



Florida Department of Education
Office of Early Learning
Child Care Resource & Referral Network
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<http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/>



A Parent's Guide to Child Care

FAMILY GUIDE
*Selecting Quality
Early Learning Programs*

www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com



A MESSAGE FOR FAMILIES

Choose Wisely

Choosing an early learning program for your child is one of the most important and difficult decisions you will ever make. This brochure will provide information about quality programs so you can find the best match for you and your child.

The right early learning program helps your child learn new skills and develop socially. Look for a positive and caring relationship between teachers and children. Make sure the teacher is someone you can talk to comfortably and trust. When you walk into the child care center or home, the atmosphere should be cheerful and safe. The children should be having fun and the program should include experiences and activities you think are important for your child. Above all, you want to choose a program where your child will be safe and happy—and where your ideas about parenting will be supported.

Be a Smart Shopper

Use the information in this brochure to help you decide if a program is a good fit for you and your child. The teachers should be caring, qualified and well organized. Read the rules and policies about fees, meals, discipline, illness, attendance and emergencies. Ask the staff to talk about their views on child development and about the daily activities they organize for the children. Walk around and look at the whole program area; be certain you are comfortable with the center and staff, and you will feel happy with your child's entire experience there.

Do Your Research

It is a good idea to visit at least three early learning programs for at least 30 minutes each. If possible, bring your child with you on the visits and feel free to ask questions. Visit for a second time on another day and use the [Quality Checklist](#) for guidance on what to look for during your visit. Ask for references and talk to parents of children attending the program.

Make an Informed Decision

Like any parent, you want a program that will keep your child healthy, safe and happy. Before making a final decision, check the state's child care licensing website for inspection information about any licensed program you are considering. <http://cares.myflfamilies.com/PublicSearch>

School Readiness Program

The School Readiness program offers financial assistance to eligible families to help pay for child care, and provides safe, quality child care for children at risk of neglect or abuse.

1-866-357-3239 (Toll-free Family Line)

www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com

Step Up for Students

Step Up for Students provides K-12 scholarships, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts, and related support to economically disadvantaged families and those caring for children with special needs. These programs offer families the ability to choose schools and/or services to customize their children's education. Families who qualify for the free or reduced-priced school lunch program, children who are homeless, in foster care or in out-of-home care, or those with specific disabilities could be eligible.

1-877-735-7837 (Toll-free)

www.StepUpForStudents.org

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

A free voluntary educational program designed to prepare 4-year-olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success.

1-866-447-1159 (Toll-free)

www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com





Florida Child Support Enforcement

Child support services that help to locate missing parents, establish legal paternity, and establish, enforce and modify support orders.

1-800-622-KIDS (5437) (Toll-free)

www.myflorida.com/dor/childsupport/

Florida KidCare

Health insurance program for uninsured children younger than age 19. The Florida KidCare program assesses eligibility based on age and family income.

1-888-540-5437 (Toll-free) (TTY: 1-877-316-8748)

www.floridakidcare.com

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8.

1-800-424-2460 (Toll-free)

www.naeyc.org

Office of Homelessness

Designated lead agencies provide supportive services and information to address the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Call 850-922-4691 to locate your designated lead agency.

www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness

Parents without Partners

Provides help to single parents through discussions, professional speakers, study groups, publications and social activities for families and adults.

1-800-637-7974 (Toll-free)

www.parentswithoutpartners.org

Using Child Care Resource and Referral Services

All families can receive help with researching and selecting programs that best meet their needs. **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)** is a free service provided by your local early learning coalition. Trained staff can answer your questions about choosing the best early learning program for your family, provide you with program referrals that are customized to your preferences and offer referrals and information about other services available in your community. Help is available by phone, in person and via email. To locate your local early learning coalition, contact the state CCR&R network office Toll-free Family Line at 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711), or you can locate information online at www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com.

