

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 2012-2013

The following categories were developed to guide use of the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children (SWVPP) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document:

- I. Collaborating with Community Partners
- II. Budget/Finance
- III. Enrollment/Eligibility
- IV. Assurances and Requirements
- V. Transportation
- VI. Other

Each main category has subcategories listed in the left column to expedite locating content areas for questions. Questions under each subcategory are numbered and will be dated for subsequent postings.

I. Collaborating with Community Partners

District Consortiums

Q1: May a school district that does not currently participate in the SWVPP combine with a neighboring district to form a consortium and receive SWVPP funding?

A: No. It was allowable for districts to combine with neighboring districts to form a consortium during the application process for the SWVPP. The final year of application was 2010-2011, therefore, no new SWVPP districts will be accepted into the program based on the requirements of Chapter 16.

Faith-Based Partners

Q1: Can a district contract with a faith-based agency to provide the SWVPP?

A: Yes, school districts may partner with faith-based religious preschools for the provision of SWVPP as long as the faith-based agency meets the requirements of Chapter 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 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.

Q2: Is the faith-based preschool program required to remove non-secular icons (such as crosses or statues) from the classroom?

A: Non-secular icons may remain in the preschool classroom; however, these items may not be included in or alluded to during conversation or instruction during the ten hours of SWVPP.

Community Partners

Q1: May a school district change the community partners identified in their application?

A: A district may add community partners, however, all programs must meet the assurances and requirements of Chapter 16. If a community partner chooses not to participate in the SWVPP, the district is to document the multiple attempts made to maintain the relationship.

Q2: Does a community partner need to be located within the district boundaries in order to collaborate to provide the SWVPP?

A: 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.

Q3: When additional preschool programs (community or district-based) are added as part of the district's SWVPP, what are the time frames for meeting program requirements?

A: Preschool programs partnering with districts are expected to meet the same assurances, requirements and standards as the programs included in the district's original application. Districts are encouraged to 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 be receiving funds or have their children counted as part of the Certified Enrollment for SWVPP funds.

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 if the district plans to count the children in this program on the Certified Enrollment count due October 1 for formula generated funding. 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. Budget/Finance

Intent of Legislation (HF 877)

Q1: What is the intent of the SWVPP law and can funds be used for children also enrolled in other programs?

A: The intent of Chapter 16, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs for Four-

Year-Old Children, is to create high-quality early learning environments for four-year-old children whose families choose to access such programs. The purpose of the SWVPP is to provide an opportunity for all young children in the state to enter school ready to learn by expanding voluntary access to quality preschool curricula for all children (281-16.1, 82GA, HF877). To this purpose, state funds are made available to assist local school districts in the implementation of the SWVPP.

Only those applicants that certify the following assurances (ARC16.9(5)) shall be considered for funding:

- Appropriately licensed teacher
- Sufficient numbers of staff
- Program standards adopted and implemented
- Instruction delivered in accordance with the applicant's curriculum and the Iowa Early Learning Standards

State funding received under this program shall be used to supplement, not supplant, other public funding received by the applicant district as the result of the participation of any eligible children if the program is funded from another state or federal source. A school district shall certify to the department of education that preschool foundation aid funding received by the school district was used to supplement, not supplant, moneys otherwise received and used by the school district for preschool programming (HF 877, ARC16.11(3,4)).

Based on this guidance from the 2007 Iowa Acts, House File 877 and the Administrative Rules Chapter 16, the school district must be the applicant and as such is held accountable for financial management. The intent of the legislation is that the funding would support a preschool program of high quality while increasing access to that program to all four-year-olds. The funding would then support the program through meeting the assurances and program requirements.

Receipt of Funds

Q1: Who is the recipient of funding through the SWVPP?

A: The funding is awarded to public school districts only. Funds are provided to school districts but they may contract with nonpublic preschools or child care centers to coordinate community partnerships and preschool classrooms. All district and partnering preschool programs must comply with the requirements of IAC 281 chapter 16.

Q2: What if the community partner has funds that are not expended?

A: If a community partner does not expend the full amount allocated or does not expend the funds for the appropriate purposes, the remaining and/or not appropriately expended funds must be returned to the district annually.

Q3: If the community partner returns funds to the district, how may the district use the returned funds?

A: The SWVPP funds refunded to the district from the community partner remain categorical to the preschool program and may only be used for the purposes stipulated in Iowa Administrative Code 281-98.

Use of Funds

Q1: May a district use the SWVPP program funds for administrative costs?

A: A district may retain up to 5% of the total program allocation for administrative costs. The district must document actual costs equal to this set aside.

Q2: May a district or community partner use the SWVPP program funds for other purposes within the school/center?

A: Other than the percentage of funds which may be used for administrative costs, the funds are considered categorical and must be used for preschool program expenditures only.

