

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The information contained in the questions and answers below are current and correct to the best of our knowledge as of March 2005

Parent Related Questions and Answers

	Questions	Answers
1.	What children are eligible for the program?	Eligibility requirements are: child must be 4 years old by September 1, 2005 and the child must be a Florida resident.
2.	How can I register my child?	If you have computer access, you can go to www.vpkflorida.com and click on <i>Parent Pre-Application</i> or you may call (727) 547- 5782 and your name will be entered into a data base. This does not commit you to anything and you may withdraw your child's name at anytime. You will be required to complete additional information at a later time.
3.	What schools will be offering this program?	Private preschools and family child care homes (they must serve no less than four and no more than 18 four – year old children) that are certified as Voluntary Pre K sites. The public schools' involvement will be minimal in the start-up school year beginning in August 2005 but will be offering the program starting in summer of 2006. Pre-schools and family child care homes interested in possibly participating can call 547-5782 or go on to www.vpkflorida.com to pre-register and get on mailing lists. The full list of qualified participating schools will not be available for several months.
4.	When will the program begin?	In Pinellas County, the school year program will begin in August or September 2005 and the first summer program will begin in May 2006. Each provider will be able to choose their own length of core VPK day and start and end dates.
5.	(A.) How many times a year will the program be offered? (B.) Can my child attend both sessions?	(A.) There will be school year sessions beginning in August or September of 2005 and another session during the summer of 2006. Parents must choose one or the other. (B.) No. A child may only attend one session (either the school year or the summer) unless they are dis-enrolled very early in the program for an appropriate cause.
6.	What would be considered an appropriate cause to dis-enroll a child?	The following are examples of appropriate reasons for dis-enrolling your child: medical reasons, job transfer, and moving home address.
7.	How many hours will my child attend a Pre K day?	The Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas may approve 2 to 3 models for the traditional school year ranging from 3 hour – core VPK days to possibly 4 or 5 hour-core VPK days for a total of 540 hours. Summer school models will have longer days for a total of 300 hours.
8.	If I need care beyond the 3 to 4 or 5 VPK hours will there be transportation available to take my child to another care setting?	No. There is not state funded transportation provision provided for this program. You may wish to choose a program that has extended hours.
9.	Who will pay for those remaining hours?	Parents will be responsible for paying for any additional hours of care they require beyond the VPK day. If eligible (low income), parents may apply for extended day scholarships through Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas.
10.	Does my child have to attend a Voluntary Pre K program?	No. Participation is completely voluntary.

11.	Can the pre-school require registration fees or additional fees for field trips etc?	You as a parent cannot be refused enrollment due to failure to pay registration or other fees for the core VPK day.
12.	Will faith based providers be allowed to participate?	Yes, faith based providers may participate in offering Voluntary Pre K as long as they meet the basic requirements of staff, curriculum, and other quality indicators and parents are fully informed in advance of enrollment.
13.	What if there is no room in the Voluntary Pre K classroom for my child?	The school district will be offering a summer program beginning in summer of 2006. Due to the large number of school campuses throughout the community, they should be able to accommodate children who could not attend a traditional school year session program.
14.	Is this just a one time program?	The Voluntary Pre K program is the result of an amendment to the Constitution of Florida. Although the future may hold changes, for now the program is here permanently.
15.	How do parents find a certified Voluntary Pre K Provider?	If the parent does not already have their child at a location offering Voluntary Prekindergarten, they may call CCC Child Care Resource and Referral and a list of approved VPK Preschools and their profile will be provided to them. These lists will not be available for several months.
16.	Can children attend more than one VPK Session?	A child may only attend one state paid Prekindergarten session either during the school year or summer session. Provisions are being determined for when children maybe disenrolled and reenrolled with good cause. More information will be available at a later date.
17.	Can a parent move their child mid session?	Parents will be counseled very closely that if they move their child out of a VPK without good cause, their child may not be allowed to re-enroll.
18.	Will there be an enrollment deadline?	It appears this may be a local decision. Enrollment could be continuous but after a certain date in the school session (possibly October or November) enrollment may stop and then children will be considered for the summer session only.
19.	Will children be allowed to enter the VPK program mid year?	Probably not. If more than 10% of the VPK hours have already been offered by your program that child may not enroll in your class as a VPK student. However the student may be eligible to attend the full summer session. Further details on children changing and/or transferring from one program to another will be forthcoming. All the specifics are not known at this time.
20.	Will 4 year old children still be eligible for scholarships from Coordinated Child Care?	Yes, qualified 4 year old children will still be eligible for scholarships from Coordinated Child Care based on program requirements and availability of funding. Low income families will still need extended care for their children after the VPK day and scholarships will cover this part of their care.
21.	How will VPK impact the children that are currently funded by Coordinated Child Care Scholarships and lose their eligibility mid year?	The Board of The Early Learning Coalition passed a resolution two years ago that states “ Qualified 4 year old children who become ineligible for federal funded scholarships during their last year before kindergarten enrollment will continue to receive care paid for by the Coalition/Coordinated Child Care until the end of the school year and depending on availability of funding”.
22.	What is the maximum and minimum class size?	A class may have no more than 18 children in the classroom during the VPK program school year session; 10 children during the summer session and no less than 4 children during

