

Military Child Prekindergarten Services Frequently Asked Questions

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

House Bill 1, Section 6.01 passed by the 79th Legislature, 3rd Called Session 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.

When does prekindergarten eligibility change take effect?

This provision takes effect for the 2006-2007 school year.

Will the prekindergarten program for military children be fully funded or only for those who already have the prekindergarten expansion grants?

Prekindergarten for military children will be funded the same as it is for other eligible students. The Foundation School Program will provide 1/2 day funding. Districts with expansion grants may serve the children for the full day, but the grant amount cannot be amended to include the additional students.

How is the prekindergarten program funded?

The school finance system provides state aid on the basis of aggregate (district-level) average daily attendance (ADA). Funding is not provided on a grade-level basis. Because attendance data and grade level are reported at the student level, it is possible to calculate the ADA generated by students associated with a particular grade level and infer the amount of funding represented by the ADA of the students in that grade level. School districts serving prekindergarten students qualify to receive one-half day ADA for each prekindergarten student served.

When was the Prekindergarten Expansion Grants program started?

In 1999, the 76th Texas Legislature established the program by allowing school districts to obtain grant funds to provide a full-day prekindergarten. This legislation allowed the commissioner to make grants to school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to implement or expand the prekindergarten programs by: (1) operating an existing half-day prekindergarten program on a full-day basis; or (2) implementing a prekindergarten program at a campus that does not have a prekindergarten program. In addition to the program, a school district may offer full-day prekindergarten programs on a tuition basis or use district funds to provide a full day prekindergarten program. (**TEC §29.153, (c), and TEC §29.155, (a), (1), (2)**)

What is meant in the bill by "member of the armed forces" ? (§6.01)

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 uniform 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. The services would provide the MIA appropriate documentation.

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.

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.

d.) For an active duty service member or mobilized reservist/guardsman that was injured while serving 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.

Does Texas require a specific curriculum for the prekindergarten program?

No, Texas does not have a required curriculum for prekindergarten. After the release of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for grades K-12, The commissioner of education convened a group of educators and community members to draft guidelines for a prekindergarten curriculum that school districts could use voluntarily. In December 1999, the final version of the Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines was released containing the statement that "use of these guidelines is voluntary." However, TEA does provide a list of state-adopted instructional materials for prekindergarten classrooms which reflects the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines. In order to receive half-day ADA for prek students, districts must use one of the state adopted instructional materials in the prek classroom. For a list of prekindergarten state adopted materials go to the following link:
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/textbooks/materials/bulletin/programs.pdf>

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

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. School districts that apply and are approved for the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program may report eligible students as ADA Eligibility Code 1-full day if the students are scheduled for at least six hours (360 minutes) of instruction each day. **(TEC §25.082, (a))**

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

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)**

Is there a state requirement for coordination of funding streams for prekindergarten services?

There is no statutory requirements for local programs. However, the commissioners of education and human services shall evaluate the potential for coordination on statewide basis of prekindergarten programs with government-funded early childhood care and education programs such as child care administered under Chapter 44, Human Resources Code, and federal Head Start programs. That evaluation shall use recommendations contained in the report to the 71st Legislature required by Chapter 717, Acts of the 70th Legislature, Regular Session, 1987. For the purpose of providing cost-effective care for children during the full workday with developmentally appropriate curriculum, the commissioners shall investigate the use of existing child care program sites as prekindergarten sites. Following the evaluation required by this section, the commissioners, in cooperation with school districts and other program administrators, shall integrate programs, staff, and program sites for prekindergarten, child care, and federal Head Start programs to the greatest extent possible. **(TEC §29.154)**

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**

§29.1532, (a)

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(a) requires a school district to offer a prekindergarten program if the district identifies 15 or more eligible children, including the newly eligible military students, who are at least four years of age.

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

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

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.

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.

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 School Readiness Integration 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 prek age children on a zip code or census tract basis (eligibility in this case includes eligibility for prek, Head Start, and Child Care). c) Survey total classroom space available for prek 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 options, 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.