Inclusive Early Learning Programs

Inclusive early learning programs are designed to provide an educational setting in which all children, regardless of ability, can participate in a broad range of activities to grow and develop. A quality inclusive early learning program will exhibit all of the requirements listed for other program types. Parents of children with disabilities, developmental delays or special health care needs should look for a program that meets the individual needs of their child and their family. Visit www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com to find services in your community, or call the Toll-free Family Line at 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711).



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The **protective factors** help families increase the health and well-being of their children. This information is important in making sure children are successful at home, in school and as adults later in life at work and in the community. Protective factors help families find resources, supports or coping strategies that help them to parent effectively, even under stress.

Nurturing and Attachment

Research shows that babies who receive affection and nurturing from their parents have the best chance of developing into children who are happy, healthy and competent. Research also shows that a consistent relationship with a caring adult in the early years is associated with better grades, healthier behaviors, more positive peer interactions and increased ability to cope with stress later in life.

As children grow, nurturing remains important for healthy physical and emotional development. Parents nurture their children by making time to listen to them, being involved and interested in their school and other activities, staying aware of their interests and friends, and being willing to advocate for the child when necessary.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Parents who understand the usual course of child development are better prepared to provide their children with respectful communication, consistent expectations and rules and opportunities that promote independence. When parents are not aware of normal developmental milestones, mistakenly interpret their child's behavior in a negative way, or do not know how to respond to and effectively manage a child's behavior, they can become frustrated and may resort to harsh discipline.

As children grow and mature, parents need to continue to learn and adapt how they respond to their children's needs. Interacting with other children of similar ages helps parents better understand their own child. Observing other caregivers who use positive techniques for managing children's behavior also provides an opportunity for parents to learn healthy alternatives.

Parenting styles need to be adjusted for each child's unique temperament and circumstances. Parents of children with special needs may benefit from additional coaching and support to reduce frustration and help them understand their child's unique needs.

Department of Children & Families (DCF) Licensing Website

DCF is statutorily responsible for administering child care licensing and training throughout Florida. This program regulates licensed child care facilities, licensed family child care homes and child care facilities for mildly ill children in 62 of the 67 counties in Florida. Licensing inspection reports may be viewed on this website.

www.myflfamilies.com/childcare

Domestic Violence

Crisis intervention and support services to victims of domestic violence and their children are provided by certified domestic violence centers throughout Florida. Call the Toll-free Florida Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline.

1-800-500-1119 (Toll-free).

Earned Income Tax Credit/ Dependent Care Tax Credit

A special tax benefit for working people who earn low or moderate incomes. Allows workers who qualify to receive a portion of their income tax refund in advance on each paycheck throughout the year. Enables parents to deduct eligible child care expenses from their taxable income.

1-800-TAX-1040 or 1-800-829-1040 (Toll-free)

www.irs.ustreas.gov

Employ Florida Marketplace

Provides access to statewide and local workforce resources, assistance in searching for jobs, building and posting resumes.

1-866-352-2345 (Toll-free).

www.employflorida.com/

Florida Abuse Hotline

24-hour hotline that receives reports of abuse and exploitation of children, elderly and adults with disabilities.

1-800-96-ABUSE or 1-800-962-2873 (Toll-free)

www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/abuse-hotline

Florida's Early Steps System

Early Steps is Florida's early intervention system that offers services to [eligible](#) children (birth to 36 months) with significant delays or a condition likely to result in a developmental delay. Early Intervention is provided to support families and caregivers in developing the competence and confidence to help their child learn and develop.

1-800-218-0001 (Toll-free)

www.floridahealth.gov



RESOURCES TO ASSIST FAMILIES

211 Services

National, state and local information and referrals for human services such as food, housing, crisis intervention, employment and healthcare.

Dial 2-1-1 or visit www.211.org

Access Florida

Temporary cash assistance and food stamp information is available through DCF's Access Florida Hotline.

1-866-762-2237 (Toll-free)

www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access-florida-food-medical-assistance-cash

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

General ADA information is available including answers to specific technical questions, free ADA materials and information about filing a complaint. The ADA prohibits most early learning programs from discriminating against children with disabilities.