		the summer and the school session. Once the VPK part of day ends, the less restrictive licensing regulation for class size and staff ratios can be followed.
23.	What happens if a parent removes their child from the program for a vacation?	Depending on the length of the vacation and the Providers' attendance policy, the parent and child could lose their opportunity to participate in the VPK program. Parents must know this before they enroll their child and choose their VPK program accordingly.
24.	Can children cross county lines to participate in the VPK program?	The law only requires the child to be a Florida resident. We will strongly advocate that parents have a choice of programs outside their county and we believe this will be allowed.
25.	How do the parents choose a location for this program?	There are two methods for a parent to choose a VPK program. First, the preschools can and should market their programs to recruit parents. Second, if a parent needs assistance they may call CCC's Child Care Resource and Referral office. When a preschool is approved to provide VPK services they will be asked to provide a profile of their program. This profile will include as examples: the hours/days that the VPK program will be offered, the credentials of the staff, whether they provide extended day services, the curriculum the preschool offers, and faith based information. Parents will then be responsible for enrolling their child in one of the certified VPK programs that still has openings.
26.	If a parent chooses to not enroll their child in VPK will it present a problem when the child enters kindergarten?	No. Participation is completely voluntary. Many parents choose to provide school readiness activities at home.

Provider Related Questions and Answers

27.	As a provider, how much will I be compensated for providing this service?	In a recent press release, Governor Bush mentioned a \$2,500 cost per child. This number must pass through the governmental budgetary process before it is finalized. Different rates will be assigned to counties based upon market. Funds to administer the program may also be included in the amount that is approved.
28.	As a certified Prekindergarten provider will the Coalition or CCC be assigning children to our preschool?	No. See # 15. The Voluntary Prekindergarten program is voluntary for parents and parents have full choice concerning the preschool their child will attend. Each Prekindergarten preschool is responsible for marketing their program and maintaining a wait list if necessary.
29.	Will parents fill out their Voluntary Prekindergarten applications at my school?	The law says there will be a single point (unified system) of entry for children enrolling in VPK. Parents will be requested to visit one of several identified locations around the county and produce birth certificate, residency documents and complete the brief application. They are then enrolled in Voluntary Prekindergarten and may attend any approved VPK school of their choice that has a slot available. See question #2 regarding how to pre-enroll for VPK. Preschools will also continue their own separate enrollment process.

