting SWVPP and the district does not have room? Is the district obligated to start an additional preschool program?

No. The district is not required to begin an additional preschool program; this is a local decision. Developing guidelines for registration and enrollment of four-year-olds for the preschool program would be a decision of the district with the advice of the local advisory group. In addition, a district may use carry over funds to expand the program within the district or through community partnerships in an effort to address the waiting list.

B. Resident District

1. Does the child have to reside in the district that provides the preschool program?

No. An eligible child may attend preschool in any district providing SWVPP.

281--16.15, 281--16.11(1)a.

2. Does open enrollment apply to the SWVPP?

Open enrollment would only apply to three to five year olds in the PK grade level with an instructional IEP. All other preschool eligible children may attend SWVPP in any district providing the program.

281--16.15, 281--16.11(1)a.

3. If a district does not have the space available to serve all children, may a district give priority to children who reside in the district (vs. children who reside in other districts)?

This is a local district decision. It is recommended that the school board and the advisory committee review eligibility and selection criteria for registration and enrollment. This policy should be available to families interested in the program.

Iowa's Administrative Rules define an eligible child as a resident of Iowa and who is four-years-old on or by September 15 of the current school year. The SWVPP funding follows the child, regardless of the resident district.

4. Is the SWVPP voluntary for districts and families?

A district is not required to develop a preschool program. If a district chooses to offer a SWVPP, the district agrees to accept funds and provide programming and services to enrolled children. Families are not required to participate (enroll) in a preschool program. State law does not require preschool participation. However, children shall be considered to be of compulsory attendance age once enrolled.

256C.2, 256C.3(4)d

III. Assurances and Requirements

A. Approved Local Program

1. Who is responsible for ensuring program requirements and assurances are met throughout the local program (inclusive of community partners)?

The District receives approval from the Department of Education to provide the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) and is responsible for oversight of the program. The district should have agreements outlining requirements and mutually agreed upon expectations with any community partners to provide the SWVPP. Community partners are considered part of the district's program and the district is responsible for ensuring that each partner meets program requirements and a set of approved program standards immediately upon operation as a SWVPP location.

256C.1(1), 256C.3(4)b.

B. Program Standards

1. What are the appropriate program standards for the SWVPP?

Three options for program standards include Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items. Each classroom must follow one of the three approved sets of program standards. More than one set of program standards may be followed across the District's program. For example, if the district partners with a Head Start program, the Head Start program must follow HSPPS, while a district building preschool may select to follow Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards. Classrooms following HSPPS should include Head Start eligible and funded students.

256C.3(3)b., 281--16.3

2. Is a private provider contracting with the school district required to adopt the same program standards as the school district?

This is not a requirement but a collaborative decision made at the local level. One of the three (3) program standards options must be in place.

256C.3(3)b., 281--16.3

C. Maximum Number of Children

1. What is the maximum number of children that can be in an SWVPP classroom?

There may be no more than 20 children in a classroom with adequate space available (must have a minimum of 35 square feet of usable space per child). Districts are encouraged to plan for children on IEPs who may be integrated in the classroom at a later date. Children on IEPs are included in the total group size for the classroom.

256C.3(3)a., 281--16.3(3)

2. May the district have more than 20 children in the session if there are additional adults?

No, there may be no more than 20 children in a session.

256C.3(3)a., 281--16.3(3)

3. What is the maximum class size if there are 3-year-old children in the classroom?

If the majority of children are 3 years of age, the ratio and maximum number of children are determined by the program standard locally selected.

281-16.3

D. Adult to Child Ratio

1. What are the adult to child ratios?

There must be a minimum of one appropriately licensed teacher present during SWVPP instructional time. A minimum of one appropriately licensed teacher and one staff member shall be present when 11 to 20 four-year-old children are present. Staff members shall have reasonable line-of-sight supervision of all children. If the majority of children are 3-years-old, the ratio would be determined by the program standard locally selected.

256C.3(3)a., 281—16.3(2), 281—16.3(4), 281--16.9(5)b.

E. Calendar/Instructional Time

1. What is acceptable instructional time?

A minimum of 10 hours per week of instructional time is required in the SWVPP. The teacher should provide instruction on the skills and knowledge included in the Iowa Early Learning Standards, and directly related to the program's locally determined curriculum. Instructional time should relate to intentional, planned teaching and learning experiences that would be reflected in the teacher's planning and lessons.

256C.3(3)f., 281--16.3(4)

2. Is the preschool start date the same date as the district's first day of school for K-12?

Districts are encouraged to start their SWVPP within a reasonable time frame comparable to their existing school calendar to allow children to benefit from the preschool program and learning experiences. In order to accommodate the required home visits, districts may choose to start the SWVPP several days later than the K-12 start date.

3. How many days per year does the preschool have to provide instruction?

It is recommended that the number of days per year be within the parameters of the school calendar days in session.

