

# Prekindergarten Program Quality Matrix

This matrix outlines current national benchmarks and best practices for high quality prekindergarten education and documents if and how these benchmarks are met across settings in Vermont’s regulated programs. It was drafted by the Program Quality Workgroup of the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee and last updated on 6.4.24.

National Benchmarks for High Quality Prekindergarten Programs			Current Prek Quality Standard in Vermont Settings		
<u>NIEER Benchmarks</u>	<u>NAEYC Program Standards</u>	<u>Head Start Performance Standards</u>	Private regulated center-based programs	Private regulated home-based programs	School-based programs
<b>EARLY LEARNING &amp; DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS</b>					
<p>Comprehensive</p> <p>Supported</p> <p>Culturally sensitive</p> <p>Aligned with state infant &amp; toddler and K-3 or college &amp; career ready standards</p> <p>Aligned w/ child assessments</p>	<p>Implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children</p> <p>Promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.</p>	<p>Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) to support development and growth.</p> <p>Includes approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and literacy, cognition, and perceptual, motor, and physical development.</p> <p>Inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children must be prioritized for enrollment based on need</li> <li>• Ensure staff are familiar with the ethnic backgrounds and heritage of the children they serve and are able to serve and communicate with children to the extent possible</li> <li>• If a majority of children in a classroom speak the same language, at least one staff member must speak the language.</li> <li>• Staff, consultants, contractors and volunteers must respect and promote the unique identity of each child and family and do not stereotype on any basis, including gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation or family composition</li> <li>• Must provide LRE for children with disabilities and ensure they are fully participating</li> <li>• Must coordinate SpEd services with LEA</li> </ul>	<p>Same across all settings.</p> <p>Vermont Early Learning Standards (<a href="#">VELS</a>) are a framework for curriculum &amp; instruction that cover development and growth for birth-3rd grade. Approved by State Board of Education in 2015 and included is state’s Educational Quality Standards.</p> <p>VELS align with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NAEYC’s Developmentally Appropriate Practice</li> <li>• Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework</li> <li>• K-3 Common Core State Standards for English LA and Math,</li> <li>• Next Generation Science Standards</li> <li>• VT’s Grade Level Expectations</li> <li>• Early MTSS Framework &amp; Pyramid Model of Practices</li> <li>• Division of Early Childhood (DEC) recommended practices</li> <li>• TSG Assessment required for UPK</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">STARS Quality Standards</a> incorporate VELS and support continuous quality improvement in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult-child interaction</li> <li>• Family &amp; youth engagement</li> <li>• Responsive practices</li> </ul> <p>Inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UPK prequalification requires attestation of inclusion of children with disabilities</li> <li>• CDD licensing requires nondiscrimination</li> </ul>		

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<b>CURRICULUM SUPPORTS</b>					
Approval process for selecting curricula  Supports in place for curriculum implementation	Uses developmentally, culturally & linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the curriculum goals.	Use research-based early childhood education curriculum, including curricular enhancements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on scientifically valid research and has standardized training procedures &amp; materials to support implementation</li> <li>Aligned with HSELOF</li> <li>Organized scope &amp; sequence with plans &amp; materials for learning experiences based on dev progressions &amp; how kids learn</li> </ul> Lesson Plans must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use curriculum with fidelity</li> <li>Individualize for each child in the classroom</li> </ul>	Same across all settings.  VT agencies do not mandate or recommend curricula for prekindergarten or any other grade/topic.		
<b>TEACHER PREPARATION &amp; SPECIALIZED TRAINING</b>					
Lead teacher must have a BA at minimum plus specialized training in PreK (ECE or child development)  Assistant teacher must have a CDA or equivalent at minimum	The program employs and supports a teaching and administrative staff that have the qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.	No less than 50% of teachers must have a BA in ECE, CDA, or equivalent  All teachers must have at least an AA in ECE, CD, or equivalent  Assistant teachers (paraeducators ) must have at least a preschool CDA  Additional program staff must meet CDD & HS requirements for their positions.	Lead teacher required to have at least 21 college credits related to early childhood. (Some exceed.)  AOE licensed teacher on site (not necessarily teaching) during UPK hours for each student's UPK hours enrolled. Ie: if students attend differing days or hours the UPK funded hours must align with the teacher hours.  Additional program staff must meet CDD requirements for their positions. Teaching assistants may only have 45-hour Fundamentals training +GED.	If registered FCCH, lead teacher and assistants required to have HS diploma + 45-hour Fundamentals. (Many exceed.)  If licensed FCCH, lead teacher would have at least 12 related college credits.  AOE licensed teacher as mentor >3 hours/week, or owner as licensed teacher, or contract with licensed teacher for the UPK hours/week.	Lead teacher in each UPK classroom is AOE Licensed Early Childhood Educator or Early Childhood Special Educator  Support staff must meet SU/SD determined requirements (usually are paraeducator standards) and CDD licensing requirements.

