



Parent Manual



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ECS Contact Information

Main Phone Number: (904) 726-1500

Toll-free Phone Number: (800) 238-3463

Fax Number: (904) 726.1522

Physical Location & Mailing Address:

ATTN: VPK

8443 Baymeadows Road, Suite 1

Jacksonville, FL 32256

ECS website:

www.ecs4kids.org

1. **What are the requirements for my child to attend VPK?** There are only 2 requirements for VPK.
- a. Your child must be 4 years old on or before September 1st of the program year.
- ▶ To be eligible for 2015-16 program year, the child must be born between September 2, 2010 and September 1, 2011.
 - ▶ To be eligible for 2016-17 program year, the child must be born between September 2, 2011 and September 1, 2012.
 - ▶ To be eligible for 2017-18 program year, the child must be born between September 2, 2012 and September 1, 2013.
- b. You must be a Florida resident.

2. **My child is not old enough/too old for the VPK program are there any exceptions to the age requirements?** Unfortunately, Florida statute does NOT allow for any exceptions to the age requirement. That being said, there are other options available to every child regardless of age. In each county there is a Resource & Referral (R&R) agency that maintains a database of all legally operating early learning providers for that county. A trained R&R Specialist can provide you with a customized listing of referrals that match the needs of you and your child.

To speak with an R&R Specialist in Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford, St Johns or Putnam Counties please call toll free 800-238-3463.

3. **What options for VPK are available for my child?** The Florida legislature created three different options for parents:
- a. A School Year program consisting of 540 instructional hours; and
 - b. A Summer program consisting of 300 instructional hours (child is eligible for this option the summer before they enter kindergarten); or
 - c. VPK Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) Program Allows VPK-eligible children with current Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and for whom instruction in a traditional VPK classroom environment may not be desired by the parent, to utilize VPK funding in a way to focus on the children's individual special needs..

A child is only eligible to participate in the school year program, the summer program, OR VPK SIS program but NOT all three.

4. **How do I enroll in the VPK program?** If you wish to attend a VPK program located in Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford, St Johns or Putnam Counties you will need to apply online at <https://vpkcp.floridaearlylearning.com/>. You will need to upload proof of residency and proof of the child's age (see below for acceptable documents) after completing the online application. After you submit your application, you will receive **e-mail** notification within 24-48 business hours regarding the status. Once approved you will be able to log back in to your account and print off the certificate of eligibility (COE) to turn in to the VPK provider of your choice.

To enroll in a VPK SIS program, your child must also have a current, local IEP in addition to the requirements listed below. Please contact ECS for more information regarding the VPK SIS program.

5. What documents are acceptable?

We are allowed to accept as Date of Birth (DOB) documentation:

- A duly attested transcript of the child's birth record (birth certificate) Note: birth certificate must be an official document
- A duly attested transcript of a certificate of baptism or other religious record accompanied by an affidavit sworn to by the parent.
- A life insurance policy on the child that has been in force for at least 2 years.
- A passport or certificate of arrival in the United States showing the age of the child.
- An immunization record indicating the date of birth, signed by a public health officer or by a licensed practicing physician.
- A valid military dependent identification card
- If none of the evidential documents listed above can be produced, an affidavit of age sworn to by the parent, accompanied by a certificate of age signed by a public health officer or by a licensed practicing physician which states that the physician has examined the child and believes that the age as stated in the affidavit is substantially correct may be accepted.

Proof of residency:

The document must:

1. Include the parent's name
 2. Include the *parent's current physical address*
 3. MATCH the address listed on the VPK application
 4. NOT be a Post Office Box
 5. Be one of the items listed below
- Recent/current (within 60 days of child application completion) utility bills (if mailed to a P.O. Box, it will *normally* also contain the service address, if NO service address is listed then we are NOT able to accept it as proof of current physical residency)
 - NOT Acceptable:** Cell phone, credit card of any kind, doctor's bill, bank statement, mortgage statements anything NOT in the parent's name or that doesn't list a service address.
 - Acceptable:** Electric, water, sewage, gas, cable, satellite or land line phone bills in the parent's name with the service address listed.
 - Pay stub (must be within 60 days of child application completion)
 - Residential rental agreement or receipt from rental payment (must be current and not expired)
 - *Current* Government documents (e.g. FL ID / Driver's License or property tax assessment showing homestead exemption)

