



# TITLE I PRE-K CLASSROOMS — A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO STARTING A PRE-K CLASSROOM

This document is an executive summary that will provide the reader with a five-step guide to starting a Title I Pre-K classroom in a school district. Please note that all components of the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds must be followed.

## **Overview of the Five-Step Process**

**Step one** begins with conducting a needs assessment. **Step two** provides an overview of the different types and combination of types of Pre-K classrooms. Decisions about the type of classroom to implement cannot be made without considering funding and classroom space options. **Step three** provides information regarding the qualifications and training of the needed classroom personnel and the maximum student-teacher ratios. **Step four** details essential high quality early childhood education components that must be considered and included in the implementation of a Title I Pre-K classroom. **Step five** requires schools to participate in ongoing monitoring of their Pre-K classrooms. Classrooms that follow this guide will meet the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds and the National Institute for Early Education Research's ten benchmarks of quality. The information in this guide is pending the final approval of the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds (tentatively June 2015).

### **Step One: Conduct a needs assessment.**

The needs assessment may include the following:

- a review of existing kindergarten data
- a survey of the access to high quality Pre-K in the district and/or community
- parent input
- school board input

### **Step Two: Choose the type of Pre-K classroom(s) to implement based on collaboration between the school district and other agencies within the community, the available amount of funding, and the available classroom space.**

#### **Types of Classrooms**

1. **Title I Pre-K Classroom** – all funds utilized to support this classroom are Title I dollars. Title I Pre-K classrooms must follow the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds and Title I, Part A – Basic Guidelines. These classrooms are typically located on campus at one or more elementary schools in a given district.
2. **Blended Pre-K Classroom** – funds utilized to support this classroom are Title I dollars and Head Start funds. Blended classrooms must follow the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds, the Head Start Performance Standards, and Title I, Part A – Basic Guidelines. These classrooms are located either on

campus at one or more elementary schools in a given district or at a local Head Start agency.

3. **Local District Pre-K Classroom** – funds utilized to support this classroom are district dollars. Sometimes Title I funds are also utilized to help support these classrooms. Local District Pre-K classrooms must follow the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds and Title I, Part A – Basic Guidelines if Title I funds are used to help support the classrooms. These classrooms are typically located on the campus at one or more elementary schools in a given district.
4. **Tuition-Based Pre-K Classroom** – funds utilized to support this classroom are tuition paid by parents of the children enrolled in the classroom. Tuition-Based Pre-K classrooms must follow the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds. These classrooms are typically located on campus at one or more elementary schools in a given district.
5. **Externally-Funded Pre-K Classroom** – funds utilized to support this classroom are partially provided from sources outside of the school district and exclude Head Start funds. Examples of Externally-Funded Pre-K classrooms are those that are partially funded through grants, private donations, and non-profit organizations. The classroom space may be donated through such means as a local Housing Authority or funds may be provided directly to the school district. Externally-Funded Pre-K Classrooms must follow the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds. These classrooms can be located on campus at one or more elementary schools in a given district or in a donated space (e.g., apartment complex). Consideration must be given to donated spaces regarding the upkeep of the facility and children’s safety. Donated spaces must also follow the physical structure components in the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds.

### Funding

Federal regulations allow school districts to operate a preschool program funded by Title I as long as the following criteria are met:

- a. Funds are used in a supplemental manner to state law and there is no state law requiring Pre-K services.
- b. Where a state law is applicable, Title I, Part A funds are used to implement Pre-K programs to the extent federal dollars supplement the state requirements.
- c. Schools receiving Title I, Part A funds remain capable of operating a viable schoolwide program including those necessary funds to provide services required by law under ESEA section 1114(a)(2)(B) (schoolwide model) for students in K-12.
- d. In instances of schools operating a state approved early learning collaborative, federal funds may be used to supplement, as well as, match state funding to advance early childhood programs.

The following link provides additional federal guidance for Title I funded Pre-K classrooms.

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/preschoolguidance2012.pdf>

A school district should anticipate an initial cost of approximately \$12,000 to equip a Pre-K classroom in the district. This figure does not include payment of personnel or the purchase of a curriculum but does include furniture and materials. Following is a generic list of basic furniture and materials for a classroom of 20 children to explore and engage in the following learning centers: reading, writing, home living, dramatic play, math, science, art, sensory, and blocks.

- Furniture
  - 2 rectangle tables
  - 1 U-shaped table
  - 20 chairs
  - 20 cubbies/backpack hangers
  - 4 shelving units
  - 1 writing/technology table
  - 1 bookstand
  - 1 dress up rack with mirror
  - 1 kitchen set (stove, refrigerator, sink)
  - Baby bed
  - Sand/water table
  - 1 large rug
  - 2 small rugs
  
- Examples of Materials
  - Books (thematic and seasonal for whole year)
  - Art supplies and materials
  - Writing materials
  - Blocks
  - Construction items
  - Lincoln Logs
  - Cars
  - Counting Bears
  - Magnifying glasses
  - Puzzles
  - Dress up clothes
  - Hats
  - Plastic food
  - Kitchen items
  - Broom and mop (kid-sized)
  - Babies with clothing and blankets

- Spanish teaching kit

### Enrollment

Children who are enrolled in a Title I funded Pre-K classroom must demonstrate need. Examples of need include children who are homeless, at-risk academically, at-risk developmentally, English language learners, receiving special education services, and have previously participated in Head Start. The enrollment selection process must include multiple, educationally-based, criteria and must not be based solely on one type of need. Though family income can be considered as one type of need, family income alone should not be the deciding factor for acceptance into the program. Some school districts assign points for each area of need a child has and then accepts the children with the most points into their Title I Pre-K programs.