1-800-514-0301 (Toll-free) 1-800-514-0383 (TTY)

www.ada.gov

Child Care Aware® of America

National network of more than 900 child care resource and referral agencies committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality programs and resources in their local community; maintains links to resource and referral agencies in every state.

1-800-424-2246 (Toll-free)

www.childcareaware.org

Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R)

Offers support to local early learning coalitions; helps families, child care providers and communities choose and plan for quality child care; offers information about community resources.

1-866-357-3239 (Toll-free Family Line)

www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com

Child Help USA® National Child Abuse Hotline

This hotline is staffed 24 hours daily with professional crisis counselors with access to thousands of resources.

1-800-4-A-Child, or 1-800-422-4453 (Toll-free)

www.childhelp.org

Parental Resilience

Parents who can cope with the stresses of everyday life as well as an occasional crisis have resilience—the flexibility and inner strength to bounce back when things are not going well. Parents with resilience also know how to seek help in times of trouble. Their ability to deal with life's ups and downs serves as a model of coping behavior for their children.

Multiple life stressors, such as family history of abuse or neglect, physical and mental health problems, marital conflict, substance abuse, and domestic or community violence—and financial stressors such as unemployment, financial insecurity and homelessness—can reduce a parent's capacity to cope effectively with the typical day-to-day stresses of raising children.

All parents have inner strengths or resources that can serve as a foundation for building their resilience. These may include faith, flexibility, humor, communication skills, problem-solving skills, mutually supportive caring relationships, or the ability to identify and access outside resources and services when needed. All of these qualities help strengthen their capacity to parent effectively and can be nurtured and developed through supportive interactions with others.

Social Connections

Parents with a network of emotionally supportive friends, neighbors and family often find it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Most parents need people they can call on once in a while when they need a sympathetic listener, advice or support, such as transportation or occasional child care. A parent's supportive relationships also model positive social interactions for children, while giving children access to other supportive adults. On the other hand, research has shown that parents who are isolated and have few social connections are at higher risk for child abuse and neglect.

Being new to a community, recently divorced or a first-time parent makes a support network even more important. Some parents may need to develop self-confidence and social skills to expand their social networks. Opportunities for social connections exist within faith-based organizations, schools, hospitals, community centers and other places where support groups or social groups meet.



Concrete Supports for Parents

Families whose basic needs (for food, clothing, housing and transportation) are met have more time and energy to devote to their children's safety and well-being. When parents do not have steady financial resources, lack health insurance or face a family crisis (such as a natural disaster or the incarceration of a parent), their ability to support their children's healthy development may be at risk. Some families may also need assistance connecting to social service supports such as alcohol and drug treatment, domestic violence counseling or public benefits.

Parents who identify and access resources in their community may help prevent stresses that sometimes lead to child maltreatment. Finding concrete supports may also help prevent the unintended neglect that sometimes occurs when parents are unable to provide for their children.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Children's emerging ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults and peers. Parents, guardians and caregivers grow more responsive to children's needs—and are less likely to feel stressed or frustrated—as children learn to tell parents what they need and how parental actions make them feel, rather than “acting out” difficult feelings.

Children's challenging behaviors or delays in social emotional development create extra stress for families. Parenting is more challenging when children do not or cannot respond positively to their parents' nurturing and affection. Identifying and working with children early to keep their development on track helps their parents facilitate healthy development.

Adapted from the US Department of Health and Human Services *Preventing Child Maltreatment and Promoting Well-Being: A Network for Action*.

Resource: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones> provides resources and discusses the importance of understanding child development and developmental milestones.



Head Start Services in Florida

Head Start serves preschool-age children from age 3 to school-age and is offered in all 67 counties in Florida. Early Head Start serves infants, toddlers and pregnant women and provides services in 54 counties. Florida is also host to two Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs: East Coast Migrant Head Start and Redlands Christian Migrant Association. These grantees serve the unique needs of Florida's migrant families who have children ages 6 weeks to school-age.

