



EARLY LEARNING
COALITION
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

VPK PROVIDER REFERENCE GUIDE 2018 - 2019

In partnership with

OFFICE OF
Early Learning
LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE.

Fiscal year 2018-2019

Dear VPK Providers:

Welcome to a new year of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten! The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida is here to support and assist you to make this year a positive one of learning for you and the children you serve.

This VPK Provider Reference Guide is intended to provide answers to commonly asked questions about the many aspects of the VPK program. The Guide serves as a ready source of information, available at all times. If you still have questions after reading about a topic in this guide, please contact your mentor for further guidance.

The Coalition will provide updates from the state as needed. The Guide is revised every year to ensure it contains the latest information available. Please be sure to watch your e-mail for blasts for information regarding VPK. E-mail is our primary mode of communication.

Thank you for your good work, for serving the children of Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee counties and preparing them for school. Without you, the VPK program could not function as the legislature has envisioned it. We look forward to working with you and appreciate all you do!

Sincerely,

Gayla Thompson

Gayla J. Thompson
Chief Quality Officer

Table of Contents

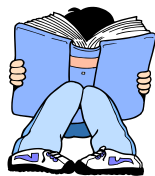
	Page
Program Overview	4
Provider Qualifications	5
Background Screening	5
Educational Qualifications	6
Program Requirements for School Year and Summer	10
Additional Program Requirements for all Programs	13
Provider Application Process	15
Child Enrollment in the VPK Program	16
Attendance and Payment for VPK Services	17
Complaint Resolution	19
Helpful Websites	21



Program Overview

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is a free program aimed to prepare four-year-old children for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. It is designed to help Florida's children develop the skills they need to become good readers and successful students. It includes high literacy standards, strict accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes, and qualified instructors.

1. VPK is an entitlement program for all four-year-old Florida residents born on or before September 1, regardless of family income. Families do not pay for this program.
2. Legislation passed in 2005 assigned responsibilities for the VPK program to three different state agencies:
 - a. The Florida Office of Early Learning (OEL) for day-to-day management of the program
 - b. Department of Children and Families (DCF) for licensing and credentialing
 - c. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) for the creation of standards, curriculum, and accountability
3. The Office of Early Learning/Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families continue to work together to provide leadership and support to the local early learning coalitions, school districts, and public and private providers to ensure the successful implementation of effective prekindergarten education programs for Florida's four-year-old children.
4. The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida (ELC) receives state funding to administer the VPK program in Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee counties.
5. The Coalition registers eligible public and private early learning programs as VPK providers. The ELC is responsible for collecting, reviewing, and maintaining all required documentation for both public school and private providers.
6. Eligible child care providers are strongly encouraged to become VPK providers and participate in this very important program.



Provider Qualifications

1. Provider Type

In order to participate in the VPK program, providers must be one of the following:

- a. Licensed child care facility
- b. Licensed family day care home
- c. Licensed large family child care home
- d. Nonpublic school that is exempt from licensure
- e. Faith-based provider that is exempt from licensure
- f. Public school district operated school



2. Provider Requirements

- a. Each provider must also meet one of the following qualifications and demonstrate to the Early Learning Coalition that VPK program requirements are met:
 - Be accredited by a VPK approved accrediting association
 - Hold a current Gold Seal Quality Care designation or
 - Be a licensed child care provider
- b. Registered family child care homes, unlicensed family child care homes, and informal child care providers are not eligible to participate in the VPK program.