30.	What about a Providers monthly paperwork and documentation?	Providers will be required to submit monthly enrollment/attendance documentation for the VPK children in your school. Any staff changes in the Prekindergarten classrooms will need to be reported. Additional paperwork is unknown at this time.
31.	Can I offer a Prekindergarten program in the summer and during the school session?	Yes. Note that program qualifications vary for each type of session.
32.	Does each VPK program determine the rate of pay for their staff?	Yes. This is a business decision that the preschool is responsible for making.
33.	What happens if parents take children on a vacation or the child is ill for a lengthy period of time?	If a parent enrolls a child in a VPK program then they should not plan an extensive vacation or their child may be disqualified from continued attendance. The law refers to hardship cases such as illness. More details will become available as the state releases the complete attendance requirements. See # 23
34.	Can you have VPK funded children and non VPK funded children in a classroom?	Yes. If you find children have dropped out of your VPK program and you want to fill those seats with non VPK children (for example a four year old who's birthday fell after September 1) you may do so, but the child will be considered private pay and not State VPK funded.
35.	Do providers have to accept a student who only wants the VPK program of 3 hours for example but you offer an 8 or 10 hour program?	You as the preschool owner/director are fully responsible for marketing your program, maintaining your own wait list and enrolling your children to fill the classroom.
36.	If the schools tuition is more than the proposed \$2,500 can we charge the parent the additional charge for the VPK core day?	No, if you choose to participate as a VPK provider then you may not charge any additional fees for the VPK core day. Supply and registration fees for the VPK core day are also not allowed. If you offer a program that extends the established core VPK day for either before or after care then these fees can be collected to support that part of your program.
37.	Will there be a limit on the number of VPK classrooms a school offers?	No, there is no limit, but you cannot exceed licensing standards.
38.	If our success/compliance will be based on the school readiness scores of our children when they enter kindergarten, how will providers be measured who provide learning experiences for Special Needs children?	There is a provision in the law that is vague but it appears that statewide kindergarten screening shall incorporate mechanisms for recognizing potential variations in readiness rates for students with disabilities. It would not be legal for you to exclude Special Needs children for fear they will lower your scores.
39.	How does VPK impact my program's enrollment process?	Parents will be required to be determined eligible by the Early Learning Coalition or it's designee in addition to completing your preschools own enrollment forms. There will be locations around the county where parents will be requested to produce proof of residency, child's birth certificate and complete a VPK application. That child is then entered into the Early Learning Coalition data base for purposes of tracking and payments and scoring results.
40.	If a child is enrolled in the public school system exceptional education program, are they also eligible for VPK?	This question has been posed to the Tallahassee Office of Early Learning and they are researching the answer. At this time we do not know.
41.	Will a summer program be offered?	Private providers may elect to offer a summer program. The

		public school system is required to offer the summer program.
42.	If a program chooses to offer a school session program will they be mandated to also offer a summer session?	No
43.	Can a program offer a split day such as a 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon?	Yes, this is an option but be aware that you will not be reimbursed for the “break” in the day. Also, a six hour VPK day for the same child is not being encouraged.
44.	Will there be any restrictions on our enrollment process?	See the answer to Questions #39. If you offer priority services to siblings or children that attended your program as 3 year olds, this should be acceptable, but State VPK reimbursement will only be for those qualified 4 year olds in the VPK classroom.
45.	Why does the Coalition want to limit the school year service models to 3 or 4 hours a day?	The Coalition’s mission is to ensure that children receive an appropriate VPK learning experience. We feel it is important to allow programs to have choice but believe that there are diminishing learning returns for 4 year olds after 4 hours of instruction per day.
46.	Are we limited to offering the 3 hour VPK program?	No. At this point we are tentatively supporting 3 to 4 hour core VPK days based on research that indicates children learn more and retain more of what they learning when knowledge is presented to them in small amounts over a longer period of time. You may offer extended hours of care, enrichment, enhancements activities at the expense of the parent or through qualified scholarship funding.
47.	A recent newspaper indicated that snack time is not allowable as part of the instructional day. Licensing standards require we provide a snack for young children.	The VPK program may not violate the licensing laws and regulations. Snack time is an acceptable activity during the core VPK day. Lunch time may or may not be considered part of the instructional day depending on the length of the day and the lunch period is incorporated into the program as a learning experience.
48.	Will a provider be allowed to operate a school session program that ends after public school session ends?	No. The school session must occur during the public school calendar defined school session time period.
49.	Will a teacher who currently holds a CDA or CDA equivalent, no longer be allowed to teach in the VPK program in the future?	CDA/E’s will be acceptable credentials for VPK teachers during the school session. The long term “aspirational goals” of the program replace the CDA/E credential for the lead teacher with an AA degree within 5 to 7 years. This will allow time for CDA/E teachers to pursue their Associate Degree.
50.	Will local universities and community colleges offer the early childhood classes?	Yes this is our plan. We have meetings set up with both St. Petersburg College and the University of South Florida to discuss their capacity to offer classes to meet your needs. Currently classes are limited because community interest has been limited.
51.	My program will not be able to pay my bachelor level teacher with the proposed \$2,500. Does this mea we will not be able to offer VPK?	Participation in the VPK program is your choice. See question #36 which describes how additional fees may be charged for non core VPK day hours. This may help with these budget concerns.
52.	I have a Bachelors degree in Psychology. Will I have to obtain another 4 year degree in Early Childhood Education?	No. This is a decision of the higher learning institution you wish to attend but usually a student only needs to take additional courses to qualify their degree as Early Childhood.
53.	I enrolled in the Director’s Credential course being offered in August of 2005. Will this count as a Pre K Director’s Credential?	Yes, the current course will count for those who have already completed the Director’s Credential course or are planning to before July 1, 2006.