- Military order showing that the child’s parent is a service member in the US Armed Forces and is assigned to duty in Florida when the child attends the VPK program (e.g., permanent change of station)
 - **If none of the evidential documents listed above can be produced, an affidavit of residency sworn to by the parent, accompanied by a letter from a landlord or property owner** which confirms that the child resides at the address shown in the affidavit may be accepted. If none of the evidential documents listed above can be produced for a homeless child, a letter from a homeless shelter or affidavit sworn to by the child’s parent may be accepted to document residency showing that the child is homeless and resides in Florida.
6. **What if I don’t have access to a computer and scanner to apply online?** If you have a smart phone, you are able to complete the process that way. You would simply take pictures of your documentation and upload them after completing the application. If you don’t have a smart phone, call the VPK Department and we will be happy to set up a time for you to come to our office and use our VPK kiosk to apply. Also, check with your provider! They may be able to let you use their computer and scanner to apply.
 7. **How do I get my COE?** Once your application is approved, you will be notified by e-mail that your COE is ready. All you need to do is log in and print it off. It is recommended that you print out and turn in only one COE as turning in multiple COEs to different providers could affect your child’s VPK funding and their one time transfer/reenrollment.
 8. **What if I don’t have access to a printer to print my COE?** Check with your provider! Most providers have computer and printer access. Also, majority of the local libraries offer computer and printer access. There is generally a small fee for printing, so please check with your local branch.
 9. **Do I have to enroll my eligible child in the VPK program?** No, the program is completely voluntary for both parents & providers.

In addition to our enrollment/eligibility process, each VPK program has their own enrollment practices. Being determined eligible for the VPK program does NOT mean instant enrollment in any VPK program.

10. **Is there an enrollment deadline?** Enrollment in the VPK program is continuous, but after a certain date in the school year program enrollment may stop and the children will be considered for the summer session only. However, please note that if your child does not start on the provider’s first date of VPK, they will not be able to take advantage of the full 540 or 300 instructional hours.
11. **Am I able to reenroll/transfer my child?** Parents are advised to closely examine their options and choose the VPK program that is best for their child. A

child *may* be allowed to reenroll/transfer once during the program year, but circumstances can be limited. You must first speak with your VPK Specialist before a reenrollment/transfer may be granted.

12. **Am I able to withdraw my child from the VPK program?** Yes, the VPK program is completely voluntary. You are able to withdraw your child at any time. You should also inform your provider of this and any other important communications.
13. **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 program or care that are not part of the VPK program.
14. **Can a VPK provider require registration fees and/or additional fees for the 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. Conversely, State law does not prohibit a provider from charging registration fees for programs or care that are not part of the VPK program.
15. **What providers are eligible to offer the VPK program?** Each private provider must be licensed child care facility, a licensed family home child care home, a large licensed family child care home or a nonpublic school for faith-based child care provider that is exempt from licensure.

Every public school district is required by law to deliver the Summer VPK program for every eligible child wanting to participate, but they are able to choose which public schools, *if any*, may offer the school year program.

16. **What VPK provider will my child attend?** Your VPK provider is not assigned. Instead, as a parent, you are given the right to select a VPK program that meets your child's needs (*subject to the provider's agreement to admit your child into their program*).
17. **How do I know what VPK providers are available?** There are a number of ways to find out what providers are participating in VPK. Our website (www.ecs4kids.org) contains listings of all the VPK providers in the counties in our service area.
All approved VPK providers (in the State) are also listed on the Department of Children & Families (DCF) licensing website (www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider), regardless if they are licensed by DCF or not.
Provider listings are also available at the VPK round-ups/parent registrations or by contacting the VPK Department.

If you are interested in your child attending a provider that is not listed, we recommend that you speak with the provider to inquire as to whether they plan on participating in VPK.