Head Start programs offer a variety of service models, depending on the needs of the local community. Programs may be based in centers or schools that children attend for part-day or full-day services; family child care homes; and/or children's own homes, where a staff person visits once a week to provide services to the child and family. Children and families who receive home-based services gather periodically with other enrolled families for a group learning experience facilitated by Head Start staff.

Head Start programs provide services to children with disabilities or special health care needs and collaborate with local school districts, early learning coalitions, health professionals and other partners to assist the family in coordinating services. Head Start classrooms offer low teacher-to-child ratios, a research-based curriculum, teachers with bachelor degrees or CDAs, year round services (in most communities), and most participate in Florida's VPK Program.

For more information and a listing by county of local Head Start programs in your area, go to www.FloridaHeadStart.org or contact the Head Start State Collaboration Office at 850-717-8648. Information on Head Start can also be found at the Florida Head Start Association website, www.flheadstart.org, or at the Office of Head Start's website, the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, <http://ECLKC.ohs.acf.hhs.gov>.



HEAD START

Head Start is the name for a group of federal programs that promote the school readiness of children from low-income families. Head Start programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in

- Language and literacy.
- Cognition and general knowledge.
- Physical development and health.
- Social and emotional development.
- Approaches to learning.

Head Start programs provide comprehensive services to children and their families, which include health, dental, nutrition, social and other services determined to be necessary based on the needs and desires of the family. In addition to education and cognitive development services, Head Start services are designed to be responsive to each child and family's ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage.

Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Programs build relationships with families that support

- Family well-being and positive parent-child relationships.
- Families as learners and lifelong educators.
- Family engagement in transitions.
- Family connections to peers and community.
- Families as advocates and leaders.



"PERFECT" MATCH: YOUR CHILDREN AND THEIR CHILD CARE SETTING

Children have different ways of behaving with others. How does your child like to spend time and how does he or she act? Match your child's temperament with the style of an early learning program. Remember, there is no right or wrong temperament or personality. Understanding your child's activity level and personality will help you find the best early learning program for your family.

What is your child's personal style?

Adaptable/Outgoing

- Flexible
- Approaches new people/situations with ease
- Good with transitions

Find large group settings that provide social opportunities and new experiences.

Cautious/slow to warm up

- Thoughtful
- Cautious in new surroundings/with new people
- Has difficulty with transitions

Find small group settings that are less overwhelming.

Feisty/Energetic

- Passionate, feels things intensely
- Has difficulty controlling strong feelings
- Impatient and demanding

Find programs where each child has a primary caregiver.

How does your child react to the world?

Big Reactors

- Expresses feelings and does not hold back

Find caregivers who help your child express emotions in a more controlled way.

Low Reactors

- Plays quietly, fusses very little and sleeps a lot

Find teachers who introduce new activities gently.



How active is your child?

High Activity

- Always on the go, explores with body movements

Find programs that offer one-on-one attention, ways to explore safely and lots of physical play.

Low Activity

- Sits quietly, explores through senses

Find caregivers who engage your child in sensory-rich activities (sight, touch, smell, taste and sound).

How social is your child?

Very Social

- Enjoys meeting new people
- Is happiest when interacting with others

Find programs with opportunities for your child to play in groups.

Less Social

- Generally shy and reserved around strangers
- Needs extra time to feel comfortable with new people

Find programs that allow your child to become comfortable at his/her own pace.

How does your child deal with change?

High Tolerance

- Is not disturbed by changes and is highly adaptable
- Copes very well with frustration

Find programs with mixed-age groups that offer frequent challenges and high stimulation.

Low Tolerance

- Is very sensitive to change
- Gets upset when daily routine is disrupted
- Is easily frustrated and bothered by change

Find programs with same-age groups and consistent routines that support your child's independence.