281—98.13(256C,257) Statewide voluntary four-year-old preschool program. The statewide voluntary four-year-old preschool program is a program for a specific category of students. Funding for the program is for the purpose of providing a high-quality early learning environment for four-year-old children whose families choose to access such programs.

98.13(1) Appropriate uses of categorical funding. Because the program is specifically instructional, expenditures generally are limited to the functions of instruction, student support services and staff support services, but include expenditures required in 281—chapter 16.

98.13(2) Inappropriate uses of categorical funding. Inappropriate uses of the statewide voluntary four-year-old preschool program funding include, but are not limited to, indirect costs or use charges, capital expenditures other than equipment, facility acquisition, debt service, operational or maintenance costs or administrative costs that supplant, or any other expenditures not directly related to providing the statewide voluntary four-year-old preschool program or that supplant existing public funding for preschool programming.

Q5: May SWVPP funds be used to provide construction for a local facility?

A: No. Funds cannot be used for facility construction. However, the USDA offers grant opportunities for construction. Additional information can be found at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/>

Q6: May SWVPP funds be used to remodel a local facility?

A: Funds shall not be used for the costs of constructing or remodeling a facility in connection with the preschool program. Funds may be allocated to support the implementation of the SWVPP.

Q7: What should the district's focus be when allocating funds for the SWVPP?

A: The focus should be on supporting the implementation of the SWVPP. Allocating funds to ensure that districts meet the assurances and program requirements, such as an appropriately licensed teacher, staff to child ratio, and meeting program standards will increase access and opportunity for four-year-olds to attend quality preschool programs. Children who attend high-quality preschool programs demonstrate increased student achievement. Funds allocated to support the implementation of quality preschool programs will successfully address the purpose of the legislation.

Q8. May the SWVPP funds be used to purchase a vehicle if that is necessary to address the transportation barrier for families?

A: Funds shall not be used for the costs of purchasing a vehicle.

Q9: May a district provide transportation for the SWVPP?

A: A district may, but is not required to, provide transportation as part of the comprehensive services for children in the SWVPP.

Tuition/Fees

Q1: Are there fees for services that school districts may charge for children receiving preschool through the SWVPP?

A: Charging supplemental fees are local decisions. Districts may charge a fee similar to the fees charged for K-12 students, if the fee is authorized by Iowa Code. Districts are encouraged to refer to the August 2010 School Leader Update “Legal Lessons” for additional information and a link to the Allowable Fees chart.

Q2: May a district charge tuition for the 10 hours of instruction required for the SWVPP?

A: No, districts participating in the SWVPP may not charge tuition during the 10 hours of instruction required in IAC 281 chapter 16.

Q3: May a district charge for programming over and above the 10 hours of instruction required for the SWVPP?

A: If the district’s program is providing more than 10 hours of instruction and/or extending the day by providing childcare services, tuition fees may be charged to cover only the costs for the remaining portion of the day.

Funding Sources

Q1: May a district include preschoolers funded by other sources in the SWVPP?

A: Yes. A district is encouraged to include Early Childhood Special Education, head Start, Early Childhood Iowa, Shared Visions and Title I funded preschool programs as long as there is no supplanting of funds. Supplanting of funds means that the same child is counted for two different funding sources for the same time, during the same day.

Q2: May the district seek other sources of public or private funding to support a SWVPP, such as low income funding or church scholarships?

A: Yes. It would be a part of the collaborative conversations and meetings the school district would conduct with stakeholders to develop a plan to support implementation and use of various needed funds to support the program. The district may not supplant public funding.

Child Count and Funding

Q1: What is the per child cost allocated to districts for the SWVPP?

A: Districts receive fifty percent of the state foundation aid based on the certified enrollment count from the previous year.

Q2: If a school district does not serve a child in the SWVPP this year, is the district able to count the child 1.0 when s/he attends kindergarten?

A: Yes. Children who are attending kindergarten are counted as 1.0 even if they did not participate in the SWVPP.

Q3: Can younger or older children participate in the SWVPP?

A: A child who is younger or older than an eligible child (four years of age on or before September 15) may participate in the SWVPP, however, they will not count for state funding through the SWVPP.

Q4: May a district combine its SWVPP and prekindergarten program?

A: A district may not combine the SWPP and prekindergarten/alternative kindergarten/transitional kindergarten program. A five year old child not attending kindergarten would require programming in addition to the SWVPP.

Supplementing vs. Supplanting

Q3: May districts use other state or federal funds (ECI, Head Start, Shared Visions, Title I, etc.) and the SWVPP for the same child during the same time period?

A: Other state or federal funds may not be used to pay for the same 10 hours of preschool instruction funded through the SWVPP. These funds may be used to expand the preschool day, however, a child may not be supported by two funding sources during the same portion of the day.