18. **Do I have to enroll with you before I enroll with the VPK provider of my choice?** When you apply online, ECS determines whether or not your child is eligible to participate in VPK. So you do need to apply and be approved before we are able to pay for any VPK days your child attends. However, each VPK provider has their own enrollment processes that are unique to that program. You will need to speak with each program to find out what this process entails.
19. **How many children may each provider serve in their VPK program?** While there is no limit on the total number of children served by each provider, there are restrictions to how many children a provider may serve in one classroom. For the school year (540 hours) program a VPK classroom may have up to 11 children with one instructor and no more than 20 children with two instructors. For the summer (300 hours) program a VPK classroom may have up to 12 children with one instructor.
20. **Are providers able to turn away children requesting to enroll in their VPK program?** Florida law does prohibit VPK providers from discriminating against children or their parents on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, including the refusal to admit a child to the VPK program.
21. **Can children cross county lines to participate in the VPK program?** State law only requires the child to be a Florida resident. You will need to complete your VPK parent orientation in the county that the provider is located. Episcopal Children's Services serves VPK providers that are located in Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford, St Johns or Putnam Counties.
22. **How do I select a VPK provider?** Choosing a VPK program is an important decision and there are many different things to consider. We highly encourage parents to visit potential providers, ask questions and utilize the VPK and R&R brochure/tools available on our website, www.ecs4kids.org. These tools are also available by contacting a VPK or R&R Specialist at 800-238-3463.
23. **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 program may offer transportation services and families are encouraged to explore these options before choosing a VPK provider.
24. **There are 3 year olds in my child's VPK class, are providers able to mix classes like this?** Yes, providers are able to have blended VPK classrooms, however those children are counted in their classroom capacity and their curriculum must still be age/developmentally appropriate.

25. **What curricula should my VPK provider be using?** VPK providers do not have to use any specific curriculum, it should just be developmentally appropriate. In some cases, Providers on Probation (POPs) may have use to an approved curriculum as part of their improvement plan.
26. **What are the performance standards adopted by the DOE?** The Florida VPK Education Standards are skills that four-year-old children should know and be able to do by the end of their VPK experience. They are:
- a. Physical Health
 - b. Approaches to Learning
 - c. Social & Emotional Development
 - d. Language, Communication, and Emergent Literacy
 - e. Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

27. **It seems like all my child(ren) does is play in VPK, is this normal?** Research shows that young children learn best through hands-on experiences that have planned by knowledgeable teachers. To parents, this may look like ‘just play’, but it is actually active learning. For more information on what your child should be learning in VPK, please refer to the ‘It’s Okay to Play in VPK!’ brochure found on our website (www.ecs4kids.org).

28. **I hear that I will have to make sure that my child is tested in kindergarten, is this true?** Yes, all children participating in VPK will be screened upon kindergarten entry. The kindergarten screening is a process that will help us better understand how much your children learned through VPK. Results will also be used to determine the VPK Provider Readiness Rate.

The screening is administered by the district public schools for all public school kindergarten students. [Children attending a non-public school for kindergarten must also be screened. For further information please call the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener \(FLKRS\) at 886-447-1159.](#)

29. **What is the VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate?** The DOE/State Board of Education is required by law to calculate a kindergarten readiness rate every year for each VPK provider of either the School Year or Summer program.

The VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate measures how well a VPK provider prepares four-year-olds to be ready for kindergarten based upon Florida’s VPK Education Standards. Current rates as well as additional information can be found online at <http://vpk.fl DOE.org>.

30. **What is the VPK attendance policy?** The state's uniform attendance policy is used for funding purposes only. Parents have the responsibility to comply with the policies (e.g. attendance, discipline, late fees, etc.) for the VPK program in which their child is enrolled.

Parents are strongly encouraged to become familiar with the policies that apply to children in the VPK program before enrolling their children in the program.

31. **What is a Parental Choice Certificate?** There are two forms that your VPK provider may use: the Long Form or the Short Form. These documents require the parent/legal guardian to verify their child's attendance each month for the VPK program they are enrolled in. Full signatures are required on these forms as well as daily sign in/out sheets (when the Short Form is used). This means that parents can't use initials or nicknames when completing these documents. Since funding is linked to these forms, it is very important that they are completed and signed accurately each month. It is very important that you are also dating your own signatures.