F. Snack and/or Meal

1. The SWVPP schedule is from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Is there any requirement that a meal would need to be provided?

Districts are encouraged to provide a minimum of one meal to children in the SWVPP. According to both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items and the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, a meal or snack must be served. IQPPS Criterion 5.17 states, "The program serves meals and snacks at regularly established times. Meals and snacks are at least two hours apart, but not more than three hours apart." Preschool foundation aid funds may be used by approved local programs and community providers for food and beverages used by children in the approved local program.

256C.4(1)e., 281--16.3(11), 281--16.3

G. Teacher Requirements

1. Who employs the teacher?

a) The district may employ the teacher or contract with another agency to provide instruction to children in a variety of settings. No matter whether the district employs the teacher or contracts with another agency for the services of a qualified preschool teacher, the district has the responsibility to ensure that all teachers meet the requirements of [Iowa Code chapter 256c](#) and IAC 281-16 Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program Administrative Rules.

256C.3(2)a.1., 281--16.2(Teacher), 281--16.9(5)a.

2. What qualifications does the SWVPP teacher need to have?

Preschool teachers must hold a valid practitioner's license issued by the Board of Educational Examiners under Iowa Code chapter 272 and hold endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners that includes prekindergarten. There is no requirement that the teacher be an employee of the district; a private provider or other public agency with whom the district has entered into an agreement or contract under Iowa Code chapter 28E may employ the teacher. Contact the [Board of Educational Examiners](#) for specific teacher information.

Appropriate teaching endorsements are:

- Teacher Endorsement #100 -- Prekindergarten through grade three, including special education;
- Teacher Endorsement #103 – Prekindergarten through kindergarten;
- Teacher Endorsement #106 – Prekindergarten through grade three; or
- Teacher Endorsement #1001 – Birth through grade three inclusive settings.

A Class B conditional license is also an appropriate license if it is for Birth through grade three inclusive settings or PK-K. If teachers do not hold one of these endorsements, they should apply to BOEE for a conditional license. (clarification continued on next page)

Note: A teacher who has an Early Childhood Teacher – Special Education 15.2 (19) endorsement (also known as #223/#262) is not appropriately licensed to teach in the SWVPP because the endorsement does not include preschool general education. The teacher may apply to the Board of Educational Examiners for a Class B conditional license in one of the acceptable teaching endorsement areas listed above.

256C.3(2), 281--16.2, 281--16.3(1)

3. If a district contracts with another agency to provide the SWVPP, is the district required to evaluate the teacher? Does Chapter 284 apply?

The district is responsible to evaluate only district employees. If a district does not employ the teacher but instead contracts or develops an agreement with another agency to provide the preschool teacher, that agency is responsible for the supervision and evaluation of the teacher. In the latter situation, Chapter 284 does not apply. The district is not required to evaluate a teacher employed by a community partner.

4. If the teacher is an employee of the school district, who evaluates the teacher?

The district employee with an Evaluator Endorsement through the Board of Educational Examiners evaluates the teacher employed by the district, regardless of where instruction is provided.

Iowa Code 284.2(5); 281—83.2; Iowa Code 284.8(1); 83.5(3)

5. If the community partner employs and evaluates the teacher, is the supervisor required to hold an Evaluator Endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners?

It is not a requirement of the community partner supervisor evaluating the teacher to hold an Evaluator Endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners.

281--83.2

6. What are the requirements for a preschool teacher who is not employed by a school district to convert the initial license to a standard license?

The teacher should contact the [Board of Educational Examiners](#) for information on license conversion.

7. What collaboration responsibilities does the teacher have?

The teacher must:

- **Collaborate** with other partners as necessary. Partners may include family support/parent education staff, community childcare, Early Childhood Iowa, Head Start, Shared Visions, and others as necessary to meet the needs of the child and family.
- **Develop** and maintain a relationship with the child's family in order to support the success of children and their families to reach desired results.
- **Assist** families to identify and access available resources to meet the needs of the child.

256C.3(3)e., 281--16.4

H. Staff Development

1. Are districts required to provide staff development to SWVPP teachers?

Yes, districts shall ensure appropriate staff development is provided to district SWVPP teachers as addressed in the career development plan. Staff development must be specific to early childhood and must be offered to community partner teachers.

256C.3(4)d., 281--16.3(8)

2. How many hours of staff development should a district make available?

It is recommended that the district provide a minimum of 15 hours per year of staff development. This is consistent with recommendations from the [National Institute for Early Education Research](#).

Professional development hours must be offered in addition to the minimally required instructional hours. The schedule of instructional hours should account for weeks in which professional development is also scheduled, so that the minimum instructional hours requirement would still be met in weeks in which professional development hours are offered. An example would be planning to offer 12 instructional hours weekly across MWF; then, if PD is offered once or twice a month on a Wednesday as a two-hour early out, the 10-hour weekly minimum could still be addressed.

