



Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program Parent Guide

The Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) Program 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, developmental standards, accountability, substantial instruction periods, manageable class size, and qualified instructors.

Choices

The VPK Program is offered by different approved providers in Florida communities. Parents can choose between private early learning providers and public school providers. Parents can contact their local early learning coalition (ELC) for a list of VPK provider profiles pursuant to 1002.53(5), F.S. Parents can choose one of three VPK Program types. The School-Year and Summer program types deliver classroom instruction and are available to all eligible students while the Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) program type is available only to children with disabilities.

School Year

- 540 instructional hours
- Lead instructor must have training equal to a Child Development Associate credential or greater
- Classes can have a maximum of 11 students with one lead instructor or a maximum of 20 students with a lead instructor and an assistant

Summer

- 300 instructional hours
- Lead instructor must have a Bachelor's degree or greater
- Classes can have a maximum of 12 students with one lead instructor

Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) program

This third type of VPK program is available only to children with disabilities who have current individual educational plans (IEP) and is delivered by specialized providers determined eligible by the Department of Education. This program type is tailored to address the identified needs on a child's IEP developed by the local school board. Ask your ELC for information about this type of program.

High Educational Standards

Children in the VPK Program receive a high-quality learning experience with teachers who meet educational standards set by the state. Teachers use a curriculum that must:

- Be developmentally appropriate,
- Prepare students to be ready for kindergarten based upon the statewide kindergarten screening, and
- Enhance the age-appropriate progress of students in attaining the VPK Education Standards adopted by the Florida State Board of Education.

Readiness Rates

Each VPK provider earns a “readiness rate” from the state of Florida. The readiness rate measures how well a VPK provider prepares children for kindergarten. Parents can view a provider’s VPK readiness rates at www.improvevpk.org.

Program Entry Requirements

There are two standard eligibility requirements (age and residency) for a child’s participation in each of the three VPK Program types and additional eligibility requirements (including an IEP) for a child’s participation in the SIS program type. There is no income requirement for the VPK Program. For an application and a complete list of accepted documentation for proof of age and residency or for more information on the additional SIS eligibility requirements, contact your local ELC.

Proof of age

A child must be four years old on or before September 1st of the school-year to participate in VPK during that school-year or the following summer. Parents must provide proof of their child’s age. An example of proof of age includes an original or certified copy of the child’s birth certificate or immunization records.

Proof of residency

Children must live in Florida to participate in VPK. Parents must show proof that the family lives in Florida. Examples of this include a parent’s driver’s license, utility bill or paystub.

Additional requirements for the Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) program

In addition to the standard eligibility requirements above, children who enroll in the SIS program type must also have a current IEP developed by the local school board.

Program Requirements

Attendance and reimbursement for School-Year and Summer program types

Law establishes how VPK providers will be paid for each child attending the VPK Program. Providers are paid for a full VPK day when a child attends any VPK portion of the day. The state also pays for up to one day’s worth of absences for every four days a child attends. VPK providers cannot charge parents for their children’s absences from the VPK Program.

Each VPK provider must have its own attendance policy, which providers must give to parents at the time of a child’s enrollment in that provider’s VPK Program. If a child or a parent does not comply with the VPK provider’s attendance policy, the provider may dismiss the child from its VPK Program. Parents should be familiar with their VPK provider’s attendance policy and may ask their ELC to help them understand issues related to attendance and absences.

Also, VPK providers must give parents a completed form each month that reflects their child's attendance in VPK for the previous month. The law requires parents to verify their child's attendance by reviewing this form each month and providing a signature to show the attendance record is accurate. The state pays the VPK provider based on this attendance record. Many VPK provider sites also require parents to sign their child in and out daily. The daily signature is a safety mechanism that helps ensure only certain individuals drop off and/or pick up children.

Attendance and reimbursement for Specialized Instructional Services program type

Specialized Instructional Services providers are reimbursed for the services that are consistent with the child's IEP which are received by the student. Parents can contact their local ELC for additional information regarding payment to Specialized Instructional Services providers.

Assessments

VPK providers conduct pre-assessments of enrolled children at the beginning of VPK classes and post-assessments of enrolled children near the end of VPK classes.

Inclusion

Private VPK providers may make reasonable accommodations to include children with special needs and disabilities in their programs. Public school VPK providers are required to make these accommodations. Parents of children with special needs may contact Florida's Office of Early Learning Call Center (866-357-3239, [TTY: 711]) to ask questions and receive referrals to address special needs matters for parents and providers.

Program Restrictions

Changing VPK Providers

Parents are responsible for researching potential VPK providers prior to enrolling their children. Parents may change their child's VPK provider **only one time** if he/she meets one of the specified criteria for either a good cause reenrollment or an extreme hardship reenrollment. Under limited circumstances, a child may receive a second reenrollment if he/she meets one of the specified criteria for a good cause exemption. Before removing your child from a VPK provider, contact your ELC to see if your child qualifies for a reenrollment or a good cause exemption.

VPK Provider Policies

VPK providers may have rules on discipline, food, dress, termination, and many other specific details. Parents should know the policies of the VPK provider they choose.

Transportation

Transportation to and from VPK is not part of the VPK Program. Parents are responsible for making sure their child gets to and from VPK each day. Some VPK providers may offer transportation. Parents should check their local options if VPK transportation is a need for their family.

Extra Hours and Extra Fees

VPK providers cannot charge parents fees or tuition for VPK Program services. Providers can, however, offer extra child care services beyond the VPK Program hours. Parents should check with their VPK provider to see what the charges are for optional child care services, if this is a need for the family. Providers are prohibited from requiring parents to enroll their children in other services as a condition of enrollment in VPK or to charge fees for VPK Program services.

Kindergarten Screening

Public schools and some private schools administer the kindergarten screening in their schools during the first 30 school days. The children's names and individual screening results are sent to the Department of Education which then works with Florida's Office of Early Learning to match the children's names and screening results with the provider where each child attended the VPK Program. These kindergarten screening results are used to assign readiness rates to each VPK provider. Law requires that parents whose children participate in VPK submit their children for the kindergarten screening.

For More Information, Contact Your ELC:

Florida's Office of Early Learning serves as the principal organization responsible for the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program and partners with the Department of Children and Families, the Florida Department of Education and local ELCs to administer the VPK Program. ELCs across the state help providers meet program requirements and help families take advantage of VPK Program services. Your local ELC has applications and additional information about the VPK Program for parents and potential providers. The ELC maintains a list of local VPK providers and public schools that participate in the VPK program.

To make an informed decision about a VPK provider, use the following resources:

- 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 child care, School Readiness and other community resources at 866-357-3239 (TTY: 711).
 - Visit the Department of Children and Families (DCF) website www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider to view inspection reports for licensed VPK providers in your area.
 - Contact the ELC that provides early learning support services in your community for more information on VPK Programs or to request a copy of the profile of each VPK provider in your county using the following contact information:
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