

Audubon Center of the North Woods

Early Learning Program Recognition Application Guide

Introduction

A charter school may offer a free or fee-based preschool or prekindergarten program that meets high-quality early learning instructional program standards that are aligned with Minnesota's early learning standards for children per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06 Subdivision 3(a). The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) verifies a charter school's alignment with early learning standards through an official recognition process. Official recognition provides an opportunity to access available state and federal resources to provide high-quality early learning programs.

The Audubon Center of the North Woods (ACNW) must first review and evaluate an authorized school's plan for the early learning program prior to submitting an affidavit to MDE. MDE grants official recognition of the following types of early learning programs:

- 1) early childhood health and developmental screening;
- 2) preschool instructional program for children 3-5 years; and
- 3) prekindergarten instructional program for four years olds to prepare children for entry into kindergarten the following year.

Charter schools that elect to provide an early learning health and development screening must comply with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, sections 121A.16 to 121A.19.

Timeline

Applications for early learning program recognition are accepted on a rolling basis and are based on the proposed start date of the program(s). ACNW has established the following deadlines for early learning program recognition applications:

- Eight months prior to proposed start date – Notice of Intent due to ACNW
- Six months prior to proposed start date – Full Application due to ACNW

If any deadline date falls on a weekend or non-business day, the deadline moves to the following business day. Failure to meet the deadlines may result in disqualification of the application.

Evaluation Process

Early learning programs must be reviewed at four levels in order to be implemented:

- ACNW Charter School Division (CSD)
- ACNW Charter School Committee (CSC)
- ACNW Board of Directors
- Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

ACNW reserves the right to reject any and all applications for early learning program recognition should ACNW determine that the school's performance does not warrant early learning program expansion or that the early learning program plans do not demonstrate a high probability of success.

Notice of Intent

A school must submit a Notice of Intent to Submit Application for Early Learning Program Recognition to ACNW in order for a complete application to be considered. The NOI must indicate the school's proposed early learning program(s), the proposed start date of the program(s), and include evidence in the form of meeting minutes that the school's board of directors has engaged in substantive discussion and consideration of the proposed program(s). Furthermore, the school must provide evidence of formal action by the board to submit the NOI. The NOI must be submitted via e-mail to admin@auduboncharterschools.org. Applicants must use the NOI template found on the [ACNW website](#) (and as part of this document). The deadline for submission of the NOI is defined above in the timeline.

NOI Feedback and Invitation to Submit a Full Application

ACNW Charter School Division staff, in consultation with the ACNW Charter School Committee, will review the NOI and determine whether to invite the school to submit the full application. This determination will be based on the school's recent contractual performance as evidenced in formal performance evaluation documents completed by ACNW and by any other information available to ACNW. An invitation (or lack thereof) to submit a full application will be communicated to the school no later than 15 days after receipt of the NOI. This will include specific requirements for the full application. (See ACNW Early Learning Program Recognition NOI Review Rubric for ACNW's criteria to determine whether to invite a school to submit a full application.)

Application Evaluation

Applicants must complete required sections of the early learning program recognition application. Applicants are expected to review these application requirements closely. Review the [ACNW website](#) to ensure you have the most up to date version of the application.

The school must demonstrate to the satisfaction of ACNW the following, which is outlined in MN Statute 124E.06, Subd. 3(a):

A charter school may offer a free or fee-based preschool or prekindergarten that meets high-quality early learning instructional program standards that are aligned with Minnesota's early learning standards for children.

To that end, the school must provide a complete description of the proposed early learning program(s) as outlined in the application along with any additional information required to demonstrate the above.

The CSD will review the full application to determine whether requirements have been met, which will be evidenced by Overall Section Ratings of Meets in all applicable areas of the application review rubric. (See ACNW Early Learning Program Recognition Application Review Rubric for ACNW's evaluation criteria.) The CSD will produce a Summary Report, which compiles the findings from the evaluation. The report will contain a recommendation regarding approval of the Early Learning Program Recognition Application. The CSC will review the Evaluation Report and make a recommendation to the full ACNW Board, which will make the final decision on the application. Should the ACNW Board grant approval, it will direct the CSD to use information provided in the application along with additional necessary information to submit an Early Learning Program Request on behalf of the school to MDE for final approval.

Implementation of Early Learning Program(s)

Once the Early Learning Program Request is approved, ACNW will monitor the school's progress as it implements the early learning program(s) according to the plan outlined in the Early Learning Program Recognition Application. To this end, ACNW will require the school to develop and maintain an implementation checklist specific to the approved program(s). ACNW will monitor the school's activities related to the implementation of the program(s) to ensure successful implementation. In the event milestones related to the implementation of the program(s) are not met according to the timeline established in the implementation plan and checklist, ACNW may, at its own discretion, decide to postpone the final execution of the new early learning program(s). The school may also decide to postpone the final execution of the new program(s) in order to have more time to successfully execute the program(s).