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<b>STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>					
<p>Teacher and assistant teacher must receive at least 15 hours/year of in-service professional development and training</p> <p>Individualized annual professional development plans &amp; coaching</p>	<p>Program makes provisions for ongoing staff development, including orientations for new staff and opportunities for continuing education</p> <p>Teaching staff have training in the program's curriculum and work as a teaching team</p>	<p>Coaching provided to all teachers that could benefit</p> <p>Teachers and TAs provided with all mandatory trainings and at least 16 hours of professional development per year</p> <p>All staff provided 3 hours per week (as scheduling allows) to complete college coursework</p> <p>All employees have Independent Professional Development Plan</p> <p>Programs have annual program-wide Training Plan to focus trainings on topics that are needed based on data</p>	<p>Same across all settings.</p> <p>All staff have at least 15 hours annually of approved professional development per child care licensing</p> <p>AOE licensed teachers must complete 45 hours of professional development in 3 years if Level 1 or 90 hours of professional development if Level 2 (in 5 years)</p> <p>Individual professional development plan required for all staff except AOE-licensed teachers</p> <p>No state-level standards related to coaching or in-service training</p>		
<b>MAXIMUM CLASS SIZE</b>					
20 students or fewer	20 students or fewer	20 students or fewer	20 students or fewer	12 or fewer students, depending on ages of children and number of staff. Charts on <a href="#">pages 74-79 Childcare Regulations</a>	20 students or fewer
<b>STAFF-CHILD RATIO</b>					
(These are class sizes for children who are all 3. If the classroom has not yet 3s in the mix the ratio drops.)					
Lowest acceptable ratio of staff to children in classroom (e.g., maximum number of students per teacher) must be 1:10 or better	1:10	1:10	1:10	1:10 or lower depending on ages	1:10

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<b>HEALTH</b>					
<p>Required screenings &amp; referrals for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision,</li> <li>• hearing</li> <li>• health</li> </ul>	<p>Promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness</p>	<p>Within 30 days of enrollment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine whether child has a PCP, dentist &amp; health insurance</li> <li>• Help them get PCP, dentist &amp; insurance if needed</li> </ul> <p>Within 45 days of enrollment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform vision &amp; hearing screenings</li> <li>• Make referral for any identified needs and assist family to get to specialist</li> <li>• Identify child's nutrition needs</li> </ul> <p>Within 90 days of enrollment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure child is up to date with immunizations, well child visits, &amp; dental visits</li> </ul> <p>Ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist parents w well child &amp; dental visits</li> <li>• Periodic observations to ID new health concerns</li> <li>• Facilitate follow up care for identified needs</li> <li>• Create &amp; follow Individualized Health Plans for children with special health needs</li> <li>• Assist children to get adaptive equipment</li> </ul> <p>Nutrition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition services meet the nutritional needs of each child &amp; USDA requirements</li> <li>• Programs &lt;6hrs provide 1/3 to 1/2 of daily nutrition</li> <li>• Programs &gt;6hrs provide 1/2 to 2/3 of daily nutrition</li> <li>• Assist families to access WIC, 3-squares, and food shelves</li> </ul> <p>Provide mental health consultants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support children/families with MH needs</li> <li>• Provide consultation for HS staff</li> <li>• Assist access to mental health interventions</li> </ul>	<p>CDD Regulations require record of annual physical &amp; health history, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name &amp; telephone of the child's primary health care and dental care providers</li> <li>• Description of any special medical, developmental, emotional or educational needs of the child</li> <li>• Written authorization from the parent for the program to be able to obtain emergency medical care</li> <li>• Child's immunization record or Vermont Department of Health approved exemption document</li> </ul>	<p>CDD Regulations require record of annual physical &amp; health history, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name &amp; telephone of the child's primary health care and dental care providers</li> <li>• Description of any special medical, developmental, emotional or educational needs of the child</li> <li>• Written authorization from the parent for the program to be able to obtain emergency medical care</li> <li>• Child's immunization record or Vermont Department of Health approved exemption document</li> </ul>	<p>SU/SD Policies for enrollment</p> <p>CDD Regulations require record of annual physical &amp; health history, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name &amp; telephone of the child's primary health care and dental care providers</li> <li>• Description of any special medical, developmental, emotional or educational needs of the child</li> <li>• Written authorization from the parent for the program to be able to obtain emergency medical care</li> <li>• Child's immunization record or Vermont Department of Health approved exemption document</li> </ul>

