

Voluntary Prekindergarten Parent Handbook



What is Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)?



Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is a legislatively mandated program designed to prepare every four-year-old in Florida for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. The VPK program gives each child an opportunity to perform better in school and throughout life with quality programs that include high literacy standards, accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes, and qualified instructors. All eligible four-year-olds are entitled to participate in one of the VPK program options.

VPK Vision

That Florida's children are eager to learn and ready to succeed when they enter kindergarten.

VPK Mission

To ensure that all children are intellectually, emotionally, physically and socially ready to enter school and ready to learn, fully recognizing the crucial role of **parents as their child's first teacher**.

Highlights of the VPK program

- High quality educational program with an early literacy focus.
- **FREE** for all children four years old on or before September 1st who reside in Florida.
- Parent choice is a priority; therefore, both private and public providers may participate.

Parents' Rights



☐ As a parent, you have the right to make an informed VPK choice using one of the following methods:

- If you have Internet access, visit the Department of Children and Families website www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider to obtain VPK profiles of each private provider and public school you are considering.
- Contact your Early Learning Coalition (ELC). ELCs work within all communities in Florida to implement our early learning support services. Your ELC has additional information about the VPK program and application process. ELC contact information can be found at www.vpkflorida.org or by calling 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711).
- If you do not have Internet access, you may request a copy of the profiles of each VPK provider and school in your county from the local ELC.
- You may also contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) office to receive a customized list of VPK providers in your area that meet the needs of your family, as well as information about other community resources. CCR&R services are free to anyone residing in or seeking early learning services in Florida. For the number of your local CCR&R, please call the Agency for Workforce Innovation – Office of Early Learning toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711).

Parent choice is a priority for the VPK program. You are encouraged to make an informed decision about your VPK provider. Eligible providers include family child care homes, private centers, public schools, and faith-based programs that meet VPK programmatic and quality standards.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK program option that meets your needs, including:

- School-year program—540 instructional hours; **OR**
- Summer Program—300 instructional hours; children may participate in the VPK program the summer immediately before the school year in which the child is eligible for kindergarten.

VPK program services vary based on the program selected. VPK providers have flexibility in structuring the hours per day and days per week to meet the required instructional hours. You are encouraged to find the program that best meets your family's needs.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to enroll in a VPK program that guarantees the following:

- An approved VPK program at no cost to you for the VPK hours of operation.
- Participation in either the school-year program or the summer program.
- The choice of paying for extended day services or “wrap around” care if it is offered at the VPK provider you select. Wrap around care is any care offered by the provider in addition to the regular VPK hours.

The VPK program is FREE for eligible children. Providers are not permitted to charge a registration fee or require you to agree to any additional services or wrap around services as a condition of enrollment in the VPK program. State law does not, however, prohibit a provider from charging fees for programs or care that are not part of the VPK program (e.g., late charges, meals/snacks, field trips, extended care, or “wrap around” care). If field trips are part of the VPK day providers may request that a parent contribute, but not require them to do so. The provider must also have an alternative activity for a child that does not attend a field trip. Before finalizing your selection, review the VPK provider’s discipline and attendance policies to become informed of program policies and practices.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK Provider that meets the following required standards:

- VPK private providers must have a director credential.
- VPK private providers must be licensed (child care, family child care home, or large family child care home); or be exempt from licensure (private school or faith-based provider); or be accredited by an approved accrediting association.

To best meet the needs of each child and to prepare them for future success, VPK curriculum must be aligned with the state performance standards.

During the selection process, consider visiting the Department of Children and Families website www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider or calling your ELC office to confirm the program is eligible.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK program that employs certified VPK instructors and meets minimum classroom requirements, including:

- Every lead VPK instructor must have at a minimum: a Child Development Associate for the school-year program; or a Bachelor's degree or higher in certain education-related programs for the summer program.
- VPK classroom ratios must be one instructor to every 10 children.
- VPK class size must not exceed 18 children in the school-year program.
- VPK class size must not exceed 10 children in the summer program.

