

KENTUCKY SCHOOL UPDATES

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

THE BASICS OF THE LAW

- Kentucky school districts are required to offer developmentally-appropriate **early childhood programs** for four-year-old children at risk of educational failure and three- and four-year-old children with disabilities. State funds are used to support these **Kentucky Preschool Programs**.
- To participate as a four-year-old at-risk student, a child must be eligible for the federal free lunch program or live in a family whose income is at 150 percent of the poverty level or less. Any child who is three or four years old, who has a disability, may participate regardless of family income. Based on local policy, other children may enroll if space is available.
- School districts must work with other preschool programs, such as Head Start, to avoid duplication and serve as many four-year-old children as possible.
- **KIDS NOW, a comprehensive early childhood initiative** passed by the General Assembly in 2000, focuses on maternal and child health, supporting families, and enhancing early care and education programs. The Division of **Early Childhood Development**, in the Department of Education, directs implementation of KIDS Now, focusing on the needs of Kentucky's youngest children from birth through the early elementary years.
- **Vision exams** are required for three- to six-year-old children before they enroll for the first time in school, public preschool, or Head Start. This is in addition to required immunizations and health, growth and hearing screenings.
- Kentucky has established **early childhood standards** that identify the critical knowledge and skills learned in the early years. They describe the range that can be observed in young children, with and without disabilities, from birth to five years of age. The standards are designed as a framework to assist parents, early care and education professionals, administrators, and others in understanding what children know and are able to do. *Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards* can be found on the Kentucky Department of Education Web site at <http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Default.htm> (search for Early Childhood Standards).
- Preschool teachers must be certified with a teacher's certificate in Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (IECE) or have a letter of exemption to be newly hired to teach in state-funded preschool programs. They must be paid on the certified salary scale. Classified teachers may remain in their current position but they may not be hired in another district without holding the IECE certification (effective 2004).
- Kentucky has developed a child care quality rating system called STARS for KIDS NOW that can be used by child care providers to improve and demonstrate the quality of their programs and by parents as they select programs for their children. A rating of one to four stars indicates program quality with four as the highest level. The program is optional.

OTHER PROGRAMS

- **Head Start** is a program funded by the federal government that provides comprehensive child development services (preschool education, health services, health, dental and mental health screening and follow up, parent involvement training, and social services) for three- and four-year-old children who come from families whose incomes meet federal guidelines for poverty. Children with disabilities may also be eligible. Thirty-two Head Start programs serve 14,342 three- and four-year-old children in all 120 counties in Kentucky.
- **Early Head Start** programs, begun in 1995, provide services to infants and toddlers as well as expectant mothers. There are twelve programs in Kentucky and it is hoped that this program will expand to serve more areas of the state in the near future.
- **Even Start** is a federally funded program that focuses on literacy services for families at risk and children ages birth through seven whose parents are eligible for adult education. There are 33 counties in Kentucky offering adult education, parent education and support, and early child development. Grants for the program come through the Department of Education. Call (502) 564-7056 for more information.
- **Early Reading First** is a federal grant program focused on preparing preschool children for reading and literacy. Local school districts can apply for these grants in collaboration with other agencies in their communities. Two Kentucky counties have been awarded Early Reading First grants.
- State-funded **Family Literacy Programs** are available in all 120 counties and focus on children ages birth through high school and their families. The statewide program is funded with state dollars through the Department for Adult Education and Literacy. For more information, call (502) 564-5114.
- The **Kentucky Institute for Family Literacy (KIFL)** was established to improve and expand family literacy services in Kentucky. It is the result of an effort among several agencies including the National Center for Family Literacy, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Workforce Development, Governor's Office, and the Kentucky Department of Education using federal, state, and local funds. The Institute is managed by the National Center for Family Literacy in Louisville. It has a resource center and provides professional development and training to local family literacy programs and partners. Family literacy services are available in every county either through adult education or Even Start programs. For more information call (502) 584-1133 x184 or visit <http://www.famlit.org/kifl/>.
- **First Steps: Kentucky's Early Intervention System**, funded through state and federal dollars, serves children ages birth to three whose development in communication, movement, learning, social growth, emotional growth, and adaptability is delayed. For more information call (800) 442-0087.
- **The Child Care Resource and Referral Network** is a group of 14 regional agencies that help parents find local child care services, connects eligible families to the child care subsidy program, and provides training for early care and education professionals. For the agency closest

to you, contact the Kentucky partnership for Early Childhood Services at (800) 956-8950 or www.kentuckypartnership.org/ccrr/.

WHAT'S NEW?





- ➔ The 2006 General Assembly provided additional funding for Kentucky preschool programs for the first time in many years. There will be \$23.5 million more in 2006-07 and 2007-08 for a total of \$75.1 million each year to help cover rising costs and to serve children whose family income is at or below 150 percent of the poverty level, up from 130 percent in previous years. This means another 750-1,000 children will be eligible and school districts will have more funding to cover their costs.
- ➔ The Kentucky Department of Education, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, and Kentucky's many early childhood partners have created Building a Strong Foundation for School Success Series, for teachers, administrators and parents that includes the following items:
 - ✓ **Parent Guides for Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards (Birth to Three and Fours)** have been published and distributed to providers across the state who work with families with children birth through age four.
 - ✓ A **Kentucky Early Childhood Continuous Assessment Guide** has been developed to be used by early childhood providers to measure to a child's progress on the Early Childhood Standards.
 - ✓ A **Quality Self-Study** is available for early childhood program staff to help them evaluate their own program and classrooms.
 - ✓ They are available to download at www.kidsnow.ky.gov. Questions about the series can be addressed to Division of Early Childhood Development at 502-564-8341.
- ➔ **Starting Strong** is a program that the Prichard Committee has adapted from its Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership for parents of preschool children. The program brings parents and early education and care teachers and administrators together for three days of training to build partnerships to improve outcomes for young children. For more information call 800-928-2111 ext. 231.

