

South Carolina



Background

South Carolina offers two state-funded pre-K programs: the Half-Day Child Development Program, also known as 4K, and the Child Development Education Program (CDEP).

Half-Day Child Development Program (4K)

4K is a half-day pre-K program administered by the South Carolina Department of Education. Only school districts are eligible for 4K funding, but they may subcontract with approved groups or agencies to provide all or part of the program.¹ The department awards funding to school districts based on the number of kindergarteners in the district that were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch during the previous year.²

School districts set their own eligibility requirements for children to participate in 4K programs, but they must be based in part on the list of state-determined risk factors, which include low income, homelessness, parent incarceration, or parents with low educational attainment.³

Child Development Education Program (CDEP)

CDEP is a full-day voucher program offered to students in school districts that have a poverty index of 70 percent or higher.⁴ Four-year-olds who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch or Medicaid and reside in one of the participating school districts are eligible for CDEP funding.⁵ Sixty-one districts out of eighty-nine districts in the state are eligible for CDEP.⁶ Participating children may use their CDEP reimbursement at any public school, charter school, or private CDEP provider, regardless of where the provider is located.

The South Carolina Department of Education administers the program for public school providers. The Office of First Steps administers the program for private and community-based providers.⁷

Charter schools in South Carolina

South Carolina's charter law allows for start-up and conversion charter schools. Local school districts, the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), and public or independent institutions of higher education registered with the state's department of education can serve as charter school authorizers. Fifteen school districts and the SCPCSD currently authorize charter schools; there are no active higher-education authorizers in South Carolina. Before submitting proposals to these authorizers, all applicants must first have their applications approved by the state charter school advisory committee.⁸



TOTAL SCORE

31/50

South Carolina's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **somewhat hospitable***

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- Compared to K-12 funding levels, low pre-K program funding makes offering pre-K less attractive to charters.
- + The size of the pre-K program does not limit charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.

** South Carolina's score is based on its Half-Day Child Development Program (4K), rather than the Child Development Education Program (CDEP), because the former is the larger program in the state.*



Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Charter schools are eligible to receive 4K slots from their authorizer, whether district or SCPCSD. The state allots each school district, including the SCPCSD, 4K slots based on the number of kindergarteners eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Districts either disburse 4K slots to schools in the district, including charter schools, or subcontract with outside providers. Each district decides how to allocate funding and slots between existing schools and community-based providers, and may or may not include charter schools in slot allocation. The state also distributes funding to SCPCSD, which then allocates funding to charter schools that it authorizes.

Charter schools, regardless of their authorizer, can also apply to be a CDEP provider. Any public or private provider can apply to be a CDEP provider as long as they are able to serve students from eligible school districts. School districts and charter schools apply through the South Carolina Department of Education; private providers apply through the Office of First Steps.⁹ Approved providers receive CDEP funding for each eligible student they serve (students who reside in one of the participating school districts and who qualify for Medicaid or free or reduced-price lunch).

Barriers

There are two state-funded pre-K programs in South Carolina. The barriers section addresses both 4K and CDEP because charters access funding through both programs, whether directly or through an affiliated pre-K program.

Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

+ **No.** Neither the charter school nor the pre-K legislation in South Carolina specifically addresses whether charter schools may offer pre-K. The state allows charter schools to receive 4K funds from their authorizer and to apply directly to the state for CDEP funding.

Six charter schools in the state offer pre-K. Several of them offer pre-K through 4K funding; at least one currently accesses CDEP funding. Three of those charter schools are authorized by the SCPCSD. The other three are authorized by local school districts.

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

- **4K: Yes.** 4K provides funding as a grant based on district enrollment of low-income kindergarteners, not on a per-pupil basis. But state 4K funds per child served average only \$1,300 per child—less than 15 percent of the funds that charters receive per child for K–12 students.

- **CDEP: Yes.** Low pre-K program funding, compared to K–12 funding levels, makes pre-K less attractive to charters. A staff member at the South Carolina Public Charter School District said that low funding is the main reason more charter schools do not offer pre-K. Although CDEP is a full-day program, charter schools that offer CDEP receive 46 percent of the per-pupil funding amount that charter schools receive to serve K–12 students.

Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

+ **4K: No.** The size of the program is not a barrier to charters accessing 4K funds. The program serves about 31 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

- **CDEP: Yes.** The small size of the program is a barrier to charters accessing CDEP funds. The program serves about 9 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

- **4K: Yes.** The funding process is a barrier for charters authorized by districts to access 4K funding. Charter schools that are authorized by districts can access 4K funds only if the district decides to allocate some of its 4K allocation to the charter school. Charter schools authorized by SCPCSD do not face the same barriers to funding, although SCPCSD's ability to award 4K funds is limited by the pool of funding that it receives from the state.

