



Preschool Programming Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

As part of the elementary school system, preschool programming is critical for providing learning opportunities to young children. Preschool programming and services under the authority of the Iowa Department of Education (Department) are grounded in the Iowa Early Learning Standards and the approved preschool program standards. Topics in this resource address questions regarding:

- [Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs](#) (SWVPP),
- [Early Childhood Special Education](#) (ECSE) services, and
- [Shared Visions Preschool Programs](#) (SVPP).

Additionally, preschool programs in Iowa may also operate under the authority of other agencies and organizations including the Iowa Department of Human Services, Early Childhood Iowa, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Head Start, as well as independent entities. Programs should contact their respective regulatory agency for program specific guidance and questions. Given many early childhood programs utilize several operational and funding sources in providing preschool, it may be necessary to contact different agencies for technical assistance and clarification. Contacts for the Department of Education are located on the last page of this document.

Note: The term virtual learning is used in this document instead of Continuous Learning as it is more explicit terminology for families and others outside of the education system. Specifically, virtual learning is used in this document to reference educational services which may include online education, home delivery or pick-up of educational resources, video or telephonic check-ins, or other innovative methods.

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)

1. As preschool attendance is voluntary, do districts have to provide general education instruction virtually/remotely in preschool? What if there is a medical consideration?

If a student is enrolled in SWVPP, compulsory attendance expectations are applicable. If the district is only offering on-site instruction, enrolled students are expected to attend unless there is a medical consideration provided as an exemption. Students/families with medical considerations may request virtual learning and provide written verification from a licensed healthcare provider.

If the district is offering a virtual learning option for families, this could be an option for the family to select rather than attending on-site. The district is responsible for ensuring a minimum of 10 hours of quality and equitable continuous learning experiences for students and families regardless of delivery method (on-site, hybrid, and virtual). Districts should also coordinate services in these situations with their community preschool partners.

2. Do we have to provide preschool services to students if we move to a virtual platform due to cases of COVID-19 in our district?

If a student is enrolled in SWVPP, compulsory attendance expectations are applicable. If the district moves to a virtual learning option for families, the district would also need to consider how to offer preschool services

virtually to maintain the requirement of a minimum of 10 hours of instruction per week. This should be described in their district Return-to-Learn (R2L) plan. Districts are also responsible for ensuring the delivery of preschool services in community preschool partner locations; leadership would coordinate local plans with their community preschool partners.

3. What does virtual preschool look like? I am wondering if virtual services can be used and how this will affect funding?

State funding for SWVPP is provided to districts and their community preschool partners to provide a preschool opportunity in the local community. The design of virtual preschool services is made at a local level. This may include video check-ins with students and families, some group screen times, and asynchronous activities available to students and families for access during available times in their day and family schedules. These opportunities could be shared electronically or in hard copy. Given the age and development of preschool students, there is a reliance on families and other adults to support students' learning. The importance is flexibility while also providing meaningful learning opportunities and ongoing, two-way communication.

4. We will be offering virtual preschool to those families who selected it. If our community preschool partners follow Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS) and provide instruction for a minimum of 10 hours per week, can our partners also offer their own virtual preschool?

Based on SWVPP assurances, the district is responsible for ensuring a minimum of 10 hours of quality and equitable learning experiences. Decisions regarding how this is delivered are determined locally. Additionally, districts would also want to ensure they coordinate any such plans with community preschool partners to ensure equitable opportunities across program locations.

Eligible students served through virtual means will be included in the child count based on the district's R2L plan for Required Continuous Learning. Students who are enrolled in SWVPP must meet compulsory attendance expectations (whether on-site or virtually) to be "counted" for FY21.

5. How do we determine if community partner preschools can remain open or move to virtual? Is this a local decision or whatever happens with the district preschool has to happen for community partners?

Local school districts are responsible for the implementation of SWVPP in all preschool program locations including community preschool partner locations. Districts should work with their community preschool partners to ensure consistent and equitable preschool programming is provided in all classrooms. The district would want to collaborate with its community partners to make sure programmatic requirements and decisions are represented in local 28E agreements as well as in the district's R2L plan.