III. Enrollment/Eligibility

Eligible Child

Q1: Who may participate in SWVPP?

A: 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.

Note: Children on an instructional service IEP may be included as part of a SWVPP but may not be counted as eligible children for funding purposes.

Q2: Does the preschool program need to be available for children with special needs?

A: 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).

Q3: Are children on a support only IEP considered to be eligible children?

A. Yes. Children on a support only IEP are considered to be eligible children for the SWVPP if they are a resident of Iowa and four years old on or before September 15. Support only services would include speech, occupational or physical therapy etc.

Q4: 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?

A: No. The district is not obligated to begin an additional preschool program. Developing guidelines for registration and enrollment of four-year-olds for the preschool program would be a decision of the district with the advisement of the local advisory group.

**Resident
District**

Q1: Does the child have to reside in the district which provides the preschool program?

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

Q2: Does open enrollment apply to the SWVPP?

A: No. Open enrollment applies to K-12 students only.

Q3: 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)?

A: This is a local district decision. It is recommended that eligibility and selection criteria for registration and enrollment be reviewed by the school board and the advisory committee. 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 home district.

Q4: Is the SWVPP voluntary for districts and families?

A: Yes, the SWVPP is voluntary for school districts and families. A district does not have to develop a preschool program. A family does not have to enroll their child in preschool. Preschool attendance is not required by state law.

IV. Assurances and Requirements

**Program
Standards**

Q1: What are the appropriate program standards for the SWVPP?

A: Three options for program standards include: Head Start Program Performance Standards, Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS) and/or the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards and Accreditation Criteria. The district selects one of the three options.

Q2: Is a private provider contracting with the school district required to adopt the same program standards as the school district?

A: This is a collaborative decision made at the local level. One of the three (3) program standards options must be in place.

Maximum Number of Children

Q1: What is the maximum number of children that can be in an SWVPP classroom?

A: There may be no more than 20 children in a classroom if adequate space is available (must have a minimum of 35 square feet of usable space per child). Districts are encouraged to plan for future needs of 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.

Q2: May the district have more than 20 children in the session if there are additional adults?

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

Q3: What is the maximum class size if there are 3 year old children in the classroom?

A: If the majority of children are 3 years of age, the ratio and maximum number of children are determined by the program standard chosen. If the majority of children are 3 years old, the IQPPS maximum number is 18 with 1 adult to 9 children.

Adult to Child Ratio

Q1: What are the adult to child ratios?

A: There must be at least one appropriately licensed teacher present for every 10 children in a classroom during the instructional time described in subrule 16.3(4). A minimum of one staff member and one teacher 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.

Calendar/ Instructional Time

Q1: What is acceptable instructional time?

A: A minimum of 10 hours per week of instructional time is required in the SWVPP. As indicated in subrule 16.3(4) instructional time must be directly related to the program's curriculum and the Early Learning Standards. Instructional time should relate to intentional, planned teaching and learning experiences that would be reflected in the teacher's planning and lessons.

Q2: Is the preschool start date the same date as the district's first day of school for K-12?

A: 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.

Q3: How many days per year, does the preschool have to provide instruction?

A: The number of days per year must be within the parameter of the school calendar days in session.

Snack and/or Meal

Q1: The SWVPP schedule is from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00p.m. Is there any requirement that a meal would need to be provided?

A: 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 Program Standards and Accreditation criteria, and the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, a meal or snack must be served. Standard 5.21 (IQPPS) states that 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.

Teacher Requirements (licensure)

Q1: Who employs the teacher?

A: The teacher may be employed by the district or contracted by the school district 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 meet the requirements of 2007 Iowa Acts, House File 877 and Chapter 16, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program Administrative Rules.

Q2: What qualifications does the SWVPP teacher need to have?

A: Preschool teachers must hold a valid practitioner’s license issued by the Board of Educational Examiners under Iowa Code chapter 272 and hold an endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners that includes prekindergarten. There is no requirement that the teacher be an employee of the district; the teacher may be employed by a private provider or other public agency with whom the district has entered into an agreement or contract under Iowa Code chapter 28E. Contact the Board of Educational Examiners for specific teacher information at the following Website: <http://www.boee.iowa.gov/>

Appropriate teaching endorsements are:

- Teacher Endorsement #100 -- Prekindergarten through grade three, including special education;
- Teacher Endorsement #103 – Prekindergarten through kindergarten; and
- Teacher Endorsement #106 – Prekindergarten through grade three.

A Class B conditional license is also an appropriate license if it is for PK-3 including special education or PK-K. If teachers do not hold one of these endorsements they should apply to BOEE for a conditional license.

Note: A teacher who has an Early Childhood Teacher – Special Education 15.2 (19) endorsement (also known as #223) 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.