Background Screening of All VPK Staff

1. General

- a. The VPK program requires that all VPK directors, instructors, substitutes and aides have a completed Level 2 Background screening through the Clearinghouse system and Attestation of Good Moral Character before they begin working in VPK for the school year or the summer program.
- b. VPK classes may not begin before the provider and staff have met all requirements, completely filled out the VPK APP, submitted the contract for signature and both the contract and VPK APP have been certified.
- c. Providers will not be reimbursed if they begin before approval by the Coalition and/or the instructor's background screening has been recognized by the Coalition.
- d. VECHS screenings are not acceptable for staff within the VPK program.
Information on background checks can be accessed at:
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/backgroundscreening/>

2. Level 2 Background Screening

- a. All directors, child care and VPK staff must be screened using the Level 2 screening standards before employment. Live Scan screening through the Clearinghouse (see link above) is now required for all Level 2 screening.
- b. All directors, child care and VPK staff must be rescreened at least once every 5 years. This means successful clearance from disqualifying offenses listed on the Attestation of Good Moral Character which each individual must sign.
- c. If previously screened: Fingerprinting and subsequent screening clearance from DCF must be completed prior to beginning employment with the current VPK provider. If the employee was screened with the current or former child care facility within five years and there was no more than a 90 day break in service, then it can be considered and rescreening may not be required. Any other form of background screening is unacceptable and new screening will be required.

3. Attestation of Good Moral Character: This document is required for all directors, child care and VPK personnel and substitutes upon employment, and must be signed. This form can be found on the Coalition website at <https://elcofswfl.org/index.php/download-central/vpk-information/>. This October 2017 version of the Attestation of Good Moral Character does not have to be notarized.



4. Educator Certificate Revoked or Suspended: Another part of background screening is verifying that a VPK instructor previously employed by any public school system is not ineligible to teach if his or her educator certificate has been suspended or revoked. All VPK teachers previously employed by a school district must sign form VPK-1018.

Educational Qualifications

1. Director's Credential Requirements

All VPK providers (except for public schools) must have a VPK endorsed director as verified on their DCF transcript (<https://training01-dcf.myflorida.com/studentsite/admin/login.jsf>) unless they have a VPK exempt status.

- a. Endorsement includes:
 - The VPK Director Credential Endorsement course (a 5 hour on-line training course-DCF website) and
 - VPK Emergent Literacy (a 5-hour online training course) and
 - Implementing the Florida Standards in Preschool Classrooms: 3 Years Old to Kindergarten (VFSP) (5 hrs. online training course – DCF website or face to face training)
- b. Directors must be on site at least 51% of the time VPK is offered.

2. Teachers and Other Staff School Year

Legislation provides specific guidelines for VPK instructors. The Coalition must verify that the instructors meet all of the necessary requirements before they can begin providing VPK services. Requirements include background screenings, educational credentials, and Attestation of Good Moral Character.

a. Educational Qualifications for VPK Lead Teacher Staff (Must be documented through transcript verification from DCF Website)

Each VPK classroom must have at least one instructor who holds at a minimum:

- Birth-5 years Child Development Associate (CDA) issued by the National Credentialing Program (NECC) or
- A credential approved by the Department of Children and Families as being equivalent to or greater than the national credential (FCCPC) and
- Successful completion of the “Emergent Literacy for VPK Instructors” five-hour online course and of Implementing the Florida Standards in Preschool Classrooms: 3 Years Old to Kindergarten (VFSP). The Standards are available as a face to face class or on-line through the DCF website

-OR-

Holds one of the following educational credentials:

- Bachelor’s Degree or higher in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer sciences (formerly known as home economics)
- Bachelor or higher degree in elementary education, with certification to teach any age birth through 6 grades. The certification does not need to be current, but cannot have been suspended or revoked.
- An Associate’s degree or higher in child development
- An Associate’s degree or higher in an unrelated field, with at least six (6) hours in early childhood education or child development and at least 480 hours of experience teaching or providing care for children 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

b. VPK Substitute Requirements

- The substitute must not be ineligible to teach in the public school because his or her educator certificate is suspended or revoked.
- A VPK substitute must meet the qualifications of a credentialed instructor or successfully complete one or more of the following:
 - An Associate’s or higher degree in any field
 - A Child Development Associate (CDA) credential issued by the National Credentialing Program of the Council for Professional Recognition