54.	What is the Pre K Director Credential?	It is a new credential that the law references. The course has not been developed yet. It will not be required until July of 2006.
55.	What will happen if the “teacher” in the classroom becomes ill or goes on vacation? Will we be required to replace her/him with a similarly credentialed teacher?	Yes. Teachers at all times must meet at least the minimum standards.
56.	If teachers will all eventually need degrees, will Directors also be required to have degrees?	At this time the law is silent on this issue. No, directors do not need degrees as of this time.
57.	Will there be grants or scholarships available for teachers who want to go back to school to enhance their education?	Yes, hopefully. The Early Learning Coalition will try to offer scholarships. This is dependent upon the amount of funds allocated to the program by the legislature.
58.	Does the CDA/E, if earned before 2000 have to be renewed? And does this renewal require a 3 credit hour course?	The Department of Children and Families and the Child Care Licensing Office is currently proposing a rule change that requires all CDA/E’s to have a renewal component. Contact your Licensing Specialist for more information.
59.	What is a level 2 screening?	Level 2 screening is the screening you currently are required to complete for your teachers under licensing standards.
60.	Do Directors have to be onsite at all times or if the Assistant Director is onsite in the absence of the Director will they too need a Pre-K Director Credential?	Directors do not have to be on site 100% of the time. Assistant Directors are not required to have the Pre-K Director Credential.
61.	If a Bachelor’s Degree in Consumer Science the same as a Bachelors Degree in Human Development?	This may vary from college to college.
62.	Does accreditation by the Florida Council of Independent Schools qualify for participations?	No, that is not one of the listed accrediting bodies in the law. If you do not have one of the accreditations listed, then you must meet the local Coalition approved requirements. Please see list of classroom requirements on the handout for Provider Certification provided at the Provider’s meeting or go to CCC website www.childcarepinellas.org and you can view or print a copy of all the handouts.
63.	Will grants be available for classroom equipment and supplies?	The Early Learning Coalition may be allocated a small amount of startup funding for providers. These dollars are to be spent on curriculum and curriculum related issues. For example; training, purchasing curricula.
64.	What is the “emergent literacy” training?	Teachers will be required to take one 5 hour session of emergent literacy training. The Department of Education will be developing a 5 hour emergent literacy training course. Currently 5 hour courses are available on line. If you have already participated in such a training, for example Heads Up Reading qualifies, then you will not be required to complete another 5 hour course.
65.	If a program is in the process of becoming accredited will that program qualify as a VPK program?	Possibly. Programs are not required to be currently accredited to participate in the VPK program.
66.	Will the VPK program be required to contract with Coordinated Child Care?	A program will not have to be subcontracted with Coordinated Child Care as we currently use the term contracted. To receive funding for VPK you will have to sign some sort of agreement outlining your responsibilities and the Early Learning Coalition responsibilities. Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas will be the designated agency to manage these

