

Frequently Asked Questions for Providers

(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.

(2) What options for VPK will be available to 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. Keep in mind, programs must be developmentally appropriate and the state will only pay for instructional hours - activities such as napping do not qualify for funding. 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.

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

The VPK program began 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 was 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.

(4) 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, or a public 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

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(<http://www.citaschools.org>), or the Florida Association of Academic Nonpublic Schools (<http://www.faans.org>); or

- 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.

(5) 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 was scheduled to verify which school districts have met these requirements in March 2005. Once approved, each eligible 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.

(6) 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 July 1, 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.

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- 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

(7) 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.

(8) 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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(9) Will providers be able to turn away children requesting to enroll in their 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.

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

The amount of funding per child will be decided by the Legislature each legislative session. The current base student allocation for Palm Beach County is \$2,693 per child.

(11) Will there be parent fees associated with the 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.

(12) 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 being designed and will be available at a later date.

(13) Will the VPK program provide funding for transportation?

No. Florida law specifies that each parent is responsible for the transportation of his or her child to and from the VPK program. VPK providers may offer transportation services for families.

(14) 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 Florida Department of Children and Family Services as being equivalent to or greater than the credential described in subparagraph A. (CDAE) (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)):

1. Be a certified teacher; or

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2. Hold one the following educational credentials:
 1. A bachelor's or higher degree in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer science;
 2. 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.

(15) Where can I find more information regarding the CDAE program?

You can find more information at the Department of Children and Families website.
<https://training01-dcf.myflorida.gov/dcf/cct/cdaecred.html>

(16) 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:

1. A Florida CDAE (see website above for approved CDAE programs).
2. Formal Education Qualifications

(17) Is the Employment History Recognition Exemption the same as being granted a CDAE?

The Employment History Recognition Exemption is not the same as a Florida CDAE, which is an approved course of study. The Employment History Recognition Exemption is an alternative to the Florida CDAE that meets the staff credential requirement for purposes of licensing, but does not qualify as a credential for purposes of VPK.

(18) What will I receive if I qualify for an Employment History Recognition Exemption?

The Department of Children and Families will grant you a CF-FSP Form 5206. This is a staff credential verification form. This credential does not qualify as a credential for purposes of VPK.

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

The adult: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.