Teacher qualifications are important to the delivery of quality instruction; therefore, VPK instructors must meet minimum education standards. Ratio and group size are also indicators of quality. As part of your decision-making process, ask potential VPK providers about teacher qualifications and classroom requirements.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK program that delivers quality instruction including:

- A curriculum that is developmentally appropriate with a focus on early literacy skills.
- A VPK program that prepares your child to be ready for kindergarten based on the VPK standards adopted by the State Board of Education.

To best meet the needs of each child and to prepare them for future school success, VPK curriculum must be individually and age appropriate, and be aligned with state performance standards. The state performance standards provide guidelines to teachers on what children should know and be able to do in order to help plan instructional activities for your child. Instructional activities involve engagement in child-initiated and teacher-directed play opportunities. When making decisions about the best VPK provider for your child, ask about curriculum and planned activities to determine if the program activities meet your expectations about quality early learning practices.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to enroll your four year old in a VPK program (subject to the provider's or school's agreement to admit your child), including families:

- Who have a child with a disability; most private VPK providers and all school district VPK providers are required to make their programs accessible to children with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- In the military, temporarily based in Florida.
- Who may be displaced due to a hurricane or other natural disaster or are temporarily homeless.

The only residency requirement is that children live in Florida during the time they are attending a VPK program. This means that four-year-old children living temporarily in Florida are eligible for services.

☐ As a parent, you have the right to withdraw your child from the VPK program at any time. You may also have the right to re-enroll your four year old in another VPK program under specific conditions:

- A parent may re-enroll his/her eligible child in the summer program if his/her child completed less than 10% of the school-year VPK hours.
- A parent may re-enroll his/her eligible child within the same program type, as long as the child has completed less than 60% of VPK hours.

VPK is a program in which parents of eligible four-year-old children can voluntarily enroll their child for services. If you have any questions about eligibility, contact your ELC or the Agency for Workforce Innovation – Office of Early Learning toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711). ■

Parents' Responsibilities



☐ As a parent, you have the responsibility to comply with Date of Birth Verification Requirements by providing a copy of at least one of the following approved supporting documents that show the child's name and date of birth:

- An original or certified copy of the child's birth record;
- An original or certified copy of the child's certificate of baptism accompanied by an affidavit sworn to by the child's parent that the certificate is correct;
- An insurance policy on the child's life which is in force for at least two years;
- A religious record of the child's birth which is accompanied by an affidavit sworn to by the child's parent that the record is correct;
- A passport or certificate of arrival in the United States;
- An immunization record signed by a health officer or doctor;
- A valid military dependent identification card; or
- The parent may submit an affidavit of the child's age sworn to or affirmed by the parent, accompanied by a certificate of age reflecting the child's birth date, signed by a public health officer or by a licensed practicing physician, which states that the physician has examined the child and believes that the age as stated in the affidavit is substantially correct.

Parents must provide documentation to prove that their child meets the age requirements for VPK. A child must be four years of age on or before September 1st to be eligible for VPK. If you have any questions about age requirements for VPK, contact your ELC or the Agency for Workforce Innovation— Office of Early Learning toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711).

☐ As a parent, you have the responsibility to comply with Residential Address Verification Requirements by providing a copy of at least one of the following supporting documents that show the name and residential address of the parent with whom the child resides:

- Utility bill;
- Bank statement;
- Insurance policy;
- Pay stub;
- Government issued document (e.g., driver's license);
- An affidavit of the child's residential address sworn to by the parent, if it is accompanied by a letter from a landlord which confirms that the child resides at the same address shown in the parent's affidavit;
- A military order issued to the parent, if a child's parent is a service member of the United States Armed Forces, which shows that the parent will reside in Florida when the child attends the VPK program (e.g., permanent change of station); or
- Documentation of residency for a homeless child based on other documents (e.g., letter from a homeless shelter).

