

# Voluntary Prekindergarten Parent Handbook



# What is Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)?



## **Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program**

**(VPK)** is a FREE educational program created to prepare every four-year-old in Florida for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. The VPK program offers each child an opportunity to perform better in school and throughout life by offering quality programs that include developmentally appropriate curricula with a focus on early literacy skills, accountability, manageable class sizes, and increased teacher credentials. All eligible four-year-olds can participate in a VPK program option.

### **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 1 of the program year 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 choice about VPK**

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. You can use the following methods to help you with your decision:

- Visit the Department of Children and Families (DCF) website [www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider](http://www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider) to obtain VPK profiles of each participating private provider and public school in your area
- Contact the early learning coalition that works within your community to implement early learning support services at [www.flready.com](http://www.flready.com) and click on “Coalitions” or by calling 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711)
- Request a copy of the profile of each VPK provider and school in your county from the local coalition
- 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 at 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)

## **As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK program that best meets your family’s needs**

VPK 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. The VPK program is designed to offer:

- 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 for which the child is eligible for kindergarten

## **As a parent, you have the right to enroll your child in a free high quality VPK program**

Providers are not permitted to charge a registration fee or require you to agree to any additional services or care as a condition of enrollment in the VPK program. The provider must also have an alternative activity for a child that does not attend a field trip. Review the VPK provider's discipline and attendance policies to become informed of program policies and practices. The VPK program you select should guarantee:

- An approved VPK program at no cost to you for the VPK instructional hours
- 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

## **As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK provider that meets the standards required by DCF and local early learning coalitions**

Consider visiting the Department of Children and Families (DCF) website [www.myflorida.com/childcare](http://www.myflorida.com/childcare) or calling your local coalition office to confirm that the program is eligible. Also, observe the classrooms to ensure they meet the requirements for group size. Each VPK program should meet the following requirements:

- VPK private providers must be licensed (child care, family child care home, or large family child care home); or exempt from licensure (private school or faith-based provider);
- or be accredited by an approved accrediting association;
- VPK classroom ratios must be one instructor to every 10 children;
- VPK class size must not exceed 18 children in the school-year program; and
- VPK class size must not exceed 12 children in the summer program.

**As a parent, you have the right to select a VPK program that employs certified VPK instructors**

VPK instructors must meet minimum education standards and the minimum classroom requirements, including:

- Every lead VPK instructor must have, 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 private providers must have the VPK Director's Credential

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

The VPK curriculum must be developmentally appropriate and meet the VPK Education Standards approved by the State Board of Education. VPK program should provide:

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

**As a parent and a Florida resident, 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)**

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. This includes families that:

- Have a child with a disability or a special health care need; 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.
- Are in the military, temporarily based in Florida.
- May be displaced due to a hurricane or other natural disaster or are temporarily homeless.

**☐ As a parent, you have the right to withdraw your child and to re-enroll or transfer your four-year-old in another VPK program under specific conditions**

If you have any questions about eligibility, contact your local early learning coalition or the Agency for Workforce Innovation – toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711).

Parents may:

- Transfer their child in another VPK program of the same program type (school-year or summer) under certain conditions.
- Re-enroll their child in a summer VPK program due to an “Extreme Hardship” as long as the child has completed less than 70% of a VPK program

**☐ As a parent, you have the right to know the VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate of the VPK program you select**

The VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate measures how well a VPK provider prepares four-year-olds to be ready for kindergarten based upon Florida’s VPK Education Standards. Visit [www.improvevpk.org](http://www.improvevpk.org) to obtain VPK provider readiness rates. The VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rates:

- Are calculated every year for each private or public school VPK provider
- Are based on the scores of children who attended VPK and who are screened upon entry into kindergarten
- Serve as an additional piece of information that families may use to determine if a VPK program is best suited for their family



# Parents' Responsibilities



## ❑ **As a parent, you have the responsibility to provide date of birth verification**

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 1 of the program year to be eligible for VPK. If you have any questions about age requirements for VPK, contact your early learning coalition or the Agency for Workforce Innovation –toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711). Examples of 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 or other religious record accompanied by a sworn affidavit by the child's parent that the certificate is correct;
- A religious record of the child's birth that is accompanied by a sworn affidavit 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.

**□ As a parent, you have the responsibility to verify your child’s residency by presenting 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**

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 local early learning coalition or the Agency for Workforce Innovation – toll free: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY:711). Examples of documentation include:

- Utility bill;
- Pay stub;
- Government issued document (e.g., driver’s license);
- Parent may submit a sworn affidavit of the child’s residential address 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;
- If a child’s parent is a service member of the United States Armed Forces, the parent may provide a military order issued to the parent 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 may be based on other documents (e.g., letter from a homeless shelter or a sworn affidavit by the child’s parent who certifies that the child is homeless).

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

**□ As a parent, you have the responsibility to comply with the VPK attendance and other program policies**

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. **850-921-3180** or **1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)** [www.flready.com](http://www.flready.com)

## **Early Learning Coalition (ELC)**

Early learning coalitions have additional information on VPK, including application procedures and dates to apply in your county. **1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)**  
[www.flready.com](http://www.flready.com)

## **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](http://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](http://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](http://www.centraldirectory.org)

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

The Office of Early Learning is responsible for VPK curriculum and accountability.  
**850-245-0445** [www.fldoe.org/earlylearning](http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning)

## **Florida KidCare**

Florida KidCare is the health insurance program for uninsured children younger than age 19.  
**1-888-540-5437** [www.floridakidcare.com](http://www.floridakidcare.com)

## **2-1-1**

2-1-1 is a national, state and local 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](http://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.

### Disclaimer

*The information contained in the VPK Parent Handbook is accurate as of January 2009. The information is subject to changes based on modification of legislation, statute or rule.*

## Verification of Receipt

I certify that I have received a copy of the VPK Parent Handbook and have reviewed and understand the parent rights and responsibilities contained in this document. Signed:

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*Parent*

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*Date*

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*Orientation Staff*

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*Date*



**For more information contact:**



**AWI/Office of Early Learning**

107 East Madison Street  
MSC 140

Tallahassee, FL 32399

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

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