- A Child Development Associate Equivalency credential as approved by the Department of Children and Families (DCF)
 - A DCF 40-clock-hour Introductory Child Care Training course
 - A DCF 30-clock-hour Family Child Care Home training
- Circumstances: The substitute instructor may be assigned only if the credentialed instructor is absent from the premises.
 - Time Limitation: A substitute instructor may be assigned to substitute for an absent credentialed instructor for no more than 30% of the VPK program. Thirty percent of the school year (540 hour) program is 162 hours. Thirty percent of the summer (300 hour) program is 90 hours. It is your responsibility to maintain a record of the number of hours a substitute instructor has been assigned to each VPK classroom. This record may be reviewed during the annual monitoring visit and must be kept for five (5) years. If Lead Instructor absences will exceed 30% of the program, a new instructor must be approved. All changes must be submitted in the VPK APP on the Provider Portal within 14 days of the occurrence.
 - Prior Approval: Substitute instructors must have their screenings and credentials submitted for approval to the VPK APP in the provider portal before being used as a substitute in a VPK classroom. Assigning a substitute to a VPK classroom without prior approval will result in a loss of funding.
 - Secondary Instructors (Aides): Substitutes for secondary instructors must pass a Level 2 background screening, complete 40 hr. DCF training and sign Attestation of Good Moral Character before being assigned as a VPK substitute.

c. School Year VPK Secondary/Aide Staff Requirements

- Must not be ineligible to teach in the public school because his or her educator certificate is suspended or revoked
- Attestation of Good Moral Character

3. Teachers and Other Staff Summer

A teaching degree from another country must be evaluated and translated by an accredited organization and submitted to DCF for approval.

a. Certified Teachers in Public Schools Requirements

- School districts are required by law to deliver the summer VPK program for every eligible child whose parents want to participate, and the following applies:

- Teachers must have a 4 year degree or higher, be certified by public school system and meet level 2 background screening.
- The school district is responsible for ensuring teacher certifications. There is an acknowledgement between the Office of Early Learning (OEL) and Department of Education (DOE) that teachers meet all requirements. The school district uploads to the VPK APP written statements attesting that VPK classes and teachers meet all VPK requirements.

b. VPK Instructor

- Copy of one (1) of the following credentials:
 - A Bachelor's Degree or higher in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer science or
 - A Bachelor's Degree in elementary education if the pre-k instructor has been certified to teach children any age from birth through 6th grade, with a Florida Educator's Certificate, regardless whether the certificate is current or not, and has not had this educator certificate suspended or revoked
 - A valid (current) Florida Educator Certificate

c. Sub Requirements

- One of the following credentials:
 - An Associate degree or higher in any field or
 - A Child Development Associate (CDA) credential issued by the National Credentialing Program of the Council for Professional Recognition or
 - A Child Development Associate Equivalency credential (FCCPC) as approved by the Department of Children and Families (DCF)

There are no aides in summer VPK due to class size limit of 12 children.

Program Requirements

1. Curriculum Requirements

- a. The curriculum must be developmentally appropriate, designed to prepare a student for early literacy, enhance the age-appropriate progress of students in attaining the state-adopted performance standards approved for use in VPK, and prepare students to be ready for kindergarten..
- b. Providers may select or design their VPK curriculum, unless they are on probation for continued failure to meet the kindergarten readiness rates.
- c. If a provider is on probation, curriculum must be chosen from the list on the Office of Early Learning website <http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/vpk/vpk-providers/vpk-curriculum>.

2. Instructional Requirements

- a. VPK programs may be administered by public, private, and faith-based providers

who meet the state eligibility requirements.

- b. VPK providers determine their own daily schedule and calendar days in order to meet the 540 (school year) or 300 (summer) hour requirement. For example, if a program is 180 days, there must be 3 hours of instruction each day to meet the 540 hour requirement.
- c. A provider could also choose to offer a 6 hour-per-day program for 90 days.
- d. In addition, a provider may run a fall semester from August to January, and start a new class in the spring beginning in January/February to May/June, depending on the number of VPK hours offered.

