

Opportunities for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten in South Carolina



Adapted from "State-Funded Full-Day 4K Annual Report: FY 20-21 & FY 21-22."

To access the full report, visit <https://bit.ly/EOC4K>

Background

There are a variety of four-year-old Kindergarten (4K) options in South Carolina available to families. These 4K programs have a variety of funding sources, varying oversight and administrative bodies, different curricular structures and distinct student eligibility characteristics and instructor certification requirements.

Fast Facts

In School Year 2020-21, 63% of the state's 57,030 four-year-olds (35,951) lived in poverty and were at risk of not being ready for kindergarten.

52% (18,679) of eligible SC four-year-olds remain unserved by Child Early Reading and Development Education Program (CERDEP 4K), First Steps 4K, or Head Start programs, though they may be served by other 4K programs (e.g., Half-Day 4K).



Is My Child Eligible for 4K?

The Early Childhood Advisory Council has launched two eligibility portals for parents and families:

- **Palmetto Pre-K** (<https://palmettoprek.org/>), which helps parents find free educational pre-K programs.
- **First Five SC** (<https://first5sc.org/>), which helps parents assess their eligibility across early childhood services in five domains (child care and education; health and safety; special needs and early intervention; food and nutrition; parenting and family support). In early 2023, First5SC plans to launch a common application across programs in those five domains.

Landscape of 4K Opportunities in SC

CERDEP 4K: CERDEP 4K programs in public schools are State-funded and run by the local school district. Students must be four years old on or before September 1 of that school year and families must meet a poverty threshold of less than 185% of the federal poverty rate, with preferential placement on the waitlist offered to income eligible students who are qualified as at-risk of entering Kindergarten without needed skills. If there are open spots, students who are not financially eligible but are at risk or access special education services may enroll in a CERDEP 4K class after October 1. Instructors in these programs are certified teachers in early childhood education.

FIRST STEPS 4K: First Steps 4K is State-funded CERDEP in non-public school settings. Students are eligible if they are four years old on or before September 1 of the school year and if they have a household income of less than 185% of the federal poverty rate. Instructors in these First Steps 4K are not certified teachers.

HEAD START 4K: Head Start is designed to offer a comprehensive suite of services designed to protect young children's health and safety in addition to moving families out of poverty using two generation strategies. Students qualify at 100% of the federal poverty rate. While there is not a federal requirement for Head Start teachers to be certified, Head Start instructors in South Carolina must have a baccalaureate, associates or advanced degree in early childhood or a related field.

HALF-DAY 4K: Half-Day Education Improvement Act (EIA) funding allows districts to offer half-day 4K for students identified as a) having a developmental delay or b) qualifying for free/reduced lunch or Medicaid. There is no required 1:10 instructor:student ratio.

DISTRICT-FUNDED 4K: These programs are managed by the school district in compliance with federal, state, and local requirements. Student eligibility for participation is determined at the local level. These programs are not required to adhere to the same curricular or assessment procedures that CERDEP 4K and First Steps 4K programs do. Requirements for teacher certification vary per district policy and procedure. There is no required 1:10 instructor:student ratio.

Licensed Child Care Centers: Four-year-olds may access full day, preschool activities in Department of Social Services (DSS) licensed early childhood education centers. Families may pay tuition, access a voucher through DSS, or utilize another scholarship or funding opportunity. Programs are licensed for health and safety. These programs are administered independently; however, oversight is provided through DSS. Instructors must be trained in the early learning standards, but are not required to be certified teachers.

PRIVATE 4K: Private 4K programs are often part of an affiliated private school program. These programs are funded through tuition dollars or scholarships the school distributes. Student eligibility is determined independently by the schools. Requirements for teacher certification are determined independently by the schools.