

Maximizing Early Learning Spaces

Guidelines for Prekindergarten Selection Criteria, Processes and Considerations

Background:

Prekindergarten is a targeted program prioritizing three- and four- year- old children living in vulnerable circumstances in the community. Research demonstrates that high quality early learning programs, such as Prekindergarten, have both short and long-term benefits in the lives of children. To provide maximum benefit to children, class size is limited to 16 spaces with a teacher and a Prekindergarten associate in the class. The lower numbers of children allows for an eight to one adult to child ratio. Currently there is more demand than available spaces in Saskatchewan.

In order to maximize early learning spaces in a community and effectively meet the early learning needs of children and families, it is strongly recommended that school divisions establish Prekindergarten selection criteria and processes. The selection criteria and processes should optimize the opportunity for children living in vulnerable circumstances in the community while avoiding duplication of services and funding.

Guidelines for Selection Process

All applications and referrals for Prekindergarten should go through a selection process established by the school division. The process should be transparent to the community. Having a clear process will assist in explaining to families why they were/not selected. The ministry recommends a selection team to prioritize applications and monitor waiting lists. The selection is done using the established criteria based on risk factors and vulnerabilities of the child and family. Those with the highest risks should receive priority. School divisions may wish to weight the criteria.

Selection Criteria

In *Prekindergarten Essentials: Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines* (2017) vulnerability is defined broadly, prioritizing and giving preference to applicants with:

- participation in the KidsFirst program;
- low socio-economic status;
- referral from a government or community based-agency;
- social isolation or not having access to early learning programs or child care;
- family health care challenges;
- exposure to family trauma; and/or,
- delays in areas such as social-emotional, and/or language development.

In addition to vulnerability factors, other selection considerations include:

- balance within the classroom, such as gender, age, abilities;
- refugee/immigrant families; and,
- family commitment to the program.

School divisions may add other vulnerability factors depending on the needs in the communities they serve to create Prekindergarten selection criteria.

Considerations for selection

Sometimes children in vulnerable circumstances have access to other community services or programs such as a community preschool, an Aboriginal Head Start or licensed child care. In these cases the selection team may decide that it is in the best interest of the child to stay in that program. An objective of the selection committee should be to have as many young children in the community as possible access high quality early learning experiences whether in Prekindergarten, child care, preschool or Aboriginal Head Start.

To maximize early learning spaces, the selection team will need to consider:

- How many risk factors/vulnerabilities impact the child and family based on the school division selection criteria?
- Do the parents have a strong connection to the school? Prekindergarten serves to welcome parents to the school – would this be particularly important to the child and family? If the child attends a child care or preschool located in the school and there is a strong connection between the school and child care this may not be a factor for the child.
- Are there children in the community with no access to early learning?
- Is this the most appropriate program for this individual child?
- What needs and placement preferences does the family identify?

Community Inventory of Early Learning Opportunities

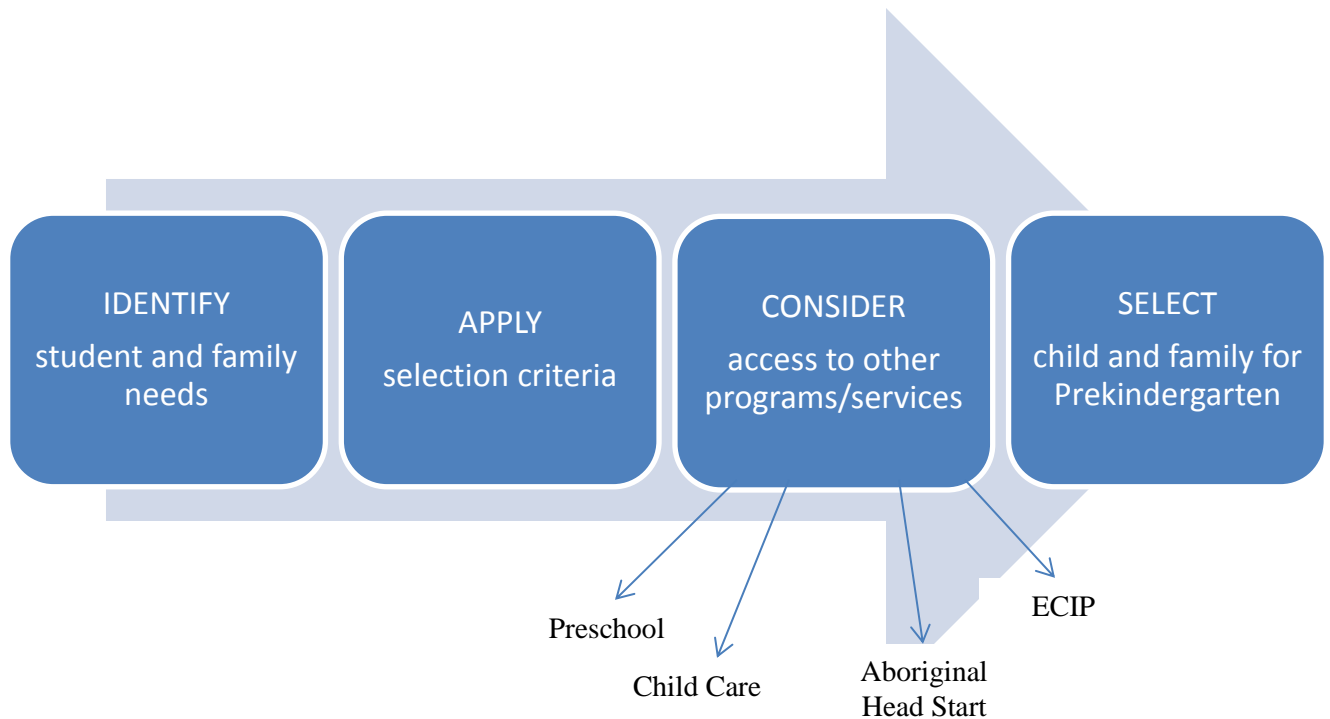
In developing programming and services to meet the needs of young children, it is valuable for school divisions to collaborate with community partners in the early learning and child care sector. An initial step is to develop a current inventory of high quality early childhood programs and options for early learners within the communities of the school division. This inventory could include information such as:

- admission criteria and mandate of programs;
- physical location of early childhood programs (child care centres, community preschools/playschools, Aboriginal Head Start programs and Prekindergarten programs);
- number of spaces available in the programs;
- contact information for directors;
- services provided;
- qualification of staff;
- consideration of sibling attendance/school involvement;
- hours of operation;
- accessibility of the building;
- transportation available;
- other information that would assist a team in determining whether such a program would meet the needs of children.

This inventory will need to be updated regularly.

Prekindergarten Selection Process

The following diagram could be used by the committee for selection and as a tool when talking with parents.



A clearly communicated selection process is facilitated through collaboration of the school division and other early learning services within the community to maximize early learning opportunities for children and to prevent duplication of services.

If the school division identifies or has a referral for a child with intensive needs the Prekindergarten selection process still applies. Please consult ***Maximizing Early Learning Spaces: Guidelines for Early Entrance Support.***