RESULTS

- All of Kentucky's 175 school districts provide preschool services. Many districts offer preschool programs in conjunction with Head Start and other programs listed above.
- In 2004-05, 36,526 children were served by Kentucky's preschool program and Head Start. This number includes 13,429 three- and four-year-old children with a diagnosed disability or delay and 23,097 four-year-old children who were eligible based on income. Many districts enroll children whose family income does not meet the guidelines but is insufficient to afford tuition. Other families pay tuition for their children to attend.

- A multi-year research study on the state's preschool program, begun in 1991 by the University of Kentucky, demonstrated that the program is reducing the achievement gap between at-risk children and their classmates. The Kentucky Preschool Program produces similar positive outcomes for all groups of children regardless of their race or gender. Findings indicate that the Kentucky Preschool Program has a positive effect on children's development during preschool, their readiness for kindergarten, and their social and academic progress through the grade five. Middle school surveys indicate that children who attend the preschool program continue to do as well and in some cases better than a random group of their peers. A follow up study tracking assessment scores, attendance and other measures is underway with results expected in the summer of 2007.
- State funding has not kept up with preschool enrollment and needs until 2006-07. The state per child allocation has decreased from \$2,285 in 1992-92 to \$2,241 in 2003-04 but was increased to \$3,168 for 2006-07.
- As of December 2005, 500 early care centers and 140 families who provided child care in their homes, were participating in the voluntary STARS for KIDS NOW program. These providers are working to improve the quality of their programs.
- Since the Folic Acid program was implemented as part of KIDS NOW, the number of babies born with neural tube defects like spina bifida, has been decreased by 34 percent. Folic Acid is a dietary supplement (like a vitamin) that is needed for a baby's healthy development very early in pregnancy. This program has worked to inform young women of child-bearing age about the need to take folic acid before and during pregnancy and provides folic acid in a multi-vitamin to women of child-bearing age.

WHAT TO EXPECT

-  Students identified as at-risk who attend preschool programs should do as well as other children in student performance measures.
-  Any young child with disabilities or whose development is delayed should be eligible for one of the many programs available.
-  Parent involvement should be an important part of early childhood programs.
-  Research on brain development in the first years of a child's life is being widely shared in an effort to encourage more parents to learn how to help their child's development.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- ★ **Learn more** about early childhood development by getting the *Kentucky Early Childhood Standards, the Parent Guide to the Kentucky Early Childhood Standards* and the “Building a Strong Foundation for School Success Series” at www.kidsnow.ky.gov or call 502-564-8341.
- ★ **Promote** the importance of early childhood programs by getting a copy of the six-part series, *Early Childhood*, prepared by the Partnership for Kentucky Schools for the *Lexington Herald-Leader*. Also ask for the series, *Successful Learning* and *Healthy Babies*. Share them with your local paper or other civic newsletters. See below for contact information.
- ★ **Call** the Prichard Committee and ask about **Starting Strong** to see if there is a program that you and your child’s early care teachers could attend.
- ★ If you have a child attending an early child education program in Kentucky, **ask** if they participate in the STARS for KIDS NOW program. If they are not, suggest that they explore the possibility with the child care facility.
- ★ If you have a child or know of children who might be eligible for these programs, call your **local board of education** office or the offices listed below for more information.
- ★ If you are concerned that a child ages birth to three years is not developing normally, **make a referral** to First Steps by calling the statewide toll free number, 1-800-442-0087.
- ★ **Visit** preschool, Head Start, Early Head Start, Even Start, or First Steps for Family Independence programs in your community.
- ★ If teachers in your program are conducting home visits to their students, **ask** how these visits help prepare children for school.
- ★ If your school has a PTA/PTO, **find out** what it can do to support preschool programs and the families of children who will be entering your primary school. Suggest a mentoring or partnering program for preschool parents or a program that provides preschool children with materials in the summer to prepare them for learning.
- ★ **Invite a speaker to your school or civic club.** Speakers are available to talk about brain research and the importance of quality child care and schooling in infancy and early childhood. Contact the Department of Education’s Early Childhood Branch for information at (502) 564-7056.
- ★ **Volunteer** to help a teacher in a preschool program. Offer to read to children.
- ★ **Attend** local school board meetings. Ask school board members how the programs are working in your district and whether every eligible child is being served.
- ★ **Write** or call your elected officials with specific examples of successes and challenges. See chapter on parent involvement for information on contacting state legislators.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

- **Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies**, Kentucky Partnership for Early Childhood Services, 800-956-8950 or www.kentuckypartnership.org/ccrr/
- **Department for Adult Education and Literacy**, (502) 564-5114.
- **First Steps**, (502) 564-2154 or visit the Web site at <http://chs.ky.gov/publichealth> (scroll down to First Steps)
- **Head Start Collaboration Office**, (502) 564-8341.
- **Kentucky Department of Education:**
 - **Early Childhood Branch/Preschool**, (502) 564-7056 or visit the Web site at <http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Default.htm> and search for preschool.
 - **Early Child Development (KIDS NOW)**, (502) 564-8341.
 - **Even Start/Family Literacy**, Early Childhood Branch, (502) 564-7056.
- **Kentucky Institute for Family Literacy**, (502) 584-1133 x184.
- **National Center for Family Literacy**, (502) 584-1133.
- **Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence**, P.O. Box 1658, Lexington, KY 40588-1658; (859) 233-9849 or (800) 928-2111; e-mail: admin@prichardcommittee.org or visit the Web site at <http://www.prichardcommittee.org/>.

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