Consider your child's unique needs

- Sleeping habits/routine
- Cultural identity
- Special needs/disabilities



School Readiness Program Highlights

- Provides income-eligible families the resources to find and pay for quality child care for their children.
- Promotes parental choice in choosing a child care program and allows working parents to make their own decisions that best suit their family's needs.
- Provides education to parents to help them make informed choices about quality child care and early learning.
- Enhances the quality and increases the availability of child care for all families.
- Prepares children for kindergarten and continued educational success.

Developmental Screening and Referrals

At the time of enrollment in the School Readiness Program, children age birth to five years are provided a developmental screening to make sure they are on the right developmental path. If any concerns are found, the child will receive referrals to specific health and/or education specialists.

These services also work along with other programs for young children such as Head Start, Early Head Start, the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program and local public school districts.

Around-the-Clock Care

These services include extended-day, extended-year and school-age care for children to support parents in becoming financially self-sufficient.

Adapted from *Matching Your Infant's or Toddler's Style to the Right Child Care Setting*, 2009
Child Care Aware®.



FINANCIAL RESOURCES

School Readiness Program

The School Readiness Program helps low-income parents who are working or in school full-time pay for a portion of their child care costs. The program prepares children to become ready for school, and provides parents with information on child development and other topics of interest.

How to Apply

Parents can apply for the School Readiness Program by going online to the single point of entry page, <https://spe.schoolreadiness.org/pe/>, and choosing the school readiness option and their county of residence, or they can contact their local early learning coalition.

Next Steps

Once a parent applies for the School Readiness Program they will need to follow up on the status of their application by contacting their local early learning coalition.

If there is no funding available at the time a parent's application is submitted, they will be placed on the wait list. If a parent is placed on the wait list, they can receive information about local community resources that may assist their family.

Parents on the wait list will need to reapply for the program at least every six months or they will lose their spot on the wait list. To reapply, parents can contact their local early learning coalition or they can go online to the single point of entry page, <https://spe.schoolreadiness.org/pe/>.

If there is no wait list for services and you qualify, you will be contacted by an early learning coalition representative to set an appointment date and discuss the documents you will need to provide.

Some families may receive services right away if they are in family crisis and have a referral for services from the Department of Children and Families.

TYPES OF EARLY LEARNING PROVIDERS

Licensed or License-Exempt Centers

Early learning centers may be licensed or license-exempt and are usually located in spaces adapted for early learning purposes. These include stand-alone centers and those located in businesses, apartment complexes, public schools, universities, hospitals and faith-based facilities. Prekindergarten programs (both school-based and non-school-based), Head Start programs, on-site employee early learning centers and faith-based centers are some of the types of centers that are available.

Licensed Centers

Licensed centers must pass an initial inspection to ensure all licensing standards have been met. Licensed centers are also re-inspected to follow up on health and safety standards. To meet the standards these centers must

- Meet physical facility requirements.
- Follow health, safety and nutrition guidelines.
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records.
- Allow parents/guardians access to their children at all times.
- Comply with annual inspection schedules.
- Meet staff and director training requirements.
- Conduct screening and background checks of all employees/teachers.
- Document current immunization records and physical examinations for all children in care.
- Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs.



Religious-Exempt Centers

Some religious centers are exempt from child care licensing. These centers must be an integral part of a church or faith-based school, and must

- Be accredited by, or a member of, a state-recognized accrediting body.
- Comply with state and federal background screening requirements.
- Meet local governing requirements for city or county health and safety regulations.
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records.
- Maintain current CPR and First Aid certifications.
- Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs.

Adult-to-Child Ratios for Licensed and License-Exempt Centers

Ratios represent the number of children that one adult may supervise for each age group. Ratios are regulated by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

- Birth to 12 months (1:4)
- 12-24 months (1:6)
- 2-year-old children (1:11)
- 3-year-old children (1:15)
- 4- to 5-year-old children (1:20)
- 4-year-olds in VPK education programs
 - School-year program (1:11)
 - Summer program (1:12)
- 5 years of age or older (1:25)



UNREGULATED CARE

Unregulated child care does not require licensure or compliance inspections by the state.