- **CDEP: Yes.** The funding process is a barrier for charter access to CDEP funding. Only seventeen elementary charter schools (about half in the state) are located in CDEP districts. Charter schools that are CDEP providers can be located anywhere in the state, but they are more likely to become a CDEP provider if there is a concentration of eligible children nearby. Further, CDEP appears to be designed to enable low-income children to access spaces in tuition-based preschool programs. So charter schools may be unwilling to offer those programs due to federal guidance limiting charters' ability to enroll children from tuition-based programs directly in kindergarten. In addition, the CDEP revenue stream is



unpredictable because charters receive funding only for CDEP-eligible children they attract.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

+ **No.** If a charter school has pre-K included in its charter, students who complete pre-K at that school may directly enroll in the school’s kindergarten program.

Recommendations

To address these barriers to charter access, the state should:

- Increase the pupil funding/reimbursement amount for 4K and CDEP funding to cover the cost of delivering a high-quality program.
- Fund charter schools equitably at the K–12 level. The state offers traditional public schools nearly 22 percent more funding than it offers charter schools, per pupil, to serve K–12 students. This difference in K–12 funding makes it more difficult for charter schools to compensate for low pre-K funding levels.
- Require districts that authorize charter schools and receive 4K funding to include charter schools on an equitable basis in deciding how to allocate pre-K slots to schools and community-based providers in the district.

	Half-Day Child Development Program (4K)	Child Development Education Program (CDEP)	Charter schools in South Carolina
Year created	Launched in 1998 ¹⁰	Launched in 2006 ¹¹	Charter law enacted in 1996 ¹²
Children in state	125,141 three- and four-year-olds in South Carolina ¹³		899,679 school-age children in South Carolina ¹⁴
Children served	21,694 children served 4 percent of three-year-olds 31 percent of four-year-olds ¹⁵	5,783 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 9 percent of four-year-olds ¹⁶	22,384 students served 2.5 percent of school-age population Fifty-nine charter schools ¹⁷
Charters offering pre-K	Six charter schools in South Carolina offer pre-K. ^{18,19}		Thirty-three charter schools in South Carolina serve elementary grades.
Funding	Districts receive 4K funds based on a funding formula. In 2014, the funding range was between \$94,852 and \$2,489,869 per district. ²⁰	Providers receive \$4,218 per pupil to offer CDREP.	Charter schools receive \$9,082 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ²¹



Endnotes

- 1 South Carolina Department of Education, “Half-Day Child Development Programs,” June 27, 2003, <https://ed.sc.gov/agency/stateboard/documents/264-1.pdf>.
- 2 South Carolina Legislature, “4K Proviso,” http://www.scstatehouse.gov/archives/committeinfo/K12FundingSelectCommittee/October192010Meeting/4_4K%20Proviso%201A35%20and%201A49.pdf.
- 3 Molly Griggs, “Public 4K in South Carolina: An Overview of Existing Programs and Considerations for Decision Makers” (Greenville, SC: Institute for Child Success), https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.instituteforchildsuccess.org%2Fmydocuments%2F4k_issue_brief_electronic.pdf&ei=sOFoVdrwHofmsAT4y4BY&usq=AFQjCNHhbO5kECyEoOaJTO3O3go8SjRnRg&bvm=bv.94455598,d.cWc.
- 4 The state determines, based on the poverty index, which districts are eligible for CDEP. The poverty index is defined as eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and/or Medicaid.
- 5 South Carolina Department of Education, “Guidelines for Read to Succeed Implementation and Program Approval in Education Preparation Programs Leading to Initial Licensure,” December 29, 2014, <https://ed.sc.gov/agency/ie/School-Transformation/Read-to-Succeed/documents/201four-2015CDEPPGuidelinesFinal.pdf>.
- 6 First Steps South Carolina, “First Steps Four-Year-Old Kindergarten,” <http://scfirststeps.org/4k/>.
- 7 First Steps South Carolina, “First Steps 4K: Information for Preschool Providers,” 2015, <http://scfirststeps.org/first-steps-4k-provider/>.
- 8 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: South Carolina,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/status/SC/>.
- 9 South Carolina Department of Education, “South Carolina Child Development Education Program, 2014–2015 Public School Guidelines,” July 2014, <https://ed.sc.gov/agency/ie/School-Transformation/Read-to-Succeed/documents/2014-2015CDEPPGuidelinesFinal.pdf>.
- 10 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: South Carolina.”
- 13 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.
- 14 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.
- 15 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: South Carolina.”
- 18 South Carolina Public Charter School District, school information page, <http://www.sccharter.org/?DivisionID=12726>.
- 19 Examples: Charleston Development Academy (<http://developmentacademy.ccsdschools.com>), D. P. Cooper Charter School (<http://www.dpcoopercharter.com>), and Quest Leadership Academy (<http://www.questleadershipacademy.org>).
- 20 South Carolina Legislature, “4K Proviso.” Funding figures derived from interviews with the South Carolina Department of Education. The funding for the 4K program is awarded via the Education Improvement Act to districts based on the number of kindergarteners eligible for free and reduced-price lunch during the previous year, but not less than 90 percent of the amount it received in the prior fiscal year.
- 21 Jay F. May et al., “Charter School Funding: Inequality Expands,” South Carolina section (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform, School Choice Demonstration Project, April 2014), <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/charter-funding-inequity-expands-sc.pdf>.