6. Are all preschools required to provide virtual or hybrid general education services if they close due to a health concern? Is there a difference for programs serving different ages?

Districts decide locally whether they will offer a virtual learning option to families. If the district is only offering on-site instruction, enrolled students are expected to attend unless there is a medical consideration provided as an exemption. State funded programs are required to provide a minimum of 10 hours of programming weekly. Should a school need to close due to a health concern, the district should have a plan for how to deliver preschool services through a virtual means to ensure the hours are provided.

Students who are enrolled in SWVPP must meet compulsory attendance expectations (whether on-site or virtual) to be included in the child count for FY21.

All students receiving special education services (regardless of age) through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are required to have a virtual learning plan recorded on Page I of the IEP. They must also meet compulsory attendance expectations. Guidance on how the delivery of services is recorded on the IEP is available on the [Return-to-Learn website](#).

7. If a student chooses to do virtual but the district is still holding classes, do they get to keep their preschool “spot” in the classroom? Can they choose to start that way and then change their mind?

Districts are responsible for ensuring a minimum of 10 hours of quality and equitable preschool programming for students and families whether on-site or virtual programming is provided. Eligible students served through virtual means will be included in the child count based on the district's R2L plan for Required Continuous Learning. Maximum group size in a SWVPP classroom is 20 students whether served virtually or on-site. If a student is served virtually, that student has a “slot” in the classroom. For example, a district could have 15 students attending on-site and five students learning via virtual means. This classroom has reached the maximum class size of 20 and could not enroll additional students.

District R2L plans should describe if a virtual learning option is available to families. If offering a virtual option for families with students in K-12, the district would want to consider virtual services for preschool. Parameters given to families in choosing a virtual option for how long that commitment is for and when they could choose to switch a student to attending on-site are locally determined and applicable for preschool families as well.

8. If a school district chooses a hybrid approach for R2L, does a community preschool partner site have to also deliver instruction through hybrid or can they continue with all on-site delivery of instruction if it is safe?

Local school districts are responsible for the implementation of SWVPP in all preschool program locations including community preschool partner locations. The district should collaborate with its community partners based on local 28E agreements to ensure consistent and equitable implementation of the district's R2L plan. SWVPP assurances require a minimum of 10 hours of preschool programming whether offering on-site, hybrid, or virtual delivery.

It is also important for district and community preschool partner locations to maintain awareness of state requirements and guidance respective of the programming offered in the location. If a location is also licensed by the Department of Human Services for childcare, leaders would want to attend to available guidance. Department of Human Services guidance for child care in response to COVID-19 is available at dhs.iowa.gov/childcare-covid-19. Specific questions could then be directed to the appropriate state offices.

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

9. When three and four-year-old students are placed in preschool to receive special education services, is compulsory attendance applicable and are districts required to provide preschool programming in all delivery models?

If a student's special education services include specially designed instruction (SDI), then compulsory attendance expectations are applicable. Compulsory attendance requirements are in place for students enrolled in preschool, whether attending on-site or virtually. When a district implements a virtual or hybrid learning model, the IEP team must consider the student's needs to prioritize and adjust goals, services, and supports needed in the virtual learning environment. This includes what services will be provided, who will provide them, and their frequency/duration.

For more information and examples across the learning models, see the [FAPE \(Free Appropriate Public Education\) Considerations for R2L guidance](#).

10. If a family chooses to keep their student whom is eligible for special education at home, is the district required to provide access to preschool programming and services required on the student's IEP? Is there a difference when the decision to stay at home is not due to a medical need?

It is the resident district's responsibility to ensure students (three to 21 years of age) receive the appropriate educational services to meet their needs as identified in the individualized education program (IEP). The IEP team must convene to determine how services will be delivered to ensure a FAPE. After considering all factors, the IEP team should determine if there is a reason why a student cannot safely participate in the delivery model being offered with protective measures in place. If there are disability-related circumstances, the district has an obligation to provide the student with an appropriate education in light of the student's circumstances and all information available to the team (including information from the student's health care provider).

