



# Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program

## *Frequently Asked Questions for Parents*

### OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING



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#### **(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 by fall 2005. 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.

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#### **(2) *When does the VPK program begin and who is eligible to deliver the program?***

The VPK program will begin in the 2005-2006 school year (August or September 2005). 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 first summer VPK program will be offered in 2006. Children may participate in the summer VPK program the summer immediately before the school year for which the child is eligible for kindergarten.

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#### **(3) *Is my child eligible for the VPK program?***

A child must be 4 years of age on or before September 1, 2005, and reside in Florida to participate in the VPK program for 2005-2006.

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#### **(4) *How do I enroll my child in Florida's Voluntary Pre-K Program?***

You may pre-apply for the VPK program at <http://www.vpkflorida.org>. Parents are encouraged to check the website periodically for updates. Once you complete the pre-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.

**(5) *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.

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**(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 day 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?***

To deliver the school-year VPK program, a school district must be approved by the Department of Education as reducing the district's average class sizes and having sufficient educational facilities and capital outlay funds. The Department of Education is scheduled to verify which school districts have met these requirements in March 2005. Once approved, each eligible school district shall choose which public schools may offer the program, and those schools are required to register with the local early learning coalition.

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

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

Before you can select a provider, providers must apply and be found eligible to offer the VPK program. The provider eligibility process has just begun. When this process is complete, you will be able to choose a provider through the early learning coalition. By completing the pre-application form at [www.vpkflorida.org](http://www.vpkflorida.org), you have submitted your contact information to your local coalition so they may contact you regarding the full application process at the appropriate time.

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***(9) 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.

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***(10) Will providers be able to turn away children requesting to enroll in the VPK 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.

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***(11) 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.

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***(12) 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.

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

No. The VPK program is voluntary.

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*If you have questions that have not been answered in this FAQ sheet, please submit your question on the website by clicking "send us your thoughts and questions" under "Have A Question?"*