		agreements.
67.	If a program offers before and after VPK core day care what will be the Coordinated Child Care rate for that care?	We do not know this answer at this time. We are advocating a new rate be established for this part of the day if paid by Coordinated Child Care scholarship. This new rate will probably be something like 75% of the current full time rate for 10 total hours of care.
68.	Does the full day including before and after or the extended day have to be 10 hours?	No, your extended day beyond the VPK day is your choice.
69.	In the financial models presented at the Forums, it seems we should reduce our full day rate proportionately to the number of hours we are paid by VPK. Is this correct?	We presented to you some examples of how you could manage your business financially including the new VPK program. These were proposals prepared by one child care program director. They were presented to help you understand the mixed funding streams. You are encouraged to develop your own fiscal models.
70.	What tool/instrument will be used to evaluate students to determine their school readiness?	At this time when a child enters the public school kindergarten program they are assessed to determine their level of school readiness. This is not new. The School Readiness Uniform Screening System requires public schools to use standardized tools such as the ESI-K. These tools are standardized statewide. The 4 year old performance standards that you should all have received copies of were developed based upon the readiness for kindergarten entry criteria. If you do not have a copy of these standards they are downloadable at the website www.schoolreadiness.org ; click on the button "Resources".
71.	If a school is part of a Church Ministry how will VPK affect their ability to teach and incorporate faith based activities?	Faith based providers are encouraged to participate in VPK. The curriculum used must be developmentally appropriate. There are no restrictions on teaching or incorporating faith based activities in your program as long as parents are aware in advance of enrollment.
72.	How will "separation of church and state" factor into VPK?	The state is not currently discriminating against faith based program participation in any way; some groups may submit this issue to the courts for a ruling.
73.	Can a faith based center know for sure there will not be conflicts if they take state money?	The law currently addresses and encourages faith based programs to participate in VPK. There should be no conflicts if the curriculum is developmentally appropriate and the program can meet all the other standards such as teacher credentials and parents make informed decisions.
74.	If a program has already enrolled 4 year old children for the fall can they still participate in VPK?	Yes. To participate in VPK, you may not charge your parents a registration fee for the VPK core day portion of your program and you will only be reimbursed for those children that will be 4 years old by September 1, 2005. Your parents still need to pre register their children for VPK though the websites provided.
75.	Does the \$2,500 number include or exclude administrative costs?	The \$2,500 amount per child is the Governor's recommendation. We do not know how it will be affected by the legislature and by county adjustments based on the cost of living index (Pinellas usually is higher than other counties). We do know that number will be reduced by administrative costs.
76.	As the requirements for higher teacher	Such increases would seem appropriate but these decisions

