
VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions

(1) What is Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)?

A constitutional amendment passed by Florida's voters in Nov. 2002 required a voluntary prekindergarten program for all four-year-old children. House Bill 1-A was signed into law by Governor Bush on January 2, 2005, creating a program designed to prepare four-year-olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. The program allows a parent to enroll his or her eligible child (four years old by September 1 and residing in Florida) in a free VPK program. The program is voluntary for children and providers.

(2) When is a child eligible for the VPK program?

A child must be 4 years of age on or before September 1 of the program year, and reside in Florida to participate in the VPK program.

(3) How do I enroll a child in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program?

You may apply for the VPK program at <https://spe.schoolreadiness.org/pe/>. Parents are encouraged to check the website periodically for updates. Once you complete the application, your local early learning coalition will contact you for further information and to assist you in completing the application process to include scheduling an appointment for submission of documentation. If you do not hear from the coalition within 72 hours, please follow-up with a call to the coalition office.

If you have any questions, you can find the contact information for your local coalition by clicking on the link "Where do I go for VPK information in my area?" and selecting the county in which you live.

(4) What options for VPK will be available for families?

The Legislature created two different options for parents:

- (a) A school-year program consisting of 540 instructional hours; and
- (b) A summer program consisting of 300 instructional hours.

VPK providers have flexibility in structuring the hours per day and days per week to meet the required instructional hours. For example, if a program is 180 days (similar to a school-year calendar), it would offer 3 hours of instruction each day to meet the 540-hour requirement. A provider could also choose to offer a 6 hour-per-day program for 90 days. Providers may consider other options, including offering a morning or afternoon program or having a program for 2 or 3 days a week instead of every day.

(5) When did the VPK program begin and who is eligible to deliver the program?

The VPK program began in the 2005-2006 school year. Public, private, and faith-based providers may be eligible to deliver the program depending on whether they meet the minimum standards required in law. The school-year program cannot begin before the first day of a county's public school system. The summer program cannot begin before May 1st. However, providers have flexibility in meeting the required number of instructional hours and may have different start and end dates.

Children may participate in the summer VPK program the summer immediately before the school year for which the child is eligible for kindergarten.

(6) Which private providers are eligible to offer the VPK program?

Each private provider must be a licensed child care facility, a licensed family day care home (registered homes are not eligible), a licensed large family child care home, or a nonpublic school or faith-based child care provider that is exempt from licensure. Each private provider must also:

OPTION 1. Be accredited by an accrediting association that is a member of the National Council for Private School Accreditation (<http://www.ncpsa.org>), the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (<http://www.citaschools.org>), or the Florida Association of Academic Nonpublic Schools (<http://www.faans.org>);

OPTION 2. Hold a current Gold Seal Quality Care designation; or

OPTION 3. Be a licensed child care provider and demonstrate to the early learning coalition that the provider meets the VPK program requirements, including, but not limited to, credentials and background screenings of instructors, minimum and maximum class sizes, director credentials, and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Unlicensed family child care homes and informal child care providers are not eligible to participate in the program.

(7) Which public providers are eligible to offer the VPK program?

The district school board of each school district will determine which public schools in the district may deliver the VPK program. Parents should check with their local school district to find out which public school in their area offers the VPK program.

Every school district is required by law to deliver the summer VPK program for every eligible child wanting to participate.

(8) What are the standards or requirements for the school-year VPK program?

A provider delivering the school-year program must:

Offer at least 540 instructional hours

Maintain VPK classes with at least 4 children and no more than 18 children (however, providers may not exceed their licensed capacity)

Have a prekindergarten director credential (or a child care director credential, if completed before December 31, 2006)

Have a developmentally appropriate curriculum

Have, for each VPK class, at least one VPK instructor who:

(a) Holds, at a minimum, a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential issued by the National Credentialing Program or a credential approved by the Department of Children and Families as being equivalent to or greater than the national credential AND who completes a 5-hour emergent literacy training course (or the Department of Children and Families' 5-hour training in early literacy and language development, if completed before April 1, 2005); -OR-

(b) Holds one of the following educational credentials:

A bachelor's or higher degree in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer science.

A bachelor's or higher degree in elementary education, if the prekindergarten instructor has been certified to teach children any age from birth through 6th grade, regardless of whether the instructor's educator certificate is current.

An associate's or higher degree in child development.

An associate's or higher degree in an unrelated field, at least 6 credit hours in early childhood education or child development, and at least 480 hours of experience in teaching or providing child care services for children any age from birth through 8 years of age.

An educational credential approved by the Department of Education as being equivalent to or greater than an educational credential described above.

Have, for each VPK class of 11 or more children, at least one additional instructor who is not required to have a CDA credential or complete an emergent literacy training course

Employ instructors of good moral character

Complete background screening (Level 2 screening in s. 435.04, F.S.) for all instructors

(9) What are the standards or requirements for the summer VPK program?

A provider delivering the VPK summer program must:

Offer at least 300 instructional hours

Offer the program between May 1 and the start of the school year in August or September

Deliver the program to children no earlier than the summer before the school year for which the children are eligible to enter kindergarten

Maintain VPK classes with at least 4 children and no more than 10 children (however, providers may not exceed their licensed capacity)

Have a developmentally appropriate curriculum

Have, for each VPK class, an instructor who holds a valid Florida Educator Certificate or has one of the following credentials:

A bachelor's or higher degree in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education or family and consumer science; or

A bachelor's or higher degree in elementary education, if the prekindergarten instructor has been certified to teach children any age from birth through 6th grade, regardless of whether the instructor's educator certificate is current.

(10) When will I be able to select a provider?

You may choose a provider through the early learning coalition. By completing the application form at <https://spe.schoolreadiness.org/pe/>, you have submitted your contact information to your local coalition so they may contact you regarding the full application process at the appropriate time.

(11) How many children may each private provider serve in the VPK program?

The VPK program places no limit on the number of children served by each provider. It is each provider's decision of how many children to serve.

(12) Will providers be able to turn away children requesting to enroll in the VPK program?

A private prekindergarten provider may establish and use criteria to determine whether to admit a child for services in the school-year or summer programs. It is recommended that these criteria be objective and apply uniformly for all children. State and federal law prohibits certain discriminatory admissions. These admissions criteria may include, but are not limited to, the objective standards and methods described below

The following standards and methods are examples of objective criteria:

- (a) Random selection (*e.g.*, lottery);
- (b) Geography (*e.g.*, children who reside within a certain school zone or children who reside within a county served by the provider or school);
- (c) First come, first served;
- (d) Previous service (*i.e.*, children previously served by the provider or school); or
- (e) Targeted populations (*e.g.*, children at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation; children whose family income does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level; or children who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch meals under the National School Lunch Program).

Florida law prohibits VPK providers from discriminating against children or their parents on the ground of race, color, or national origin, including the refusal to admit a child to the VPK program. Florida law also prohibits providers from requiring enrollment into supplemental services as a condition of enrollment.

(13) How much does it cost to enroll in a VPK program?

The VPK program is FREE for eligible children, regardless of family income. Providers are not permitted to charge a registration fee or require parents to agree to any additional services. State law does not, however, prohibit a provider from charging registration fees for programs or care that are not part of the VPK program.

(14) Will the VPK program provide transportation?

No. Florida law specifies that each parent is responsible for the transportation of his or her child to and from the VPK program. Some VPK providers may offer transportation services, and families are encouraged to explore these options before choosing a VPK provider.

(15) Do I have to enroll my eligible child in the VPK program?

No. The VPK program is voluntary and your child does not have to participate.

(16) Is the VPK program only for 4 year olds? If yes, where can I send my 2 year old? Yes the Voluntary Pre-kindergarten Program is only open to children who turn four-years of age on or before September 1st of the program year and reside in the State of Florida. However, there are other options available to you for a two year old child. In each county there is a Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency that maintains a database of all legally operating early learning providers for that county. A trained CCR&R specialist will be able to provide you with a customized listing of referrals that match the needs of you and your child.

(17) How do I apply to be a VPK provider?

You may apply to be a VPK provider at <http://www.floridajobs.org/vpk/ProviderPreApp.aspx>. Providers are encouraged to check the website periodically for updates. Once you complete the application, your local early learning coalition will contact you for further information and to assist you in completing the application process. If you have any questions, you can find the contact information for your local coalition by clicking on the link "Where do I go for VPK information in my area?" and selecting the county in which you live.

(18) How much funding will be provided per child?

The Florida legislature approved a base student allocation of \$2,628 for the 2008-09 school year and the 2009 summer programs. During the special legislative session, the base student allocation was reduced by approximately \$53 for the remainder of the current school year program. The 2009 summer program base student allocation was reduced to \$2,190 with the ratios increased from 1:10 to 1:12. This amount varies based on the district cost differential.

(19) How will VPK providers get paid?

VPK providers will be paid in advance with a reconciliation of attendance conducted at the end of each month. Additional details regarding the payment process are available with the local early learning coalitions. During the 2009 summer program, changes are expected to be implemented that change the way providers are reimbursed for services rendered throughout the VPK program.

(20) What credentials must a VPK instructor have?

The prekindergarten instructor for the school-year program must hold, at a minimum, one of the following credentials:

A child development associate credential issued by the National Credentialing Program of the Council for professional Recognition (CDA); or

A credential approved by the Department of Children and Family Services as being equivalent to or greater than the credential described in subparagraph A. (FCCPC) (s. 1002.55(3)(c)1.a., F.S.)

