

The NC Pre-Kindergarten Program (NC Pre-K) Frequently Asked Questions Updated on August 10, 2011



1. When will the NC Pre-K Program Requirements be available?

The NC Pre-K Program Requirements document for the 2011/2012 school year is being finalized and will be available very soon.

2. How will Judge Manning's ruling affect NC Pre-K?

As you know, on July 18, 2011, Superior Court Judge Howard Manning issued a major ruling related to the legislative changes to NC Pre-K. In this ruling, Judge Manning struck down on constitutional grounds certain provisions contained in the budget bill relating to the rights of at-risk children to attend NC Pre-K. The ruling can be found online at:

http://www.sgrtoday.com/files/Documents/2011/071811_Manning_order.pdf

Many of you have expressed a desire to know how Judge Manning's ruling changes the enrollment process that you have begun for NC Pre-K families. His Order does the following:

- Prohibits the state from denying any eligible at-risk four-year old admission to NC Pre-K and directs the state to provide the quality services of the NC Pre-K to any eligible at-risk four year old that applies.
- Forbids the state from implementing or enforcing the provision of the budget bill contained in section 10.7(f) purporting to limit, restrict, bar or otherwise interfere, in any manner, with the admission of all eligible at-risk four year olds that apply to the NC Pre-K.
- Prevents the state from implementing, applying or enforcing any other "artificial" rule, barrier, or regulation to deny any eligible at-risk four year olds admission to the NC Pre-K.
- Prohibits the state from imposing a co-pay requirement that has the effect of preventing any eligible at-risk 4-year old from taking advantage of the NC Pre-K. (Notably, Section 10.7(h) of the budget bill also provides that eligible at-risk children and children of military personnel are exempt from the co-payment requirement.)

3. Who is eligible for NC Pre-K?

A child is eligible for NC Pre-K if the child meets one of the criteria below:

- Is from a family whose gross income is at or below 75% of the State Median Income level;
- Has an identified disability as indicated by the child having a current Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- Has Limited English Proficiency (LEP) as indicated by the family and/or child speaking limited or no English in the home;
- Has a developmental or educational need as indicated by the child's performance results on an approved developmental screening;
- Has a chronic health condition as indicated by a health care provider diagnosis;

- Has at least one parent or legal guardian as an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States or the North Carolina National Guard or other state military force, or a Reserve Unit of the armed forces who is ordered to active duty by the proper authority within the last 18 months, or expected to be ordered within the next 18 months. A child whose parent or legal guardian has been seriously injured or killed while on active duty is also eligible.

4. How is “at-risk” defined?

A child is “at-risk” if the child meets one of the criteria below:

- Is from a family whose gross income is at or below 75% of the State Median Income level;
- Has an identified disability as indicated by the child having a current Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Has been determined “at-risk” by DCDEE based upon documentation that the child’s eligibility criteria and other factors constitute a significant and substantial risk that the child would be unable to avail himself/herself of the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.

5. What is the parent fee structure?

No parent fee shall be imposed for parents of “at-risk” children enrolled in the NC Pre-K program.

No parent fee shall be imposed for children who have at least one parent or legal guardian as an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States or the North Carolina National Guard or other state military force, or a Reserve Unit of the armed forces who is ordered to active duty by the proper authority within the last 18 months, or expected to be ordered within the next 18 months. No parent fee shall be imposed for children whose parent or legal guardian has been seriously injured or killed while on active duty.

A parent fee may be charged for other children eligible for NC Pre-K. However, a Contract Administrator may waive a fee if the collection of a fee has the effect of diminishing the access of at-risk children to the NC Pre-K program.

6. How will DCDEE serve all eligible children in NC Pre-K if the capacity for high quality classrooms is not yet in place at the local level?

DCDEE is working on a transition plan to increase the capacity of high quality pre-kindergarten spaces across the state to meet the needs of all eligible 4-year olds. *However, priority must be given to ensuring access to NC Pre-K for all at-risk children.*

NC Pre-K Contract Administrators are directed to first serve the children according to the allocated funding amount as indicated in their contract. DCDEE will concurrently ask for information about the additional county/regional need for Pre-K spaces and the capacity that the county/region has to fulfill that need.

7. Will the county/region More at Four Committee structure continue to exist?

Yes. The county/region More at Four Committees will now be titled the “NC Pre-K Committees” and will retain the structure, purpose, intent, and goals as the former More at Four Committees. NC Pre-K Committees will be expected to determine rates for the NC Pre-K slots in the county/region. DCDEE

expects that NC Pre-K Committees will consider the following when determining rates paid to NC Pre-K sites:

- Differentiated rates should be paid based on:
 - NC Pre-K settings available & the given resources needed to support a quality program in that setting (ie: child care center, public school classrooms, Head Start centers, etc.).
**Please note that that the goal of DCDEE is to offer families a diverse delivery system for NC Pre-K that will include child care programs, public school programs, Head Start, etc.
 - Teacher education level
 - Length of NC Pre-K day (legislation allows for the NC Pre-K day to be between 6 ½ - 10 hours long)

8. Will parents have to apply for NC Pre-K services through the child care subsidy system?

No. Parents will use the same eligibility determination system that has been used in the past through the More at Four Program.

