



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
UNIVERSAL
PREKINDERGARTEN



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Universal PreKindergarten (UPK)?

Starting with the 2025-26 school year, California's Department of Education will fully implement a flexible Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) framework which provides families of 2-4-year olds access to high-quality early learning opportunities, including free Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) for eligible children, as well as many other early care and education programs. UPK is available to all families in Santa Cruz County, regardless of immigration status.

Why is Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) important?

UPK is an essential part of transforming California's schools and giving every student in Santa Cruz County a great start in their early care and education. UPK can serve as a bridge between early childhood and TK-12 systems to increase students' readiness for school and schools' readiness for students, so that all children thrive in school and in life.

Research has shown that participation in high-quality early care and education programs enhances children's academic, cognitive and social-emotional development, and leads to improved outcomes and success for individuals in the long term.

What types of Universal PreKindergarten options are available to families in California?

Depending on families' needs, California's UPK system offers access to four primary Pre-K options:

- California State Preschool Program (CSPP)
- Transitional Kindergarten (TK)
- Head Start
- Private Centers and Family Child Care Homes

[More detailed information is available online.](#)

What is Transitional Kindergarten (TK)?

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is a free PreKindergarten program where children learn together through play and develop their social and academic foundational skills. All children turning 4 years old by September 1 are eligible for TK the year before entering Kindergarten. TK is free for families as part of California's public school system.

Who can attend TK?

Starting in the 2025-26 school year, all children who turn 4 by September 1st are eligible for TK.

How do I decide if TK is right for my family?

Since TK may not cover all the hours some families need Child Care, it's important to think about what works best for your family. Many families choose to have their child attend a before and/or after-school program in addition to TK. Free before and/or after-school programs may be available for families who qualify. Be sure to ask your school about the options available in your area. The [Santa Cruz COE's Child Development Resource Center](#) can also support families with and before and/or after school care needs/referrals. Call (831) 466-5820 for more.



What is the TK curriculum?

TK Curriculum will vary depending on the school district and site, but is grounded in the Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLFs), a [guiding document](#) from the California Department of Education (CDE).

Are children required to attend TK?

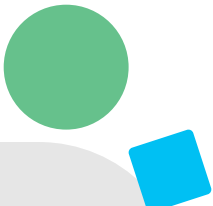
TK is an optional program of the UPK system.

How is TK beneficial to children?

Research has shown that participation in TK enhances a child's academic, cognitive and social-emotional development and puts them on a path to succeed from cradle to career.

How do I sign up my child for TK?

Contact your school district/school of residence to learn which district sites offer TK learning. To enroll your child in TK you will need to register with your school district/school of residence and provide the following required documentation:

- Your child's verification of age
 - Your child's immunization records
 - Proof of your residence
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What is a California State Preschool Program (CSPP)?

CSPP is a state-funded, free or low-cost, high-quality preschool program for children to learn together through play and develop their social and academic foundational skills.

CSPP is available to eligible families of 2- to 5-year-olds. CSPP programs are available in a variety of settings, depending on your area. Check with the Santa Cruz COE's [Child Development Resource Center](#) at (831) 466-5820 to learn about the options available to you.

Who can attend CSPP?

CSPP programs are open to 2- to 5-year-old children based on varying eligibility criteria. Check with the Santa Cruz COE's [Child Development Resource Center](#) at (831) 466-5820 to learn about the options available to you based on your individual circumstances.

What is the curriculum at CSPP?

CSPP curriculum is developmentally appropriate, play-based learning grounded in the Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLFs), a [guiding document](#) from the California Department of Education (CDE).

How can I enroll my child in a CSPP?

Contact the Santa Cruz COE's [Child Development Resource Center](#) at (831) 466-5820 to ask about California State Preschool Programs near you.

If you are seeking other early care and education opportunities in Santa Cruz County, contact the [Child Development Resource Center](#) at (831) 466-5820 or toll free at (833) 774-4596 to learn about available programs and eligibility.