Informal Care

Informal care takes place in a person's home where one adult cares for children from only one family. The person is often a relative, neighbor and/or friend. This type of care has no state guidelines or inspections. Informal providers may qualify to participate in the School Readiness Program (see Financial Resources section) after completing a six-hour health and safety course and by meeting early learning coalition requirements.

Au Pair/Nanny Care

Au pairs provide families with intercultural, individualized, live-in child care. Most au pairs are members of one of 14 federally designated U.S. Au Pair Sponsor Agencies, which are regulated by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Exchange Visitor Program. Nannies may also be hired by families locally to care for the children of one family and may live in or out of the family's home.

Summer Camps and Recreational Programs

Summer camps are recreational, educational and enrichment programs operated only during school year summer breaks, for children who are 5 years of age on or before September 1 and older, or children who are in kindergarten and above. Adult/child ratios of summer camps vary. This type of care requires no state inspections. All summer camp staff and directors are level 2 background screened.

Membership Organizations

Not-for-profit programs are associated with or certified by national organizations, which often require screening; therefore, personnel are not subject to DCF screenings. However, screening may be required as part of their certification process. An example of these organizations is the Boys and Girls Club.

Resort/Hotel Care

Resort/hotel care establishments provide care solely for guests. All staff caring for children must be screened.





License-Exempt Programs

The following programs are exempt from school-age care licensure, but must meet city/county health and safety regulations (exempt programs are not government inspected):

- Public schools and non-public schools and their integral programs.
- Summer camps with children in full-time residence.
- Summer day camps.
- Programs that are an integral part of a faith-based school.
- Religious education programs conducted during vacation periods.
- Operators of temporary establishments (e.g., hurricane shelters).

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive requirements than those mandated by the state.

Family Child Care Homes

Family child care takes place in a person's home for children from unrelated families. Group size may vary according to the preferences of the family child care provider. Ages of children may often be mixed, although some providers serve only a specific age group (such as infants, toddlers or preschoolers). Different requirements apply to different programs, with some family child care homes being licensed and some registered.

Registered Family Child Care Homes

These providers are required to meet minimal state requirements, such as

- Register annually with DCF.
- Complete and provide to parents/guardians an annual health and safety home inspection checklist.
- Provide proof of substitute care.
- Provide proof of background checks for all adults in the household.
- Complete additional hours of training annually.
- Complete specific training in early literacy and language development.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes

Licensed family child care home providers must meet all requirements listed above for registered family child care homes and must meet the following licensing requirements regulated by DCF:

- Follow health, safety and nutrition guidelines.
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records.
- Comply with licensing standards of local and state governments.
- Maintain current infant and child CPR and First Aid certifications.
- Pass an inspection prior to receiving a child care operating license.
- Comply with two routine and one renewal licensing inspections annually.
- Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs.

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive requirements than those mandated by the state.



Adult-to-Child Ratios for Family Child Care Homes

Family child care homes are regulated by DCF. A family child care provider may care for one of the following groups of children, including the provider's own children younger than age 13 years of age:

- (1:4) Birth to 12 months of age.
- (1:6) No more than three are under 12 months.
- (1:10) As long as at least five children are school-age and no more than two are under 12 months of age.
- (2:8) If more than four children under 24 months old.
- (2:12) If no more than four children are under 24 months old.

Gold Seal and Accreditation

The Gold Seal Quality Care program acknowledges child care facilities and family day care homes that are accredited by nationally recognized agencies and whose standards reflect quality in the level of care and supervision provided to children. To access the list of current DCF-approved agencies participating in the Gold Seal Quality Care Program, visit <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-care/goldseal>.