Submission of Application

An email containing an electronic version of the application must be **received** by ACNW by the designated deadline. Applicants must send an electronic copy of the application including all attachments in either Microsoft Word or PDF versions via e-mail to admin@auduboncharterschools.org.

Audubon Center of the North Woods
Notice of Intent to Submit Application for Early Learning Program Recognition

Date:

School:

Check the box(es) that relate to the proposed early learning program:

- Early childhood health and developmental screening
- Preschool instructional program (not prekindergarten) for children ages 3-5 years
Anticipated size of preschool instructional program: *enter estimated number of children to be served annually*
- Prekindergarten instructional program for four-year-olds to prepare children for entry into kindergarten the following year
Anticipated size of prekindergarten instructional program: *enter estimated number of children to be served annually*

Briefly describe the proposed early learning program(s) along with the proposed start date of the program(s).

Provide evidence that the school’s board of directors has engaged in substantive discussion and consideration of the proposed early learning program(s), including formal board action to move forward with a Notice of Intent to ACNW. Include meeting minutes as attachments or indicate the dates of the meetings in which the board engaged in such discussion and consideration (if minutes have already been submitted to ACNW via Epicenter). In addition, board members present at the meeting at which this NOI was approved must sign below (add additional lines as necessary).

*By our signatures below, we affirm that this Notice of Intent to submit an application for early learning program recognition was approved by majority vote of the board in public session on **DATE**.*

Board Member Signature

Submit to admin@auduboncharterschools.org no later than eight months prior to the proposed start date. If the deadline falls on a weekend or non-business day, the deadline moves to the following business day. A Notice of Intent received after the deadline may result in disqualification.

Board Chair Signature

School Leader Signature

**Audubon Center of the North Woods
Application for Early Learning Program Recognition
Cover Page**

Date:

School:

Check the box(es) that relate to the proposed early learning program:

- Early childhood health and developmental screening
- Preschool instructional program (not prekindergarten) for children ages 3-5 years
Anticipated size of preschool instructional program: *enter estimated number of children to be served annually*
- Prekindergarten instructional program for four-year-olds to prepare children for entry into kindergarten the following year
Anticipated size of prekindergarten instructional program: *enter estimated number of children to be served annually*

Board members present at the meeting at which this application was approved must sign below (add additional lines as necessary).

*By our signatures below, we affirm that this application for early learning program recognition was approved by majority vote of the board in public session on **DATE**.*

Board Member Signature

Submit to admin@auduboncharterschools.org no later than six months prior to the proposed start date. If the deadline falls on a weekend or non-business day, the deadline moves to the following business day. An application received after the deadline may result in disqualification.

Board Chair Signature

School Leader Signature

Audubon Center of the North Woods Application for Early Learning Program Recognition

Directly address each section below that is required for your early learning program request as indicated by ACNW's response to the school's Notice of Intent to Submit Application for Early Learning Program Recognition. Responses should be concise and comprehensive.

Part A. Early Learning Program Description, Need, and Demand

1. Provide a summary of the school's proposed early learning program(s) including:
 - a. A brief description of the program(s).
 - b. Proposed start date of the program(s).
 - c. Whether the program(s) will be free to all participants or fee-based.
 - i. If fee-based, include the fee structure that will be used.
 - ii. Indicate if the school will provide enrollment preference to kindergarten for students participating in the school's early learning program per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.11(c).
 - d. Specify the additional number of students that would be served.
 - e. Discuss how the proposed program(s) will help your school meet its mission.
 - f. Describe how the proposed program(s) will improve all pupil learning and all student achievement and improve service overall to students and families.
 - g. Describe how the proposed program(s) will include environmental education programming consistent with ACNW expectations.
 - h. Include how the proposed program(s) will impact the school's current contractual goals. As appropriate, provide new proposed goals.
 - i. Describe any other staffing changes that will occur including job descriptions and qualifications for any new hires or positions.
 - j. Describe the facility that will be used to provide the early learning program(s), including learning spaces and other characteristics that are designed to meet the unique needs of the school and students to be served by the school.
2. Provide evidence that the proposed program(s) is/are supported by need and projected enrollment.
 - a. Provide a table that includes annual enrollment projections (for the entire school) with and without the proposed program(s). This should be for as many years as needed to achieve full implementation of the program(s), but no fewer than three total years.
 - b. Provide evidence to document need and demand for the program(s), including the following:
 - i. Evidence of interest from current or prospective families and community level support for the early learning program(s) as attachments. This could include but is not limited to letters/emails of support from parents and community organizations, survey information that includes a sample survey and survey results, and sign-in sheets from community information sessions.
 - ii. Discussion of how the program(s) fulfills an unmet need in the community.
 - c. Describe marketing and recruitment strategies to be implemented to ensure equitable access for all children and enrollment targets will be met.