	credentials increase over the next several years, will the reimbursement rate per child also increase?	are in the hands of the legislature.
77.	Is there going to be a minimum wage requirement set by the Coalition?	No. As private business owners the Coalition has not authority over the wages you pay your teachers.
78.	How involved is the bookkeeping for state funds?	In the world of state funds this is referred to as a unit cost payment process. You receive a set dollar amount for all eligible children and the expectation is these children will leave your program "school ready". The state does not require you to account for these funds in terms of how much was paid for salaries and supplies, etc. The state does not audit to that micro level. Programs that appear to be misusing funds, for example claiming payments for non eligible VPK children, will be subject to more intense scrutiny of their business practices and paybacks as appropriate.
79.	Will the programs be paid monthly or biweekly and by whom?	As far as we know at this time programs will be paid monthly using an advance payment methodology. The Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County plans to contract with Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas County to actually prepare the individual checks and pay providers. Electronic Funds Transfers is the payment methodology recommended but not required.
80.	Can we charge parent fees for registration and/or supplies for the VPK program?	The law is very clear that VPK providers may not charge parents any costs in addition to the rate paid for the VPK core day. If you operate an extended day these charges must be allocated to support the extended, before and after hours of your program day. (see # 11)
81.	If a parent fails to pay for the extended day but they utilize the services of the extended day can the child be disenrolled?	We are seeking State guidance on this issue. A current local interpretation would be that if you have clearly stated your service delivery model (hours per day and fees) in your parent agreement then you should be able to disenroll for significant contract infractions. The State has the final say on this issue.
82.	How long will it take the state to pay the centers?	The law clearly stipulates programs will be paid in advance of the services provided.
83.	Will we be paid based upon a child's attendance like we are paid now by Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas County?	No. You will be paid based upon enrollment. A full understanding of this process and how it will differ from the CCC's scholarship attendance payment method is not known at this time but it is anticipated to be less complicated.
84.	What is the maximum and minimum class size? This question is also answered in the parent section.	You may not have anymore than 18 children in the classroom during the VPK program school session; 10 children during the summer session and no less than 4 children during the summer and the school session. Once the VPK part of the day ends you then must follow the less restrictive licensing regulations for class size and staff ratios.
85.	When will we know for sure the actual reimbursement rate?	Hopefully at the end of the 2005 legislative session which should be late April.
86.	Will programs be paid different rates according to staff credentials?	The Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County is proposing a differential funding structure based upon staff credentials. This means the rate paid to a preschool with CDA/E level teachers will be lower than the rate paid to a preschool with

		certified Bachelor level teachers. We do not yet have final State approval for this proposal.
87.	How would this system impact a school with multiple VPK classrooms, each with teachers at different level of credentials?	Preschools will be paid by the classroom. If there are variations by classroom based upon teacher's credentials then the rate for each classroom would vary. (This is based upon the premise that differential Funding as we are proposing is allowable).
88.	Does the VPK program have to be offered daily?	No. You may choose a model where VPK is offered Monday, Wednesday and Friday or some other configuration of days. During the school year session the program must be 540 hours long. Currently the summer session is required to be 300 hours long.
89.	Will Pinellas County Public Schools be participating in the program?	In order to participate in the VPK program public schools must be certified to have met their class size requirements. At this time Pinellas public schools have not been certified as such and will probably not offer VPK services for the 2005-2006 school year. However, public schools are mandated in the law to provide the summer session for VPK beginning in 2006.
90.	If a preschool chooses to participate in the VPK program how long is their commitment?	If a preschool decided to withdraw from the program best practices would suggest this decision be made at the end of the VPK session, either school year or summer session. So the commitment is one year/session at a time.
91.	Typically children frequently change centers throughout the year. Who will keep track of these VPK children and their movement?	The Early Learning Coalition will contract with Coordinated Child Care to accomplish this task. The law is very specific in its intent to minimize the movement of children. Children do not learn as well when they are constantly changing classrooms and schools. Therefore parents will be counseled that if they want to participate in the VPK program they will be limited in their choices to move their child or they may lose the opportunity to participate. Under special cases of documented hardship (parent is transferred, etc) movement is allowed.
92.	By what date will preschools be required to make a commitment to participate in the VPK program?	At this time we do not know but we encourage interested preschools to pre register now and going to the State website at www.vpkflorida.com or through a link on CCC website at www.childcarepinellas.org or they can call CCC at <u>547-5782</u> and pre-register by phone. Remember that pre-registering your interest does not mean you have committed to participate as a VPK provider.
93.	Does the government have a deadline for answering all the questions?	The Office of Early Learning has established a timeline for implementation of the program and so far has met these self imposed deadlines. All questions should be announced by June 2005.
94.	Can a preschool choose the date to start their VPK program?	Yes. The school session must occur sometime within the school session as defined by the public schools calendars. The preschool does not have to begin their VPK program on the first day of that calendar nor are they bound to follow the vacation days as established by the public school calendar.

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