SCHOOL-AGE CARE

Licensed or License-Exempt

A school-age child is one who is at least 5 years old by September 1, and who is attending kindergarten through fifth grade. A school-age program is a licensed or license-exempt program that serves only school-age children. The setting for a school-age program may be a public or private school, private center, family child care home, faith-based facility or community/recreation program. School-age programs may be open before and after school as well as full days during teacher planning days, spring, winter and summer breaks.

Licensed Programs

Licensed programs must pass inspections to ensure that all standards required by law are met, including

- Meet physical facility requirements.
- Follow health, safety and nutrition guidelines.
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records.
- Allow parents access to their children in care at all times.
- Comply with annual inspection schedules.
- Receive 45 hours of training initially, plus a minimum of 10 hours annually thereafter.
- Submit screening and background checks of all employees/caregivers.
- Comply with a ratio of one adult for 25 children.
- Have a supervisor/director who holds an administrator's credential (multi-site supervision at school-age child care programs is permitted).





How to Apply

To apply for VPK online, go to the Office of Early Learning's website to the single point of entry page (<https://vpkcp.floridaeearlylearning.com/>).

You can apply and upload proof of Florida residency and documents that verify the age of your child. Registration is complete once your application has been reviewed and accepted. Take the certificate of eligibility that you will receive after registration to the VPK program of your choice.

Contact your local early learning coalition for additional information and questions on how to apply for VPK. For local contact information, visit the Office of Early Learning website at www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com or call the Toll-free Family Line at 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711).



VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK) EDUCATION PROGRAM

VPK builds a strong educational foundation for 4-year-old children so they are prepared to enter kindergarten with the skills that lead to reading and writing success. The early learning programs that offer VPK must ensure staff and programs meet high-quality expectations. The programs' curricula must be effective and class size must allow the teachers to build close relationships with each child.

VPK Highlights

- High quality educational program with a focus on early literacy skills.
- **Free** for all children who live in Florida and are 4-years-old on or before September 1 of the program year.
- www.BrightBeginningsFL.org includes information and materials about VPK readiness designed specifically for parents.

VPK Program Options

Parents may select one program for their child:

VPK School-Year Program

- 540 instructional hours

VPK Summer Program

- 300 instructional hours during summer

VPK Specialized Instructional Services (VPK-SIS)



VPK Specialized Instructional Services (VPK-SIS)

A child who is eligible for VPK and who has a disability, as evidenced by a current individual educational plan (IEP), is also eligible for specialized instructional services instead of attending a traditional VPK program. The Department of Education approves VPK-SIS providers whose services meet statutory standards, maintains a list of approved providers and notifies each school district and early learning coalition of the approved provider list. Parents with questions about accessing VPK-SIS for their child should contact their local early learning coalition. To locate information for your early learning coalition, go online to www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com or call the state CCR&R network office Toll-free Family Line at 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711).

VPK Providers and Instructors

VPK providers and instructors must meet high standards required by Florida law.

- Parents can choose the provider that meets their own family's needs.
- Options for parents include public schools, private centers and licensed family child care homes.
- All VPK instructors must have at the minimum a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) for the school-year program or a bachelor's degree for the summer program.
- Class ratio is one teacher to 11 children, and class size cannot exceed 20 children with two instructors (school-year). Summer is one instructor with a maximum of 12 students.



VPK Curriculum

- Must be developmentally appropriate and focused on early literacy skills.
- Must prepare the child to be ready for kindergarten based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education.

Readiness Rates

The Office of Early Learning assigns a kindergarten readiness rate annually for VPK providers that are private or public schools and that offer either the school-year (540-hour) or summer (300-hour) program. The readiness rate measures how well a VPK provider prepares 4-year-olds to be ready for kindergarten based on the performance standards adopted by the State Board of Education and serves as an additional piece of information families may use to determine if a VPK program is best suited to the needs of their family.

Transportation

Parents are responsible for their child's transportation to and from the VPK program.



Early Learning Coalitions

Your local early learning coalition has information including application procedures and dates to apply in your county. For local contact information visit the Office of Early Learning website at www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com or call the Toll-free Family Line at 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711).