Parents must provide documentation to prove that their child lives in Florida during the time they will be attending a VPK program. A child living in Florida is eligible for VPK with the proper documentation for eligibility. If you have any questions about residency requirements, contact your ELC or the Agency for Workforce Innovation – Office of Early Learning toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711).

☐ As a parent, you have the responsibility to ensure your child participates in kindergarten screening

- You have the responsibility to comply with the kindergarten screening process that will occur when your child enrolls in kindergarten.

All children participating in VPK will be screened upon kindergarten entry. The kindergarten screening is a process that will help us better understand how much your child learned through VPK. It will also help your child's kindergarten teacher understand what your child knows and can do, which will help with instructional planning.

☐ As a parent, you are responsible for your child's VPK Transportation

- Parents are responsible for their child's transportation to and from the VPK program.

Some VPK providers may offer transportation services at a cost. Families are encouraged to explore these options before choosing a VPK provider.

☐ As a parent, you are responsible for complying with the VPK attendance and other program policies

- Parents have the responsibility to comply with the attendance policies for the VPK program in which their child is enrolled.
- Parents have the responsibility to comply with all of the VPK provider's policies (e.g., discipline, late fees).

Providers have individual policies related to attendance, discipline, and late fees. Parents are strongly encouraged to become familiar with the policies that apply to children in the VPK program before enrolling their child in the program. ■



Information Resources



**Agency for Workforce Innovation-
Office of Early Learning**

The Office of Early Learning provides state-level support and direction for the implementation of the VPK program, as well as other early learning programs. **850-921-3186** or **1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)** www.flready.com

Early Learning Coalition (ELC)

ELCs have additional information on VPK, including application procedures and dates to apply in your county. **1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)** www.vpkflorida.org

Department of Children & Families (DCF)

The Department of Children and Families regulates licensed child care facilities, licensed family child care homes, and licensed mildly ill facilities in 60 of Florida's 67 counties.

850-921-4713 www.myflorida.com/childcare

Florida Abuse Hotline

The Florida Abuse Hotline provides a full spectrum of services, from parenting classes and respite care to transportation and child care. The goal of the department is to keep children safe in their own families when possible. **1-800-96-ABUSE** or **1-800-962-2873**

www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse

**Florida's Central Directory
of Early Childhood Services**

The Central Directory provides information and referral services on disabilities and special health care needs for families, service coordinators and other professionals that work with children with special needs.

1-800-654-4440 www.centraldirectory.org

**Florida Department of Education-
Office of Early Learning**

The Office of Early Learning is responsible for VPK curriculum and accountability.

850-245-0505 www.fldoe.org

Florida KidCare

Florida KidCare is the health insurance program for uninsured children younger than age 19.

1-888-540-5437 www.floridakidcare.com

2-1-1

2-1-1 is a national information and referral service that provides information and referrals to human services such as crisis intervention services, support groups, financial assistance, and job training.

Dial 211 www.211.org

Parents' Rights

- As a parent, I have the right to select VPK program options that meet my child's needs.
- As a parent, I have the right to enroll in either a school-year or summer free VPK program.
- As a parent, I have the right to select a VPK program that employs VPK instructors and meets minimum classroom requirements.
- As a parent, I have the right to select a VPK program that follows approved VPK curriculum and guidelines.
- As a parent, I have the right to enroll my four-year-old child in a VPK program.
- As a parent, I have the right to make an informed VPK choice.

Parents' Responsibilities

- As a parent, I am responsible for complying with date of birth verification requirements.
- As a parent, I am responsible for complying with residential address verification requirements.
- As a parent, I am responsible for ensuring my child participates in kindergarten screening.
- As a parent, I am responsible for my child's VPK transportation.
- As a parent, I am responsible for complying with the provider's attendance and other program policies.



Agency for Workforce Innovation

www.flready.com or *www.vpkflorida.org*
or call toll free at: 1-866-357-3239 (1-866 FL READY)
(TTY: 711)

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