

Military Child Prekindergarten Services Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the eligibility requirements for serving children of military personnel?

The 79th Texas Legislature increased the eligibility for free public school prekindergarten services to the child of an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States, including the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces, who is ordered to active duty by proper authority; or the child of a member of the armed forces of the United States, including the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces, who was injured or killed while serving on active duty. A child who is eligible for enrollment in a prekindergarten class under this section remains eligible for enrollment if the child's parent leaves the armed forces, or is no longer on active duty, after the child begins a prekindergarten class.

Eligibility includes the child of a member of the armed forces who is the biological or adopted child of the member of the armed forces, regardless of whether the child lives with that parent; or a step-child of the member of the armed forces and lives in the household of the member of the armed forces.

2. When did military prekindergarten eligibility change take effect?

In the 2006-2007 school year.

3. Will the prekindergarten program for military children be fully funded or only for those who have a Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grants?

Prekindergarten for military children will be funded the same as it is for other eligible students. The Foundation School Program (FSP) will provide 1/2 day funding for each eligible student, regardless of the district's PKES grant status.

4. How is the FSP prekindergarten program funded?

The school finance system provides state aid on the basis of aggregate (district-level) average daily attendance (ADA). School districts serving prekindergarten students qualify to receive one-half day ADA for each eligible prekindergarten student served.

5. What is meant in the bill by "member of the armed forces"?

The definition of "member of the armed forces" is as follows: Active Duty uniformed members (parents or official guardians) of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard who are assigned to duty stations in Texas or who are Texans who have eligible children residing in Texas. Guard and Reserve--Activated/Mobilized uniformed members of the Texas National Guard (Army or Air Guard), or the Activated/Mobilized Members of the Reserve components of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard who are Texas residents regardless of the location of the reserve unit. In addition, children of a uniformed service member who is Missing in Action (MIA) would qualify under this code.

For purposes of eligibility for enrollment in a prekindergarten program, a child is considered to be the child of a member of the armed forces if: (a) the child is the biological or adopted child of the member of the armed forces, regardless of whether the child lives with that parent; or (b) the child is a step-child of the member of the armed forces and lives in the household of the member of the armed forces.

6. What type of documentation is needed to verify eligibility for prekindergarten under Article 6 of the bill?

- a. To verify that a service member is active duty—the sponsor parent or guardian would present the Department of Defense identification. (Note: this is a DoD photo identification.)
- b. To verify that a service member is an active member or mobilized reservist or member of the Texas National Guard: He/she would request a “Statement of Service” from the Installation Adjutant General (AG)/Director of Human Resources. This office would use the military personnel systems and documentation to verify that the service member is in fact on active duty in Texas or a Texas mobilized reservist. (Note: a Texas reservist is a resident of the state of Texas though his/her unit might be located or headquartered outside of Texas). For Texas National Guard members (Army or Air Guard), the Texas National Guard’s Office of The Adjutant General (TAG), could also provide documentation. The service member might also present an official letter from a commander (at or above the Lieutenant Colonel or, for the Navy at the Commander level) that he/she is active/mobilized.
- c. For a service member who dies or is killed: The family would present a copy of the death certificate using the service appropriate Department of Defense form, or a Department of Defense form that indicates that the reason for the separation from service was because of death. In either case the DoD form would show that the service member died while serving on active duty.
- d. If the Department of Defense form is not available, the family would ask the Casualty Assistance Office of the closest Casualty Area Command (in Texas) to provide a memorandum signed by the Casualty Office stating the service member was killed in action or died while serving.
- e. For an active duty service member or mobilized reservist/guardsman that was injured while on active duty: If wounded or injured in combat, a copy of the Purple Heart orders or citation would be presented. If the service member was NOT wounded or injured in combat (and was hospitalized or lost more than 24 hours of duty) a copy of the Line of Duty Determination documentation or, if such is not available, a copy of an official letter from a commander (at or above the Lieutenant Colonel or, for the Navy at the Commander level) the service member was wounded or injured while on active duty.
- f. For children of a uniformed service member who is Missing in Action (MIA): a copy of appropriate documentation for children of service members who are “Missing in Action” (MIA). Any one of the following three acceptable pieces of documentation will suffice for all services: (1) a copy of the transmittal letter from the Service Secretary stating the service member is in a missing status; (2) a copy of the DD (Department of Defense) Form 2811, “Report of Proceedings by Initial/Subsequent Board of Inquiry or Further Review Board”; or (3) a copy of the DD Form 2812, “Commander’s Preliminary Assessment and Recommendations Regarding Missing Person.”

7. Does Texas require a specific curriculum for the prekindergarten program?

No, Texas does not have a required curriculum for prekindergarten. There are no Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for prekindergarten. However, in an effort to align the prekindergarten program with the TEKS, prekindergarten curriculum guidelines have been developed and distributed to school districts. These curriculum guidelines provide challenging but achievable skills and concepts that three and four year old children are known to be able to do in each subject area delineated in the kindergarten TEKS. The guidelines are organized into 10 skill domains that support integration of curriculum and build connections between and among all disciplines. Because there is no state required prekindergarten curriculum, use of these guidelines is voluntary.

8. Is prekindergarten included in the review and adoption cycle for textbooks?

Yes, the State Board of Education (SBOE) shall adopt a review and adoption cycle for textbooks for elementary grade levels, including prekindergarten and secondary grade levels, for each subject in the required curriculum under Section 28.002. In November 2010, the SBOE adopted instructional materials

for prekindergarten systems. The new list and descriptions of materials may be found at www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147486677.

9. Is the length of a full-day and half-day prekindergarten program defined in the Texas Education Code?

Yes, a full-day program shall be at least seven hours each day including intermissions and recesses. A half-day program is a minimum of three hours.