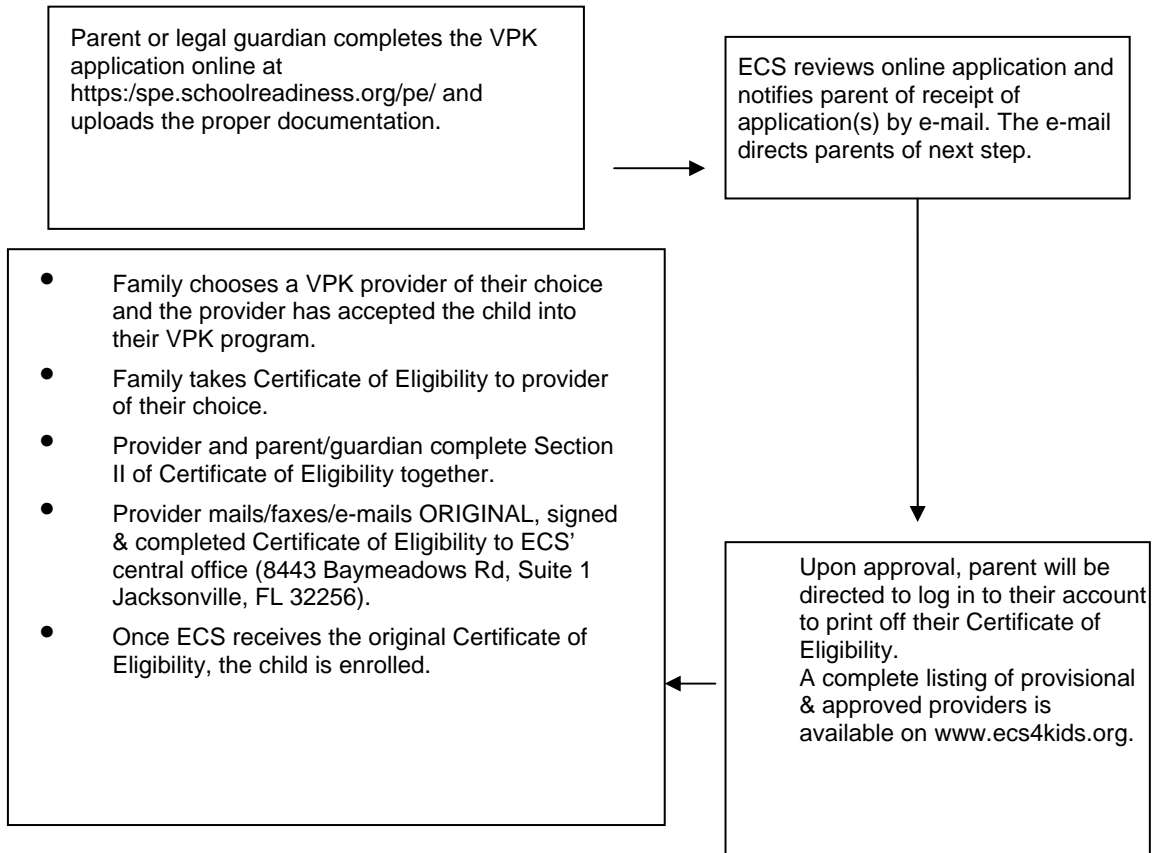
32. **What happens if I want to go on vacation while my child is in VPK?** Depending on the length of the vacation and your provider's attendance policy, you could lose your opportunity to participate in VPK. You should know this before enrolling your child and choose your VPK program accordingly.

33. **What is wrap-around care?** Many providers offer the VPK program for only a few hours per day, but many are also able to offer services before and/or after the VPK hours. The time not included in VPK is considered 'wrap-around care' and is a contract that is entered into between yourself and the provider and would not be governed by VPK policy.

34. **Do you offer any type of financial assistance for the wrap-around care?** Yes, we do offer financial assistance when funding is available and for those who qualify. For more information please call toll-free 800-238-3463 to speak with a Family Service Specialist in the county that you reside.

35. **I lost my VPK Certificate of Eligibility (COE) how do I get another one?** If you have misplaced your VPK COE, please contact the VPK Department and they will be happy to mail you a new one.

VPK Child Enrollment Process



Helpful Links

Episcopal Children's Services:

www.ecs4kids.org

(Local parent & provider VPK information/forms, as well as information on other services we offer.)

The State of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Registration System

<https://vpkcp.floridaearlylearning.com/>

(Parents create an account and complete a VPK application.)

Early Learning Coalition of North Florida

<http://www.elcnorthflorida.org/>

(The Coalition that contracts with ECS to provide various child care and early learning services in Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford, St Johns, and Putnam Counties.)

DCF Child Care Provider listings

www.myflorida.com/childcare/provider

(For more information on *approved* VPK Providers, as well as all licensed child care programs)

Department of Education websites:

<http://www.fldoe.org/earlyLearning/>

(Important VPK information including kindergarten readiness rate, emergent literacy, performance standards, etc.)

<http://vpk.fldoe.org>

(Website listing of VPK providers' Kindergarten Readiness Rates)

Office of Early Learning website:

<http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/>

(More statewide VPK information)