### Classroom Space

Pre-K classrooms must be a minimum of 600 square feet and meet other logistical requirements as detailed in the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds. The maximum number of children enrolled in each classroom may not exceed 20, regardless of the square footage.

### **Step Three: Staff the classroom(s) with qualified personnel.**

#### Teacher and Assistant Teacher Qualifications

The teacher and assistant teacher qualifications are pending final approval of the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds (tentatively June 2015).

1. By fall 2018, early childhood educators of four-year-old children must meet all three of the following requirements:
  - a. Possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree,
  - b. Have at least 12 hours of early childhood related coursework,
  - c. Hold one of the following Mississippi teaching licenses, and
    - i. Pre-K - K (153)
    - ii. Elementary Education K - 3 (116)
    - iii. Elementary Education K - 4 (152)
    - iv. Elementary Education K - 6 (120) with a supplemental Nursery - Grade 1 (150) endorsement.
  - d. Receive a corresponding passing score of 229 on The Foundations of Reading Praxis Test.
2. By fall 2018, an assistant teacher must meet one of the two following requirements:
  - a. Possess an associate's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field, or
  - b. Possess an associate's degree in any field and a Child Development Associate credential, a Montessori certification, or an equivalent certification.

## Teacher and Assistant Teacher Professional Development

Both teachers and assistant teachers must participate in at least 15 clock hours of training related to early childhood each year. This training can be delivered in a combination of ways, including from the school/district, the Mississippi Department of Education, or other agencies or organizations that provide training related to early childhood.

## Student-Teacher Ratio

The maximum ratio is one adult for every 10 students, not to exceed 20 students. At least one adult who meets the teacher qualifications must be included in this ratio. Occasional visitors and parents are not counted as adults regarding student-teacher ratios.

## **Step Four: Include high-quality early childhood education components in the Pre-K classrooms.**

### Pre-K Standards

The *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children* (2013) must be utilized in the classroom. These standards are aligned to the Kindergarten Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards. These standards may be found at <https://districtaccess.mde.k12.ms.us/curriculumandInstruction/EarlyChildhood/4-year-old-standards.pdf>.

### Curriculum

Curricula aligned to the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children* should be utilized in the classroom. Most vendors already have this alignment developed, and it can be found on the company's website or through contacting them directly. Through the textbook adoption procedures, the Mississippi Department of Education has an approved list of curricula that are aligned to the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classroom Serving Four-Year-Old Children*. This list can be viewed at the following link: <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/curriculum-and-instructions-library/2014-pre-k-adoption.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

### Assessment

Assessments aligned to all eight areas of the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children* should be utilized in the classroom. All four-year-old children in school districts must take the required state Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in both the Fall and Spring of each year. The MDE has purchased this assessment for each four-year-old child in each school district. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is aligned to two of the eight areas in the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children*. Information regarding the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment can be found at the following link: <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/OSA/KRA>. Each school district can decide on

additional developmentally appropriate assessments to conduct that are aligned with the other six areas, until such time as that the MDE requires additional measures.

### Screening, Referrals, and Support Services

Screenings and referrals for vision and hearing are required. By fall 2018, screenings and referrals for health (e.g., EPSDT) will also be required. Health screenings can be completed on the school's campus or through a partnership with another community agency (e.g., Head Start, local health department, etc.). At least one additional support service (e.g., mental health, dental screenings, parental and family support, etc.) should be provided to families. As part of assessment, teachers can administer observational checklists which can also serve as screening tools.

### Provision of Meals

Schools must offer daily breakfast and lunch for Pre-K students. Students may pay for these meals or may qualify for free or reduced meals.

### Instructional Minutes

The school day must include at least 330 instructional minutes for full-day programs and at least 165 instructional minutes for half-day programs.

### Transportation

Transportation is optional. Schools must follow the [National Highway Transportation Safety Association \(NHTSA\) Guidelines](#). These guidelines recommend placing four-year-old students in the first few rows of a school bus as well as utilizing properly secured Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS). In addition, schools must follow the caregiver ratio below:

- When transporting five to sixteen four-year-olds on a bus, one caregiver in addition to the driver should be on the bus.
- When transporting seventeen to thirty-two four-year-olds on a bus, two caregivers in addition to the driver should be on the bus.
- Caregivers should be eighteen years of age or older and an agency employee.

### **Step Five: Participate in on-going classroom monitoring.**

School districts must develop an internal procedure for monitoring their Pre-K programs. In addition, early childhood staff members from the Mississippi Department of Education will conduct on-site monitoring to determine the district's adherence to program standards (i.e., Public Standard 17.2).

For a recent report on Title I Pre-K classrooms in Mississippi, view the publication by Mississippi First at the following link. [http://1iq0332x28t34od07uajkv11.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/PreKReportBook\\_final3192015.pdf](http://1iq0332x28t34od07uajkv11.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/PreKReportBook_final3192015.pdf)

## Resources

1. The Mississippi Department of Education Early Childhood Webpage - <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ESE/EC>
2. The Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children (2014) - <https://districtaccess.mde.k12.ms.us/curriculumandInstruction/EarlyChildhood/4-year-old-standards.pdf>
3. Mississippi Pre-K Approved Curricula - <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/curriculum-and-instructions-library/2014-pre-k-adoption.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
4. Public Standard 17.2 (Pre-Kindergarten) - <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ACCRED/AAS>
5. The Mississippi Department of Education Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Webpage - <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/OSA/KRA>
6. The United State Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance on Serving Children Through Title I - <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/preschoolguidance2012.pdf>
7. Mississippi First - <http://www.mississippifirst.org/education-policy/pre-kindergarten/>
8. National Highway Transportation Safety Association (NHTSA) Guidelines - <http://www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Press+Releases/U.S.+DOT+Releases+Guidelines+to+Minimize+In-Vehicle+Distractions>
9. Head Start National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching>