



VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions

(courtesy of the Agency for Workforce Innovation)

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.

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.

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 visit the local office at:

Community Coordinated Care for Children, Inc (4C)
201 8th Street South, Suite 200, Naples, FL 34102
239-213-1137

Where does Collier County Parks and Recreation offer VPK?

East Naples Community Park, 3500 Thomasson Drive , 793-4414
Golden Gate Community Center, 4701 Golden Gate Pkwy, 252-4180
Immokalee Community Park, 321 North 1st St., 657-4449
Max Hasse Community Park, 3390 Golden Gate Blvd. W., 348-7500

What options for VPK will be available for families?

The Legislature created two different options for parents:

- A school-year program consisting of 540 instructional hours; and
- 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.

Collier County Parks and Recreation offers 4 hours per day (9 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.), Monday through Thursday for the school year. All school and county holidays will be observed.

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.

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. Collier County Parks and Recreation falls under Option 3.

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.

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:
 - 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-
 - 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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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:

1. A child development associate credential issued by the National Credentialing Program of the Council for professional Recognition (CDA); or
2. 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.)

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?"