

on 02/17/2025 02:48pm MN updated/proposed the following change to this statues in HF 803. The line that is stricken now makes the following policy changes void.

Subd. 4. Eligibility. (a) An eligible child means a child who:

(1) is four years of age as of September 1 in the calendar year in which the school year commences; and

(2) meets at least one of the following criteria:

(i) qualifies for free or reduced-priced meals;

(ii) qualifies for the rate at application specified in section [142E.10, subdivision 1](#), paragraph (a), clause (2), in the current calendar year;

(iii) is an English language learner as defined by section [124D.59, subdivision 2](#);

(iv) is American Indian;

(v) has experienced homelessness in the last 24 months, as defined under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, United States Code, title 42, section 1143a;

(vi) was identified as having a potential risk factor that may influence learning through health and developmental screening under sections [142D.09](#) to [142D.093](#);

(vii) is in foster care; is in kinship care, including children receiving Northstar kinship care assistance under sections [142A.60](#) to [142A.612](#); or is in need of child protection services;

(viii) has a parent who is a migrant or seasonal agricultural laborer under section [181.85](#);

or

(ix) has a parent who is incarcerated; ~~or.~~

~~(x) is defined as at-risk by the school district.~~

COLOGNE ACADEMY

MANUAL OF SCHOOL POLICIES APPROVED BY THE BOARD

POLICY 604: VPK ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT

Purpose

This policy establishes updated criteria for entrance into the MN state funded Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program to ensure equitable access for eligible children while prioritizing students who may benefit most from early learning opportunities. Additionally, this policy defines Cologne Academy's at-risk criteria for eligibility into VPK. Those that do not meet the eligibility criteria will pay a fee.

Eligibility Criteria

All students enrolled in VPK must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Each eligible child must complete a [health and developmental screening](#) within 90 days of program enrollment.
- Each eligible child must [provide documentation of required immunizations](#) within 90 days of program enrollment.
- Is four years of age as of September 1 in the calendar year in which the school year begins and meet one of the following criteria:
 - Qualifies for free or reduced-price meals.
 - Qualifies using state general financial eligibility requirements listed in [Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 142E.10](#).
 - Is an English language learner.
 - Is an American Indian.
 - Has experienced [homelessness](#) in the last 24 months.
 - Is identified through [health and developmental screening](#) with a potential risk factor that may influence learning. Screening highlighted supports for Speech, Social Emotional, Cognitive or other factors
 - Is in foster care, kinship care, or is in need of child protection services.
 - Has a parent who is a migrant or seasonal agricultural laborer.
 - Has a parent who is incarcerated.
 - Is defined as at-risk by the school district*

*Children identified as “at-risk” by the school district are those who, based on research and assessment, face challenges in achieving early literacy milestones critical for long-term academic success. This designation is grounded in statewide data on literacy outcomes and supported by research highlighting the importance of early interventions.

- Changes in the home such as a recent move, parent job change, separation or divorce of guardians, bereavement
- Financial obligations due to an unexpected medical or financial event
- Inability to attend preschool for any reason without scholarship support
- Students who have not yet attended preschool based programming
- Attendance concerns in the past year or decreased participation in a class/childcare
- Mental illness support needed for any person in the household
- Traumatic experiences in the child’s history
- Concerns of academic performance for any student residing within the household
- A small number of social experiences, or poor peer relationships for the child.

Minnesota Literacy Challenges

In 2024, 49.9% of students in Minnesota were proficient in reading on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA):

Comparison to previous years: This is the same percentage as in 2023, and is well below the 59.2% of students who were proficient in reading in 2019.

Comparison to pre-pandemic: These scores are still significantly below pre-pandemic levels.

Comparison to other subjects: In 2024, 45.5% of students were proficient in math, and 39.6% were proficient in science.

Minnesota State Demographic	Proficiency in Reading based on demographic data	
American Indian	3.4%	29.5%
Asian	7.1%	43.6%
Black/African American	11.8%	28.8%
Hispanic/Latino	11.0%	29.1%
Native Hawaiian	<0.1%	29.7%
Pacific Islander	<0.1%	29.7%
Other Indigenous People	<0.1%	29.5%
White	61.4%	56%
Two or more races	5.1%	50.4%

Early Vocabulary and Literacy Development

Research emphasizes that early vocabulary growth is a key determinant of later reading proficiency. By age 3, children with limited exposure to rich language environments are significantly behind their peers in vocabulary and oral language skills, creating a persistent "achievement gap" (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Evidence Supporting Early Interventions

Early literacy programs focusing on phonemic awareness, oral language skills, and pre-reading strategies have been shown to significantly improve kindergarten readiness and future academic outcomes (Snow et al., 1998).

Criteria for "At-Risk" Designation

A child may be considered “at-risk” if they exhibit:

Delays in literacy or language development as identified through district-approved screenings. Limited access to literacy-enriching resources or experiences. Indicators suggesting a potential struggle with achieving grade-level reading proficiency by third grade. This is assessed by teacher assessments, including but not limited to observation, screening, diagnostic testing, and progress monitoring.

A child who falls below the target benchmark scores on the district's universal math and literacy screeners may be at risk for challenges in reading and math achievement. The outlined target scores for each subtest and composite score in math and reading are provided below:

Early Reading		Early Math	
Concepts of Print	8	Numerical ID	17
Onset Sounds	13	Match Quantity	9
Letter Names	21	Number Sequence	7
Letter Sounds	6	Composite	38
Composite	35		

What characteristics do "At Risk" Pre-K children display? They often (but not always) show traits such as:

- Limited oral language and listening skills or a tendency to avoid speaking; a history of ear infections
- Challenges with articulation, delayed or unclear speech, or struggles with learning sounds
- Problems with directionality (e.g., over/under concepts)

- Difficulties with motor skills, such as holding a pencil, writing, or performing activities like skipping
- Trouble recognizing rhyming words; emotional instability, and challenges with attention and following instructions
- A family history of dyslexia or other learning problems
- Difficulty learning letter names and colors (Grimes, 2019)

Program Commitment to At-Risk Students

To address the needs of at-risk children, the VPK program will:

Incorporate Research-Based Literacy Practices

Implement daily activities to strengthen oral language, vocabulary, and phonemic awareness.

Align instructional strategies with the Minnesota Early Learning Standards.

Engage Families in Literacy Development

Provide resources, workshops, and tools for families to support literacy at home.

Offer practical strategies to encourage language-rich interactions.

Use Data to Drive Instruction

Conduct regular assessments of language and literacy development to monitor progress and tailor interventions.

Program Requirements

1. **Attendance** Regular attendance is expected for all enrolled children. Families are encouraged to communicate any absences promptly.
2. **Health Requirements** Children must have up-to-date immunizations or a notarized exemption form on file or conscious exemption
3. **Parent/Guardian Engagement** Families are encouraged to participate in at least two parent-teacher conferences annually and attend parent workshops when possible.

Appeals Process

If a family disagrees with the determination of eligibility or placement, they may file a written appeal to the district's VPK coordinator within 10 business days of receiving the decision.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure compliance with Minnesota Department of Education guidelines and to reflect evolving community needs.

Contact Information:

For further information or assistance, please contact Dr. Lynn Peterson at lpeterson@cologneacademy.org