Part B. Current Academic Performance

1. Provide evidence that the school has demonstrated progress on academic and academic-related goals as outlined in the charter contract.

2. Provide evidence that academic performance and growth has been demonstrated across student groups.

Part C. Financial Management Plan

1. Provide analysis that the school is fiscally sound and has the financial capacity to implement the proposed program(s).
 - a. Provide information demonstrating the school has sound financial health.
 - b. Provide at least a three-year budget (starting with the next fiscal year) with and without the program(s). If full implementation of the program(s) will go beyond three years, extend the budget model as needed. This budget should be a line-item report, subtotaled by program code.
 - c. Provide a comprehensive budget narrative that addresses the differences in the two budgets and provides assumptions used in developing the budgets.

Part D. Governance and Management Plan

1. Provide evidence that the charter school has the management capacity to carry out the proposed program(s).
 - a. Provide evidence that the school's board of directors has approved the application for the proposed program(s) by completing the Application Cover Page.
 - b. Describe the capacity of the board and management to implement the proposed program(s) including any anticipated changes to the organizational structure.
 - c. Provide an implementation plan that includes clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as timelines, milestones, and key activities related to the proposed program(s).
 - d. Discuss potential challenges related to the proposed program(s) and possible solutions to address those challenges.

Part E. Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening

1. Describe the school's plan and capacity to provide an Early Childhood Screening program in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 121A.16–121A.19 and Minnesota Rules 3530.3000, 3530.3300, and 3530.3400.

Part F. Prekindergarten and/or Preschool Instructional Program

1. Provide a plan that addresses the following elements:
 - a. **Comprehensive Child Assessment:** Assess each child's cognitive skills with a comprehensive child assessment instrument when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program to inform program planning and promote kindergarten readiness.
 - i. Describe the assessment process used to measure individual child progress in all the prekindergarten and preschool instructional classes that includes the use of a standardized child assessment instrument, such as *High Scope Child Observation Record (COR)*, *Teaching Strategies Gold* or *Work Sampling System*.
 - ii. To measure child progress, the assessment must be used at program entrance and program exit.
 - iii. At a minimum, the comprehensive assessment should measure children's progress in the domains of language and literacy and mathematical thinking. Other domains may include approaches to learning, general cognitive development, physical and motor development, social and emotional development, creativity and the arts.

- b. **Intentional Instructional Practice:** Provide intentional instructional practice aligned with the state early childhood learning standards and kindergarten standards that is based on early childhood research and professional practice focused on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and development and prepares children for the transition to kindergarten, including early literacy skills.
- i. Describe how program content and intentional instructional practices are aligned with the *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (ECIPs)* available on the [MDE website](#).
 - ii. Include a very brief description of the curriculum used in the early learning program, such as *High Scope Preschool Curriculum* or *Opening the World of Learning (OWL)*.
 - iii. Indicate how the *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (ECIPs)* are incorporated into the program.
 - iv. Provide an overview of instructional practice to support children's early literacy skills development.
- c. **Kindergarten Transition:** Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with parents and kindergarten teachers.
- i. Briefly describe the program plan for transition to kindergarten that includes meaningful coordination and planning with kindergarten teachers, and engages families in a variety of ways to support children's learning and successful transition to kindergarten.
 - ii. Describe a plan for providing guidance to families not enrolling their child in the charter school kindergarten program.
- d. **Coordinate with Relevant Community-Based Services**
- i. Coordination may include referrals to community programs based on child needs, such as local public health, social services, mental health services, or other early learning or child care programs.
 - ii. Provide a brief description of how the program coordinates with community organizations and how those resources are shared with families.
- e. **Staff Ratios and Licensure:** Ensure staff-child ratios of one-to-ten and maximum group size of 20 children with the staff being supervised by a licensed early childhood teacher.
- i. Briefly describe how the prekindergarten or preschool instructional program is provided and how ratios and group size are provided to ensure a high-quality early learning program.
 - ii. For each prekindergarten and preschool instructional class, describe staff licensure area and MN teaching license file folder number and other credentials, as appropriate.
- f. **Teacher Content Knowledge:** Have teachers knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, and instruction.
- i. Describe licensed staff training/professional development specific to early learning curriculum, instructional practices and assessment that has been completed in the past five years.
- g. **Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening:** Ensure participating children have completed health and developmental screening within 90 days of program enrollment under Minnesota Statutes, sections 121A.16 to 121A.19.
- i. Provide a description of how and where participating children receive health and developmental screening either through a traditional school district or comparable screening from health care provider (such as a Child and Teen Checkups) if the

charter school is not providing the early childhood health and developmental screening program. It is not necessary for the charter school to provide the early childhood health and developmental screening, but must describe how children receive the comprehensive health and developmental screening to identify possible problems that may interfere with children's learning.