3. Are teacher assistants in the SWVPP required to participate in staff development?

Yes, the district must ensure that all district SWVPP staff receive appropriate staff development in early childhood education. The school district shall ensure that staff members for the program are provided appropriate staff development in early childhood education.

281--16.3(8)

I. Curriculum

1. What are the curriculum requirements for the SWVPP?

Not all SWVPP classrooms are required to use the same curriculum. A district must use a curriculum with a research or evidence-based written framework that is comprehensive, addresses the needs of the whole child, and provides a guide for decision making about content, instructional methods, and assessment. Examples include, but are not limited to, Creative Curriculum and High Scope.

The curriculum also must meet the identified program standards (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items, Iowa's Quality Preschool Program Standards, or Head Start Program Performance Standards), and must align with the Iowa Early Learning Standards. The benefits of districts using the same curriculum across all preschool classrooms include teachers working together to align instruction with the Iowa Early Learning Standards, planning for instruction, and attending cohesive professional development to enhance teaching and learning.

256C.3(3)c., 281--16.3(5), 281--16.3(6)

2. What does research or evidence-based mean?

Research-based means there are theories behind it, but that they are not always proven true. Evidence-based means there is evidence to back it up. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) definition of "evidence-based" includes four levels of evidence. The first three levels require findings of a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on different types of studies. The fourth level addresses ideas that do not yet have an evidence base; these are considered "under evaluation" based on ongoing efforts to examine the effects.

Results Matter (2017, June). 9 Ways to Make Federal Legislation Evidence-Based. Retrieved from: <http://results4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/9-Ways-to-Make-Federal-Legislation-Evidence-Based-2017-What-Works-Guide-for-Congress.pdf>.

J. Assessment

1. What are the assessment requirements?

Districts are required to assess all preschool children with the SmartTeach™ GOLD online assessment and maintain local agreements with Teaching Strategies under Iowa's GOLD State Umbrella Agreement. [Iowa Code 279.60](#) was amended in 2013 to include the SmartTeach™ GOLD assessment for every resident prekindergarten or four-year-old child whose parent or guardian enrolls the child in the district. This includes any preschool-aged child enrolled by a parent in a district program. Examples include four-year old, and mixed age classrooms, as well as those in which a child receives early childhood special education services. It also includes any community based early childhood program that receives Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program funding.

K. Families

1. Do families need to be involved in SWVPP programming?

Yes, family participation is vital to their child's preschool success. The SWVPP must involve families in at least one home visit, one family night, and a minimum of two family-teacher conferences annually. Family involvement may include volunteering in the classroom, orientation to the preschool program, parent education, general communications, and other activities.

281-16.3(12), 256C.3(3)

2. What are the requirements for Family Night?

This is a local decision that should be made with the input from the local advisory group, including parents if possible. It is not recommended that districts use Open House or Meet the Teacher events to meet this requirement. Some ideas may include events such as Family Literacy Night, Family Math Game Night, Family Art Project Night, cookie-decorating night, a literacy tea party, a family picnic, etc. Ideas may be generated based on input from the advisory group and specific to the needs of local communities.

3. Does the home visit need to take place in the home?

It is the expectation that the home visit occurs in the home. It is intended for the teacher to meet the child and family in a familiar environment so the child has a comfortable adjustment to the school. The home visit provides an opportunity for the teacher to become acquainted with and learn from the family about its family structure, preferred child-rearing practices, and information families wish to share about their socioeconomic, linguistic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The visit provides an opportunity for staff to learn about the family's priorities and hopes for their child. It also provides an opportunity to learn about the child within the family context.

If a family expresses a preference to meet at an alternate location for the home visit, this request should be honored. With the prior reviewed purposes in mind, the school setting is not the preferred setting for conversation and learning about the child and family. The home visit should occur in a setting in which the family is comfortable or a neutral location may be considered such as a library, coffee house, or a park. School districts also need to ensure the safety of their staff in determining the location and timing of the home visit.

4. The rules require that a teacher make a home visit at least once a year – can this be combined with a conference at the school?

No, conferences are a time for teachers and families to discuss the preschool program and the child's learning and progress. The purpose of the home visit is to help the teacher learn about the child and the family. The location should be where the family is comfortable; this could be the home, the public library, a coffee shop; but preferably not the school setting. The focus of the home visit is to share information, and allow the teacher to understand the child within the context of their family. See question 3 above.

IV. Transportation

A. Bussing

1. Do school buses need to have safety restraints for four-year-olds?

The DE provides guidance regarding the safe transportation of children. See the [Transportation Guidance web page](#) for information on transportation.

For additional questions about the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program contact:

- Marcie Lentsch (marcie.lentsch@iowa.gov) or 515-419-2088
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