If a district is operating under the on-site delivery plan, and the family refuses to send a student to school out of fear of COVID-19, this is best approached on a case-by-case basis and involving the IEP team. If the unique circumstances of the individual require the student to participate differently (all on-site or all virtual), then it is a placement issue and the IEP needs to reflect the difference.

For more information on placement decisions, see the [Placement Decisions During the COVID-19 Pandemic guidance](#).

11. As young children transition from Early ACCESS (early intervention services) to special education when they turn three-years-old throughout the year, can Early ACCESS services continue or does the resident district have to provide the preschool?

When children reach the age of three, they are no longer eligible for Early ACCESS services. For three-year-old students eligible for special education, the IEP teams must consider all possible platforms for delivery of SDI and then determine the appropriate match for the individual student and their needs to ensure a FAPE. All students receiving special education services (regardless of age) through an IEP are required to have a virtual learning plan recorded on Page I of the IEP.

For additional information, see the [Compendium of Resources for Districts, Schools, and IEP Teams](#)

12. If a preschool student is receiving special education services in a SWVPP community partner location and the partner location must move to virtual services, what role does the district play?

Districts are responsible for the implementation of special education services for all eligible preschool students with an IEP including those receiving services in community preschool partner locations. Districts should work with their community preschool partners to ensure consistent and equitable preschool programming including SDI as described in the IEP (specifically Page I). The district would want to collaborate with its community partners to make sure programmatic requirements and decisions are represented in the IEP, local agreements, and the district's R2L plan.

Shared Visions Preschool Programs (SVPP)

13. Is there guidance for hours per day in Shared Visions for the current pandemic situation?

Each Shared Visions grantee should use the intended program design represented in its approved grant application regarding specific number of hours and days identified for programming. There is not a specific number of hours required per Iowa Code for Shared Visions. It is expected that grantees plan services that offer the number of days/hours specified in the awarded application. If a grantee needs to change the service plan as stated and awarded in the application, the grantee must communicate those changes with the

Shared Visions consultant at the Department. Such changes may include the delivery model being altered to include virtual learning or a combination of on-site and virtual learning.

Districts awarded a Shared Visions grant will need to maintain awareness of program requirements of Shared Visions Preschool Programs, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs, and other regulatory agencies as applicable.

14. How should we handle our grant goals if we aren't able to meet them due to not being on-site?

Progress on goals will be reported within an annual report at the end of the grant year. If desired progress on a goal was not achieved due to interruptions in programming, this would be included in the year-end report. There is not a penalty or consequence to not meeting goals as planned. The intent is continuous improvement. It is anticipated that goals would remain in place and continue to be addressed in subsequent years and throughout the five years of the grant. If a grantee determines there is a need to modify goals or the service plan as stated and awarded in the application, the grantee must communicate a desire to make those changes with the Shared Visions consultant at the Department.

Preschool Return-to-Learn Resources

Visit the [Preschool Programs and Services](#) tab of the R2L site to access the following two resources:

- [Preschool Resources for Return-to-Learn](#) and
- [Considerations for Preschool Programs and Services for Return-to-Learn](#).

Contacts

General Questions

For general questions, please contact Kimberly Villotti, Administrative Consultant, at kimberly.villotti@iowa.gov.

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program

For questions related to the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, contact:

- Jennifer Adkins at jennifer.adkins@iowa.gov and
- Mary Breyfogle at mary.breyfogle@iowa.gov.

Early Childhood Special Education

For questions related to Early Childhood Special Education, contact:

- Dee Gethmann at dee.gethmann@iowa.gov and
- Betsy Lin at betsy.lin@iowa.gov.

Shared Visions Preschool Programs

For questions related to the Shared Visions, contact:

- Amy Stegeman at amy.stegeman@iowa.gov and
- Marianne Rodrigues at marianne.rodrigues@iowa.gov.