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<b>CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM</b>					
<p>Systematic structured observations of classroom quality</p> <p>Information collected is used for classroom/program improvement at the state and local levels</p>	<p>Informed by ongoing systematic, formal &amp; informal assessment approaches to provide information on children’s learning and development</p> <p>Assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop</p>	<p>Annual program self-assessment involving community partners. Internal data and information on community needs evaluated and used to determine shifts in programming +any compliance aspects to focus on for the coming year.</p> <p>Data used for annual program improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Information Report (PIR), a Head Start database which collects copious information</li> <li>• Internal data on child assessment, professional development &amp; family engagement</li> <li>• Community data</li> <li>• Structured classroom observations (CLASS, T-POT, Active Supervision, etc.)</li> </ul> <p>Year-round improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data must be aggregated, analyzed &amp; compared to identify risk and inform strategies</li> </ul> <p>Child Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research-based developmental standardized screening within 45 days of enrollment for development, behavior, motor, language, social, cognitive, and emotional skills</li> <li>• Child outcomes (TSG) evaluated at least 3 x/year; data must break out subgroups</li> </ul>	<p>Same across all settings.</p> <p>STARS is state’s program-level quality rating system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 or 5 STARS to qualify for UPK (3 allowed only if have approved plan to achieve at least 4 STARS)</li> <li>• Supports structured continuous improvement</li> <li>• Focuses on Adult-child interaction, Family &amp; youth engagement, Responsive practices</li> <li>• Includes systematic structured observations of classroom quality through CLASS tool as part of STARS initial and 3 year renewal</li> </ul> <p>Accompanying SPARQS program provides quality support specialists to offer coaching, consultation, and training to support programs.</p> <p>AOE ACIS Monitoring System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitors compliance with UPK requirements via survey.</li> <li>• Promotes high quality for each and every child</li> <li>• Promotes equitable access to high quality PreK education</li> <li>• Focuses on continuous improvement</li> </ul> <p>Child Care licensing includes annual site visits from CDD.</p> <p>Development assessments (fall, spring) for each child enrolled in UPK using Teaching Strategies GOLD via AOE.</p> <p>Data used for program improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STARS data including program-level CQI plan which is base of new STARS system</li> <li>• CDD Licensing Site visit reports</li> <li>• Exclusionary Data collected by AOE</li> <li>• AOE TSGold data for progress monitoring of children and educator practice</li> <li>• Child data points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ASQ</li> <li>○ ASQ SE</li> <li>○ TSG</li> <li>○ ICP</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

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SAFETY					
N/A	<p>Facility is designed so that staff can supervise all children by sight &amp; sound.</p> <p>Program has necessary furnishings, such as hand-washing sinks, child-size chairs and tables, and cots, cribs, beds, or sleeping pads</p> <p>A variety of materials and equipment appropriate for children’s ages, skills and abilities is available and kept clean, safe, and in good repair</p> <p>Outdoor play areas have fences or natural barriers that prevent access to streets &amp; other hazards.</p> <p>First-aid kits, fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and other safety equipment are installed and available</p>	<p>Implement practices in “Caring for our Children”</p> <p>Daily, monthly, and yearly safety checklists</p> <p>All staff with regular child contact trained in safety procedures in all state, local, federal &amp; program-developed health, safety, &amp; child care requirements</p> <p>Emergency Response Plan updated yearly that covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Emergencies</li> <li>● Contagious disease</li> <li>● Fire prevention &amp; response</li> <li>● Med administration</li> <li>● Systems to ensure children are only released to authorized adult</li> <li>● Child specific health care needs</li> <li>● Disaster preparedness</li> </ul> <p>Background checks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Before hire, program must consult sex offender registry and either state criminal history records including fingerprint or FBI criminal history including fingerprint checks</li> <li>● Within 90 days of hire, complete fingerprinting for whichever was not conducted above and child abuse and neglect registry</li> </ul>	<p>CDD <u>licensing requirements</u> include all the NAEYC noted.</p> <p>In addition to NAEYC listed- all programs are inspected by Dept of Fire Safety, complete lead testing (water and paint), and are inspected by CDD staff.</p>	<p>CDD <u>licensing requirements</u> include all the NAEYC noted.</p> <p>In addition to NAEYC listed- all programs are inspected by Dept of Fire Safety, complete lead testing (water and paint), and are inspected by CDD staff.</p>	<p>CDD <u>licensing requirements</u> include all the NAEYC noted.</p> <p>* Public schools are exempt from a few CDD licensing requirements focused on admin documentation. None of the exemptions are about health and safety.</p> <p>In addition to NAEYC listed- all programs are inspected by Dept of Fire Safety, complete lead testing (water and paint), and are inspected by CDD staff.</p> <p>Additionally abide by AOE Pk-12 facilities requirements.</p> <p>Public schools require background checks through the SU/SD in addition to via CDD licensing.</p>