Q3: If a district contracts with another agency to provide the SWVPP, is the district required to evaluate the teacher? Does Chapter 284 apply?

A: 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 such case, Chapter 284 does not apply.

Q4: If the teacher is an employee of the school district, who evaluates the teacher?

A: 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.

Q5: If the community partner employs the teacher, is the district required to evaluate him/her?

A: The district is responsible to evaluate the district employees only. If the teacher is employed by the community partner, his/her supervisor is responsible for teacher evaluation.

Q6: If the community partner employs and evaluates the teacher, is the supervisor required to hold an Evaluator Endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners?

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

Q7: 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?

A: The teacher should contact the Board of Educational Examiners for information on license conversion at <http://www.boee.iowa.gov/>.

Q8: What collaboration responsibilities does the teacher have?

A: The teacher must

- **collaborate** with other partners as necessary. Partners may include family support/parent education staff, community child care, Early Childhood Iowa (Community Empowerment), Head Start, Shared Visions, and others as necessary to adequately meet the needs of the child and family.
- **develop** and maintain a relationship with the child's family in order to increase the potential of the child and family including collaboration with necessary family service/education providers.
- **assist** families to identify and access available resources to meet the needs of the child.

Professional Development

Q1: Are districts required to provide professional development to SWVPP teachers?

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

Q2: How many hours of professional development should a district provide?

A: It is recommended that the district provide a minimum of 15 hours per year of professional development.

Q3: Are teacher associates in the SWVPP required to participate in professional development?

A: Yes, the district must ensure that all district SWVPP staff receive appropriate professional development in early childhood education.

Curriculum

Q1: What are the curriculum requirements for the SWVPP?

A: A district must use a curriculum that is 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.

Q2: What does research or evidence-based mean?

A: Research-based means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.

Evidence-based means research that can be classified as “promising” under certain conditions. First, if a research design is weak but findings have been consistent across multiple replications, the treatment under study can be said to have promise. Second, if single strategies that have been studied under true experimental conditions are combined with multiple strategies, practices, and routines and the composite then studied with a weaker design with positive results, the findings can be classified as promising.

Q3: Are all SWVPP classrooms in the district required to use the same curriculum?

A: No, all SWVPP classrooms are not required to use the same curriculum.

The curriculum must meet the identified program standards (National Association for the Education of Young Children Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, Iowa’s Quality Preschool Program Standards, or Head Start Program Performance Standards), must be research or evidence-based and must align with Iowa’s Early Learning Standards.

Assessment

Q1: What are the assessment requirements?

A: The district must employ a systematic, ongoing procedure for obtaining information from observations, interview, portfolios, and tests that can be used to make judgments about the strengths and needs of individual children and plan appropriate instruction. There are many methods of addressing these criteria. Several published assessment tools include, but are not limited to the High Scope Child Observation Record, Teaching Strategies GOLD and/or Work Sampling system. Best practice would suggest using an assessment that is aligned with your curriculum, and the Iowa Early Learning Standards.

Families

Q1: Do families need to be involved in SWVPP programming?

A: Yes, family participation is vital to their child's preschool success. The SWVPP must include families in at least one home visit, one family night and a minimum of two family-teacher conferences annually. Family involvement is encouraged for classroom volunteers, orientation to the preschool program, parent education, general communication and other activities (IAC 281-16.3(12)).

Q2: What are the requirements for Family Night?

A: This is a local decision that should be made with the input from the Preschool Advisory Team, 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 should be generated based on the input from the advisory group specific to the needs of the local communities.

Q3: Does the home visit need to take place in the home?

A: It is the expectation that the home visit occurs in the home. The home visit provides an opportunity for the teacher to become acquainted with and learn from the family about their family structure; their 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.

At times, conditions may not be supportive of a home visit and other settings need to be considered for a family visit. With the prior reviewed purposes in mind, the school setting is not the preferred setting for conversation and learning about the 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 even a park. School districts also need to ensure the safety of their staff in determining the location and timing of the home visit.

Q4: 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?

A: No, conferences are a time for the teacher to share information about 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.

Q5: Is a district required to develop a parent handbook for SWVPP?

A: It is recommended that the district and community partners develop a common parent handbook for the SWVPP. A parent handbook is helpful in clarifying roles

and responsibilities for families and the district. Districts may consider how their current parent handbook may be edited to include the necessary elements to address the SWVPP and the adopted program standard.

V. Transportation

Q1: Are school districts required to provide transportation for children in the SWVPP?

A: No, transportation is not required but districts may choose to provide transportation as one of the comprehensive services defined in the Administrative Rules.

Q2: Do school buses need to have safety restraints for four-year-olds?

A: The DE provides guidance regarding the safe transportation of children. See the following website for further information on transportation
http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=2147