The prekindergarten instructor for the summer program must hold, at a minimum, one of the following credentials (s. 1002.61(4)):

Be a certified teacher; or

Hold one the following educational credentials:

A bachelor's or higher degree in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer science;

A bachelor's or higher degree in elementary education, if the prekindergarten instructor has been certified to teach children any age from birth through 6th grade, regardless of whether the instructor's educator certificate is current, and if the instructor is not ineligible to teach in a public school because his or her educator certificate is suspended or revoke

The term "certified teacher" means a teacher holding a valid Florida educator certificate under s. 1012.56 who has the qualifications required by the district school board to instruct students in the summer prekindergarten program. In selecting instructional staff for the summer prekindergarten program, each school district shall give priority to teachers who have experience or coursework in early childhood education.

(21) Where can I find more information regarding the Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC) program?

You can find more information at the Department of Children and Families website.
www.myflorida.com/childcare/training

(22) What credentials have been determined to be equivalent to the national CDA for purposes of VPK?

The credentials that have been determined to be equivalent to or greater than the national CDA for purposes of VPK participation are:

A Birth Through Five Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC formerly known as the CDAE). A list of DCF approved training program providers can be found at www.myflorida.com/childcare,

An Early Childhood Professional Certificate (ECPC) issued by the Department of Education (formerly known as the CDAE). A list of training program providers can be found at www.myflorida.com/childcare,

A Child Care Apprenticeship Certificate (CCAC) issued by the Department of Education. A list of training program providers can be found at www.myflorida.com/childcare, or

A Staff Credential issued for formal education qualifications. A description of Formal Education Qualification can be found at www.myflorida.com/childcare.

The Employment History Recognition Exemption, School-Age FCCPC and DOE School-Age Professional Certificate will not be accepted as credentials for VPK instructors.

(23) Is the Employment History Recognition Exemption the same as being granted a FCCPC?

The Employment History Recognition Exemption is not the same as a FCCPC. The FCCPC is an approved course of study. The Employment History Recognition Exemption is an option that meets the staff credential requirement for purposes of licensing, but does not qualify as a credential for purposes of VPK. The Employment History Recognition Exemption is no longer granted by the Department of Children and Families, and has no renewal requirement.

(24) I am a family day care home provider. Can my child attend the VPK program I provide?

The adult to child ratios for family day care homes are established by s. 402.302(7), Florida Statutes. According to CF-FSP Pamphlet 175-2 (the Child Care Desk Reference) children under the age of 13 who are cared for in the provider's home are to be included when calculating the ratio. There is nothing in child care statute or rule that prohibits a family day care home provider from caring for his or her own children in the home. In fact, this is quite often the reason that a person becomes a family day care home provider. There is nothing in VPK law that prohibits this action, as long as there are at least four VPK children enrolled, with a maximum of 6 VPK children in your program.

(25) I want to work in a VPK program, what do I need to do?

Training varies depending on which program you want to work in. Requirements for working in an early learning program can be found on <http://www.myflorida.com/childcare/training>. Course schedules and fees can be obtained by selecting your county at the top of the page. For more information, please contact the Child Care Training Information Call Center at 1-888-352-2842.

(26) Why is VPK important?

The Voluntary Prekindergarten program is designed to help Florida's children to develop the skills they need to become good readers and successful students. It includes high literacy standards, strict accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes and qualified instructors.

Instructional time for VPK is comprised of planned activities or experiences that prepare children for early literacy, enhance the age-appropriate progress of children in attaining the performance standards adopted by the Department of Education for one or more developmental domains, and prepare children to be ready for kindergarten. Simply allowing children to play without teacher planning and reflection will not facilitate optimal progress for children. Learning centers and outside play are encouraged in VPK programs where teachers have thoughtfully planned a schedule that incorporates ample time for dramatic play and teacher-directed activities, provided children with choices, and included opportunities for observation and reflection. Classrooms with these elements provide the foundation for children to thrive and afford them the best opportunity to leave VPK ready for success in kindergarten. The Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

Education Standards describe skills that four-year-old children should know and be able to do by the end of their prekindergarten year and are designed to guide prekindergarten administrators and teachers in designing and implementing appropriate early learning environments. The implementing legislation of the VPK Education Program, states that each VPK provider can choose their own curriculum, as long as it aligns with the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Standards. Those Standards, along with a history of the document, can be found on the Department of Education's website at: <http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning/perform.asp>.

There is a huge a distinction between child care and early childhood education. For children, that difference will have a distinct impact on how well they do in school and life. Effective early childhood education affects more than just the first few years of learning; it sets the foundation for success throughout their lives.

If you have questions that have not been answered in this FAQ sheet, please call our Toll-Free hotline @ 1-866-357-3239 or 850-921-3180. You may also submit your question on the website

<http://www.floridajobs.org/VPK/questions.asp> by clicking "send us your thoughts and questions" under "Have a Question?"