10. Can school districts contract with community-based organizations to provide public prekindergarten?

Yes, before establishing a new prekindergarten program, a school district shall consider the possibility of sharing use of an existing Head Start or other child care program site as a prekindergarten site. (TEC §29.1533) To facilitate collaboration among district prekindergarten, licensed child care and Head Start programs, the agency has made available a manual for building community collaborations for early childhood care and education. The manual, titled *Community-Based School Readiness Integration Partnerships: Promoting Sustainable Collaborations* is available at www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/our-programs/program-overview/TX-school-ready/community-tools.

11. Does a school district have to offer a prekindergarten program?

A district shall offer prekindergarten classes if the district identifies 15 or more eligible children who are at least four years of age. A school district may offer prekindergarten classes if the district identifies 15 or more eligible children who are at least three years of age. (TEC §29.153)

12. If the district does not have a prekindergarten program because there were too few eligible students and the addition of military prekindergarten age students causes the district to exceed 15 eligible students, must the district start a prekindergarten program?

Yes, Texas Education Code, Section 29.153 requires a school district to offer a prekindergarten program if the district identifies 15 or more eligible children, including eligible military students, who are at least four years of age.

13. If our district operates a full-day prekindergarten program, must we serve eligible military children in the full-day program?

Yes, the district must offer the same services to eligible military children that it offers to other eligible children.

14. If the district offers a prekindergarten program to serve 3-year-old children, must it now include children of military service personnel?

A school district may, as a local option, offer prekindergarten classes if the district identifies 15 or more eligible children at least three years of age. Because serving 3-year-olds is optional, the district has discretion in the structure of this program and is, therefore, permitted to have a waiting list for 3-year-olds, if needed. However, the military children must be served and admitted to the program in the same manner as other eligible children.

15. What is a School Readiness Integration (SRI) model?

A School Readiness Integration model can be described as a cost-effective way to develop an integrated approach to bring together school districts, child care providers and Head Start programs in a cohesive service model that dramatically improves early reading, math and social development.

In an SRI classroom, a school district positions a certified teacher in a Head Start or child care classroom to provide a minimum of three hours of daily instruction to eligible students using state-adopted instructional materials. As described in the TEA Student Attendance Accounting Handbook, Section 7.5.1, districts may receive ADA funds for eligible prekindergarten students, who are enrolled in the Head Start or child care classroom served,

The two key principles driving school readiness integration are (1) the preparedness of all children to enter kindergarten on or above grade level and ready to benefit from the full array of public education services to keep them on grade level in kindergarten and beyond; and (2) the development and implementation of a SRI model that is community-based and individualized in ways that best serve each community in the most effective and efficient ways to meet each community's needs.

16. What are the benefits to the school district for partnering with a military installation child care center for school readiness integration?

The centers located on military installations make excellent partners for the SRI model in a number of ways. They offer:

- a. food program operated by the US Dept of Agriculture, similar to the federal lunch program operated in the schools;
- b. social work services;
- c. state of the art facilities;
- d. licensed child care facilities that meet NAEYC standards;
- e. low student-teacher ratio;
- f. special needs resource teams for special education students;
- g. extended hours of operation (typically 5:30 am to 6:00 pm);
- h. consistent attendance of children;
- i. predictable mobility rates for children; and
- j. well-trained staff by military early childhood specialists.

17. How can the School Readiness Integration model assist school districts impacted by this new requirement?

School districts may enter into SRI arrangements with existing nonprofit child care centers currently located on military installations and operated by the military or with other local community-based child care providers who are serving children of military families. On-base centers have been funded 50% by the military service and 50% by tuition payments from parents. As with other community based child care centers, the center can continue to charge tuition for "wrap-around" care before and after public school services.

18. Do School Readiness Integration models address the needs of prekindergarten children with special needs such as PPCD under IDEA-B and bilingual education?

Children with special needs such as PPCD under IDEA-B and bilingual education will be served as they are in regular prekindergarten programs. All regulations that apply to public prekindergarten programs will apply in other settings. It is expected that additional funds provided to districts to serve such students will continue to be used for the benefit of the child regardless of the setting in which the child is placed.

19. How do I identify an appropriate Head Start or child care center for an SRI partnership?

Prior to selecting and approaching community-based early childhood education providers for partnership purposes, the following steps are suggested:

- a) Identify characteristics of your school district (urban, suburban, rural, consolidated, high need, etc.)
- b) Estimate total classrooms needed for eligible prekindergarten age children on a zip code or census tract basis (eligibility in this case includes eligibility for prekindergarten, Head Start, and Child Care).
- c) Survey total classroom space available for prekindergarten age children in all ISD, Head Start and child care sites, including child care centers on military installations.
- d) Assess conditions and circumstances of buildings in which classroom space is available (ownership, terms and conditions of lease and use agreements, repair needs, estimated life of structures, etc.).
- e) Estimate child turnover/mobility rates in child care (including military installations), Head Start and Prekindergarten programs.
- f) Identify existing Head Start program options (part day, full-day, partial year, full-year, home-based, etc.) and child care service delivery models (centers, centers located on military installations, family day homes, self-arranged care with family) that are currently in place, and the distribution of children currently within each of those.
- g) Identify the number of people who are currently staffing classrooms serving prekindergarten age children and their qualifications.
- h) Based on the information gathered, develop a strategy/action plan for approaching a prospective partner who will best serve the needs of your campus, district and community.

The process of going through a-g will assist you in defining the characteristics of appropriate and eligible early childhood partners. It will also give you the information necessary to begin planning with prospective partners.