- ii. Provide a plan for those children who do not successfully complete early childhood screening.



Audubon Center of the North Woods
Notice of Intent to Submit Application for Early Learning Program Recognition
Review Rubric

Upon receipt of the Notice of Intent to Submit Application for Early Learning Program Recognition by a school, ACNW Charter School Division staff will review the school's performance to determine whether to invite the school to submit a full application. Should the school clearly not meet the required threshold in any area below, it will not be invited to submit a full application.

Performance Area	The school does not meet this threshold. The school will not be invited to submit a full application.	The school must provide additional information during the review process.	The school meets this threshold. No additional information is needed.
Academic: A record of demonstrated progress on academic and academic-related goals as outlined in the charter contract.			
Environmental Education: A record of demonstrated progress on environmental education goals as outlined in the charter contract.			
Financial: A history of sound school finances in terms of financial management and financial health.			
Operations: A history of sound school operations, governance, and compliance.			

**Audubon Center of the North Woods
Application for Early Learning Program Recognition
Review Rubric**

School Name:		
Strengths:		
Weaknesses:		
Questions:		
Overall Recommendation	Denial	Approval
Narrative Justification of Recommendation:		



I. Early Learning Program Description, Need, and Demand

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
• The application provides a summary of the school’s early learning program(s), including the proposed start date, the fee structure of the program(s) (if fee-based), and indication whether the school will grant enrollment preference to kindergarten for students participating in the school’s free early learning program(s) (if applicable).			
• The application describes how the early learning program(s) will be funded. The funding mechanism(s) are reasonable and allowable.			
• The application includes a clear description of how the program(s) will help the school meet its mission, the primary purpose of charter schools, and improve overall service to families.			
• The application includes a description of how the proposed program(s) will impact staffing.			
• The application includes proposed new academic contractual goals as appropriate.			
• The application includes information on how the proposed program(s) will include environmental education programming consistent with ACNW expectations.			
• The application includes a description of facility needs for the proposed program(s) and a comprehensive discussion of learning spaces and characteristics to meet those needs.			
• Enrollment projections are reasonable.			
• The application provides compelling evidence of the need and demand for the proposed program(s).			
• The marketing and recruitment plan presented in the application ensures equitable access for all children and is sufficient to meet enrollment projections.			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- **Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- **Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- **Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).

II. Academic Performance

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACNW has evidence that the school is making substantial progress on academic or academic-related goals as outlined in the charter contract or a plan from the school to address any areas of concern. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACNW has evidence that all student groups have demonstrated performance and growth on statewide assessments or on other academic assessments. 			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- **Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant's understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- **Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- **Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant's understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).

III. Financial Management Plan

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACNW has evidence of a history of sound school finances – both in terms of financial management and financial health or a plan from the school to address any areas of concern. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The budget for the early learning program(s) is/are comprehensive, reasonable for the proposed program(s), and viable for overall school sustainability. 			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).

IV. Governance and Management Plan

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACNW has evidence of a history of sound school operations, governance, and compliance or a plan from the school to address any areas of concern. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application includes a description of any changes to the school's organization structure stemming from the proposed program(s). 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application includes a description of the board and staff's capacity to implement the proposed program(s). 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application includes an implementation plan that provides clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, milestones, and activities for the proposed program(s). 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application includes evidence that the school has considered potential challenges related to the proposed program(s) and offers possible solutions to address those challenges. 			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- **Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant's understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- **Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- **Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant's understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).

V. Environmental Education Performance

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACNW has evidence that the school is making substantial progress on environmental education goals as outlined in the charter contract or a plan from the school to address any areas of concern. 			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- **Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- **Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- **Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).

VI. Early Childhood Health and Development Screening (if applicable)

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application includes a description of the school’s plan and capacity to provide an Early Childhood Screening program in accordance with applicable law. 			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- **Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- **Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- **Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).

VII. Prekindergarten and/or Preschool Instructional Program (if applicable)

Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Questions			
	Inadequate	Approaches	Meets
The proposed plan adequately addresses the following elements:			
• Comprehensive Child Assessment			
• Intentional Instructional Practice			
• Kindergarten Transition			
• Coordinate with Relevant Community-Based Services			
• Staff Ratios and Licensure			
• Teacher Content Knowledge			
• Early Childhood Screening			
OVERALL SECTION RATING			

- **Inadequate:** Lacks significant detail; demonstrates lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).
- **Approaches:** Addresses some of the criteria, or lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information in order to be reasonably comprehensive.
- **Meets:** Address most of the criteria, is reasonably comprehensive, and indicates the applicant’s understanding of the issues, concepts, and/or ability to implement the proposed early learning program(s).