9. How will eligibility be verified?

Each local NC Pre-K contractor will determine eligibility for the program, using the system outlined in the 2010/2011 More at Four Program Standards as a way to prioritize children when capacity for 4-year old high quality classrooms is limited at the county level. Verification of parent income is required. For the 2011/2012 school year, DCDEE will accept methods of income verification used in prior years through the More at Four Program, except in cases in which programs simply allowed a parent to sign a statement regarding their own income. If the NC Pre-K Contract Administrator has NOT yet verified income for 2011/2012, then income verification must take place using one of the following documents:

- Tax records
- Pay stubs
- Award letters from the Social Security Administration
- Award letters from the Employment Security Commission
- Employer statements
- Business records for self-employed individuals
- Signed statements when an individual claims to have no verifiable countable income

10. Do both parents have to be working or in school?

No.

11. What is the administrative allowance for NC Pre-K Contract Administrators?

DCDEE has an administrative cost cap of 4% of the total NC Pre-K county allocation (or a \$20,000 administrative allowance, whichever is greater). The 4% is based on the DCDEE allocation amount, not expenditures, so the NC Pre-K Contract Administrator can budget for the full administrative amount.

Administration funding can be used to support costs at the Contract Administrator level. This may include: staff salaries, benefits, staff travel, training, computers, equipment and/or supplies and other administrative costs at the Contract Administrator level.

The remaining portion of the funds *must* be allocated to the individual NC Pre-K sites for direct services for prekindergarten children. Sites can choose to use this funding for items such as: salary/benefits for teaching staff, equipment, supplies, curriculum and related materials, developmental screening tools and assessment efforts, staff to conduct developmental screenings, staff training, etc.

12. Will programs be required to participate in the Subsidized Early Education for Kids (SEEK) system?

Budget provisions stated that the prekindergarten program would be required to participate in the SEEK attendance reporting and accounting system. DCDEE will work with local contractors to achieve this goal, but this will not be in place during the 2011/2012 school year.

13. Will public school classrooms be required to maintain licensure through DCDEE?

Pursuant to the 2011 budget bill, public school classrooms will have a one-year transition period to become licensed through DCDEE and may continue to operate NC Pre-K classrooms for the 2011-2012 school year. The Department shall create a transition plan to assist public schools in obtaining licensure through DCDEE. If meeting licensure standards for a public school constitutes a significant barrier to access to NC Pre-K for at-risk students, the public school may request a waiver of the licensure requirement from DCDEE.

14. Who will monitor NC Pre-K?

NC Pre-K classrooms will be monitored at the local/regional level by Contract Administrators, as well as by DCDEE staff. This is further defined in the NC Pre-K Program Requirements.

15. Can Head Start or Title I partner with NC Pre-K?

Yes.

16. What is the continued relevance of the designation of 80% vs. 20% for “slots” as it relates to “at risk” factors and income eligibility?

The 80% / 20% division is no longer relevant. All at-risk 4-year-olds must be served by NC Pre-K, and priority must be given to ensuring access to NC Pre-K for all eligible at-risk children.

17. Will the same More at Four teacher education standards apply for NC Pre-K teachers?

Yes. As indicated in the current More at Four Program Requirements: All teachers will hold, or be working toward a North Carolina (NC) Birth-through- Kindergarten (B-K) Standard Professional II or Preschool Add-on licensure. Effective for the 2011-2012 school year, all lead teachers will hold a minimum of a BA/BS degree in early childhood, child development, or a related field and be working toward a B-K license. On a case by case basis, in order to expand capacity, exceptions can be submitted to DCDEE for consideration if qualified teachers are not available.

18. How will teachers be supported through NC Pre-K?

The legislation allowed for funding to be used for teacher support. At the state level, funding will be used to support programs such as T.E.A.C.H., WAGES, T.E.A.C.H. Health Insurance, classroom

assessments, data collection tools and other initiatives. At the local level, the NC Pre-K Committee will need to determine how administrative funds may be used for other teacher support initiatives. Compensation requirements for NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants (including all salary, wages, health and/or retirement benefits) is further defined in the NC Pre-K Program Requirements.

19. Will classrooms in their 4th year of participation be allowed to continue if their teachers have not completed the course requirements for a BA/BS degree but have been diligently taking the required coursework as stated in the previous More at Four guidelines?

The exceptions for teachers that do not yet have a BA/BS degree will be made on a case-by-case basis. This is further defined in the NC Pre-K Program Requirements.

20. Will any exceptions be allowed for the B-K licensure requirement for a teacher who is in the final stages of obtaining the B-K license?

Yes. There will be an allowance for teachers with a BA/BS to continue working toward their B-K license. This is further defined in the NC Pre-K Program Requirements.

21. Can a Contract Administrator designate new NC Pre-K classrooms if they meet the high quality standards of NC Pre-K?

Yes. DCDEE encourages all counties to consider ways to expand pre-kindergarten in order to abide by Judge Manning's ruling and achieve the ground-breaking accomplishment of serving all at-risk 4-year olds in our state. NC Pre-K Contract Administrators are encouraged to work with their local DCDEE licensing consultant to help identify high quality child care sites that meet the requirements of the NC Pre-K program.