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RELATIONSHIPS					
N/A	<p>Promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member</p> <p>Establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals.</p> <p>The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.</p>	<p>Family Engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement intentional strategies to engage parents in their child's learning &amp; development &amp; support parent-child relationships</li> <li>● Develop relationships with parents &amp; structure services to encourage trust &amp; respectful, ongoing two-way communication</li> <li>● Create welcoming environments that incorporate cultural, ethnic, &amp; linguistic backgrounds of families</li> <li>● Partner with families to identify needs, interests, strengths, goals, and services/resources that support the family (nation-wide average of 1 full-time social service workers for every 35 families enrolled)</li> <li>● Provide parents with opportunities to participate in the program as employees or volunteers</li> <li>● Provide family engagement services in the family's preferred language, to the extent possible, and ensure families have the opportunity to share personal information in an environment in which they feel safe</li> <li>● Implement procedures for teachers and social workers to share information, as appropriate, to ensure coordinated family engagement strategies across settings</li> </ul> <p>Governance structure with a Parent Board called Policy Council at the overall program level and a Parent Group at each site</p>	<p>VELS speak to providing opportunities that make a positive difference in their learning and development. "Intentional teaching includes having instructional goals for children that guide our interactions, learning environments, and curriculum planning." Family engagement is required by UPK standards.</p> <p>Throughout VELs the importance of adult relationships is embedded.</p> <p>The assessment tool CLASS (currently being used for STARS) has Adult-Child Interactions as one of the 3 areas it assesses. STARS also includes Family Engagement as an area.</p> <p>Child Care licensing regulations have the adult, child, and family relationships across many of the regulations.</p>	<p>VELS speak to providing opportunities that make a positive difference in their learning and development. "Intentional teaching includes having instructional goals for children that guide our interactions, learning environments, and curriculum planning."</p> <p>Throughout VELs the importance of adult relationships is embedded.</p> <p>The assessment tool CLASS (currently being used for STARS) has Adult-Child Interactions as one of the 3 areas it assesses. STARS also includes Family Engagement as an area.</p> <p>Child Care licensing regulations have the adult, child, and family relationships across many of the regulations.</p> <p>Family engagement is incorporated in UPK assurances</p>	<p>VELS speak to providing opportunities that make a positive difference in their learning and development. "Intentional teaching includes having instructional goals for children that guide our interactions, learning environments, and curriculum planning."</p> <p>Throughout VELs the importance of adult relationships is embedded.</p> <p>The assessment tool CLASS (currently being used for STARS) has Adult-Child Interactions as one of the 3 areas it assesses. STARS also includes Family Engagement as an area.</p> <p>Child Care licensing regulations have the adult, child, and family relationships across many of the regulations.</p> <p>Family engagement is incorporated in UPK assurances</p> <p>AOE encourages use of Pyramid Model Practices</p>

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LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT					
N/A	Effectively implements policies, procedures & systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences	N/A	<p>Child care licensing regulations have requirements for directors, requirements for policies, procedures and system. Depending on size of program, director is required to have certain coursework in these areas.</p> <p>*AOE School administrator license endorsement can be used in place of documenting coursework specifically listed in regulations.</p> <p>A Program Director credential is offered through Northern Lights at CCV.</p>	<p>Child care licensing regulations have requirements for policies, procedures and systems needed in Family Child Care Homes.</p>	<p>Child care licensing regulations have requirements for directors, requirements for policies, procedures and system. Depending on size of program, director is required to have certain coursework in these areas.</p> <p>*AOE School administrator license endorsement can be used in place of documenting coursework specifically listed in regulations.</p> <p>A Program Director credential is offered through Northern Lights at CCV.</p>

**Resource Links:**

- [NIEER's Quality Benchmarks](#)
- [NIEER Vermont Preschool Profile 2022](#)
- [NIEER Vermont Preschool Profile 2023](#)
- [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS®\) in Head Start](#) (new assessment of classroom quality/environment/interaction - STARS)
- [CDD Licensing Regulations](#)
- [STARS process for the QRIS / STARS Guidance Manual / STARS Quality Levels](#)
- [AOE UPK Program Requirements](#)
- [AOE UPK Program Requirements readiness chart](#)
- [AOE State Board Rules 2600 Series](#)
- [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#)
- Teaching Strategies Gold [Developmental Assessment](#) (online assessment of child skills over a time - plays nicely with VELs)
- [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#)
- [10 NAEYC Program Standards Overview / Program Accreditation Standards & Assessment Items 2022](#)
- [AOE Early Childhood Special Education](#)
- [AOE Licensing Endorsements](#)