

What Does Act 62 on Prekindergarten Education Mean for Early Care and Education Providers?

This past spring, the Vermont State Legislature passed a law that recognizes the importance of prekindergarten education for children ages 3 to 5 and defines the state's commitment to ensuring young children are provided "with opportunities to reach their full growth and developmental potential." Governor Douglas signed this law which is now known as "Act 62." The Act recognizes that "a child's growth and development occur best in integrated environments" and "are best provided in locations that are convenient to families and minimize transitions for children." It further acknowledges that "the provision of early care and prekindergarten education through high quality private providers is one of the most crucial elements supporting the strengths and stability of the system serving young children."

Important Information for You to Know about Act 62:

- School districts can use public education funding for prekindergarten education (pre-K), but it is **not mandatory**. The decision of whether to offer pre-K is decided by the school board.
- It is important to know that children who are 3 to 5 years old are **not required** to participate in pre-K; that is a decision made by their family.
- Before school districts can start or expand prekindergarten programs, there must be a community planning process that includes parents, private providers, and the community.
- The Building Bright Futures (BBF) Council in your community can act as a resource during the community planning process. If you are not already involved with your BBF Council, this would be a good time to learn more about the Council by calling or e-mailing your BBF Director. (To locate the BBF director in your area, go to the BBF website listed below.)
- School districts must partner with existing qualified providers to the extent that they have the capacity to meet the district's early education needs effectively and efficiently before starting or expanding pre-k services. This includes licensed centers as well as registered family child care homes.
- The law establishes quality standards that all programs must meet in order to access the education funds associated with the pre-K program. These standards include:
 - Be licensed by the Child Development Division and maintain good regulatory standing;
 - Obtain NAEYC accreditation or a 4 or 5 STAR rating in Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System; OR obtain a 3 STAR rating with an approved plan for moving to 4 or more STARS within 3 years;
 - Employ or contract with a licensed early childhood or early childhood special educator. In the case of registered child care homes, regular onsite supervision by a licensed teacher can be used in lieu of the provider possessing the teaching license; and
 - Use curricula that are aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards and assess children's progress.
- Parents can request that a district enter into a contract with a qualified child care center or family child care home either in or outside of the district. Qualified providers may also request that the school district enter into a contract with them so that they can serve the district's pre-K children. When the request is made, the school district is required to consider it and respond.

- This law requires all pre-K programs to provide opportunities for parent participation.
- The Department of Education (DOE) and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) will jointly write rules that provide more specific guidance on how pre-K will be implemented. These draft rules will be open for public comment from January 21 through February 29, 2008.
- The reporting requirements for pre-K programs have been increased, both in terms of tracking children's progress and in terms of expenditures.
- Act 62 became law this past July. The provisions include limits on the number of pre-K children that can be counted in the district's Average Daily Membership (ADM). The draft rules DOE and DCF are working on will become effective in July 2008.
- DOE and DCF staff will provide technical assistance to assist providers in understanding the requirements of pre-K education.

What You Should Do Now:

- Review Act 62 and the proposed rules when they become available for public comment starting on January 21, 2008. The draft rules will be posted on the DOE website (www.education.state.vt.us). Two public hearings also are scheduled: one will be in Montpelier on February 11th and the other will be in Rutland on February 13th. All comments must be made by February 29 to be considered. This is an opportunity to have your voice heard!
- Consider becoming nationally accredited or participating in the STARS program if you do not already meet the quality standards.
- Participate in discussions with your local school boards, BBF Council, and the families you are serving on what Act 62 may mean for your community.

For Additional Information on the following topics, go to the link that appears below the topic:

Act 62

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2008/acts/ACT062.htm>

Rules and Rule-Making Process

http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdffdoc/board/packet_07_1016/item_1.pdf

NAEYC Program Accreditation

<http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation>

STARS

<http://www.starsstepahead.org>

Dept. for Children and Families CDD Licensing

<http://www.dcf.state.vt.us/CDD/licensing/general.html>

Dept. of Education Educator Licensing

<http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/maincert.html>

Vermont Early Learning Standards

http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdffdoc/pgm_earlyed/pubs/vels_03.pdf

Building Bright Futures

www.buildingbrightfutures.org