Tennessee's Early Childhood Education (ECE) Pilot Project, which began in 1998 with 30 classrooms, was a competitive grant program for public schools, institutions of higher education, Head Start agencies, private child care agencies, and public housing authorities to provide preschool education programs. In the 2005-2006 program year, Tennessee launched the Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) program adding 300 new classrooms to the existing ECE Pilot Project. While only public schools can compete for state-funded VPK grants, these schools may subcontract with private child care agencies, Head Start agencies, institutions of higher education, public housing authorities, and any three-star rated private or community-based child-serving agency. There were 934 VPK classrooms in operation as of the 2009-10 school year.

The VPK program was funded through general education revenue and lottery revenue, which enabled the program to expand in the past. However, in the 2009-2010 school year the program received only inflationary adjustments and no additional expansion funds. Starting in the 2009-2010 program year, all pre-K funding was required to be allocated to the local education authority. Whereas previously the Office of Early Learning (OEL) had contracted directly with various community-based organizations and Head Start, these programs now subcontract with the LEA in which the program resides.

There are three tiers of priority for enrollment. Top priority is given to 4-year-olds who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Pending availability of space, additional children who have an IEP, are in state custody, have a history of abuse or neglect, or are English Language Learners may enroll. Children who meet locally determined risk factors such as single-parent families, low parent education level, teen parents, or a parent on active military duty, may enroll only if spots are still available after children meeting the state-specified risk factors have enrolled. While the VPK program only serves 4-year-olds, pilot programs may enroll at-risk 3-year-olds as well. This program has been evaluated for program impact/child outcomes in the 2007-2008 school year using K–5th grade data on children who did and did not attend pre-K.

The Voluntary Pre-K for Tennessee Act of 2005 also established the Office of Early Learning to be responsible for program administration, technical assistance, monitoring, oversight, data collection, and training for VPK. This office coordinates and collaborates with local school systems, intra-state agencies, and community providers to gather information on best practices in support of early childhood education. OEL includes the Head Start State Collaboration Office, Even Start State Coordinator Office, Family Resource Centers, and School Administered Child Care Program Evaluation.
TENNESSEE VOLUNTARY PRE-K

**ACCESS**

- Total state program enrollment: 18,370
- School districts that offer state program enrollment: 99%
- Income requirement: 185% FPL
- Hours of operation: 5.5 hours/day, 5 days/week
- Operating schedule: Academic year
- Special education enrollment: 6,661
- Federally funded Head Start enrollment: 15,178
- State-funded Head Start enrollment: 0

- Total state pre-K spending: $81,657,785
- Local match required: Yes
- Statespending per child enrolled: $4,445
- All reported spending per child enrolled*: $5,688

**QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST**

**POLICY**

- Early learning standards: Comprehensive
- Teacher degree: BA
- Teacher specialized training: Teaching license and Specializing in pre-K
- Assistant teacher degree: CDA (ECE pilot); HSD + pre-K experience (VPK)
- Teacher in-service: 18 clock hours
- Maximum class size: 20 or lower
- Staff-child ratio: 1:10 or better
- Screening/referral: Vision, hearing, health; and supports services
- Meals: Lunch and either breakfast or snack
- Monitoring: Site visits and other monitoring

**STATE PRE-K REQUIREMENT**

- Comprehensive
- BA
- Specializing in pre-K
- CDA or equivalent
- At least 15 hours/year
- 1:10
- Vision, hearing, health; and supports services
- At least 1 support service
- At least 1/day

- DOES REQUIREMENT MEET BENCHMARK?

**BENCHMARK**

- Comprehensive
- BA
- Specializing in pre-K
- CDA or equivalent
- At least 15 hours/year
- 1:10
- Vision, hearing, health; and supports services
- At least 1 support service
- At least 1/day

**RESOURCES**

- Total state pre-K spending: $81,657,785
- Local match required: Yes
- State spending per child enrolled: $4,445
- All reported spending per child enrolled*: $5,688

* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.

**SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED**

- PRE-K*: $5,688
- HDST**: $8,699
- K-12***: $8,698

1 Once all available students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch are enrolled, LEAs are permitted to enroll children whose families do not meet this income criterion.
2 Naptime cannot be counted in the 5.5 hour minimum.
3 Permissible types of endorsements include those in: Pre-K–3, Pre-K–4, Pre-K–K Regular and Special Education, Pre-K–1 Special Education, and Pre-K–3 Special Education. The pre-K–4 certification is no longer issued, but it is still accepted for pre-K teachers in public and nonpublic settings.
4 The LEA is required to hire an assistant teacher with a CDA if one is available. If not, the LEA may hire one with a high school diploma and relevant experience working with ECE programs and the assistant must demonstrate progress toward a CDA.

1 Teachers working in public schools must meet the state requirement of 30 hours of in-service per year. The 18 hours required in early childhood for preschool teachers may count toward this total.
2 Dental and developmental screening and referrals are locally determined. Support services include two annual parent conferences or home visits, parenting support or training, parent involvement activities, referral for social services, and transition to kindergarten activities. Some other comprehensive services are required, but specific services are determined locally.
3 The state Basic Education Plan (BEP) funding formula determines the state share and the amount of the local match, based on each county’s tax base.