3. School Year Program Requirements

- a. VPK classes may begin in conjunction with the local public school district calendar or anytime following their start date, as long as the required number of hours can be provided. Programs must end by June 30th.
- b. Programs may not begin earlier than the first day of public school in their locale.
- c. VPK classes must be composed of at least 4 students but may not exceed 20 students. A class may not exceed 11 children without a secondary teacher.
- d. The VPK provider must apply to offer VPK with the Early Learning Coalition using the Provider Portal for the VPK APP and VPK Contract. Both items must be certified by the Coalition once completed before VPK can begin. All documentation must be kept current in respect to owners, locations, director, instructors, secondary staff and class dates and hours to avoid non-compliances and non-payment.
- e. The VPK provider must use a developmentally appropriate curriculum and deliver the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program in accordance with the approved VPK Standards.
- f. The VPK provider must have a signed OEL-VPK-20 contract with the Coalition through the provider portal and a completed and certified VPK APP
- g. Each VPK provider must provide appropriate adult supervision for students at all times and comply with DCF Health and Safety Regulations.
- h. It is highly recommended that at least one substitute be listed for the VPK classrooms.

4. Summer Program Requirements

- a. VPK classes must be composed of at least 4 students but may not exceed 12 students.
- b. Program must be comprised of at least 300 instructional hours.
- c. Program may not begin earlier than the first day of May and must end before the 1st day of local public school.
- d. The VPK provider must apply with the Early Learning Coalition using the Provider Portal for the VPK APP and VPK Contract. Both items must be certified by the Coalition once completed before VPK can begin. Information and documentation must be kept current in respect to owner(s), location, director, lead and secondary instructors, and class dates and hours.
- e. The VPK provider must use a developmentally appropriate curriculum and deliver the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program in accordance with the approved standards.

- f. VPK provider must have a signed and certified OEL-VPK-20 agreement with the Coalition through the provider portal and also a certified VPK APP
- g. Each VPK provider, including public schools, must provide appropriate adult supervision for students at all times and comply with DCF requirements.
- h. Each district school board must determine which public schools are eligible to deliver the summer prekindergarten program and identify them through submission of a VPK APP for each site.

5. VPK Calendars

- a. During the application process, VPK providers must complete their program calendar in the VPK APP showing how they will meet the required number of instructional hours.
- b. Changing VPK calendars during the VPK program session may lead to payment errors. Therefore, when creating your program's VPK calendar, think of it as a schedule that can only be changed due to extraordinary circumstances (i.e. hurricanes).

6. VPK Assessments

- a. VKP Assessment AP1, AP2 and AP3
- b. The provider shall order pre- and post-assessment materials as needed and submit assessment scores by logging into the Bright Beginnings website <https://brightbeginningsfl.org/Register.aspx> by the deadlines established in rule which are based on the provider's VPK class schedule approved by the Coalition
 - 1) Summer VPK providers are required to submit AP1 & 3, and School Year providers are required to submit AP1 and AP3 unless on probation (see section 7). Those providers on probation must submit AP1, AP2, and AP3.
 - 2) All providers must input their information into the web based system Bright Beginnings for AP1 and AP3 timely. VPK providers are required to enter assessment scores for each child to whom the assessment was administered. All assessment data must be entered and submitted by the specified date for each Assessment Period (AP).
 - 3) Deadlines for pre and post assessment are based on each VPK class schedule, which is the VPK class calendar approved by the coalition in the VPK APP on the provider portal.
 - a) Assessment Period 1 (AP1) is the pre-assessment, which is the first 30 calendar days of the VPK class schedule beginning with the first VPK instructional day and including non-instructional days. Data must be entered within 45 days of the beginning of VPK.
 - b) Assessment Period 2 (AP2) is not required for most providers, but is recommended. Providers on probation that have chosen the OEL-Approved Staff Development Plan are required to administer AP2 and must submit the scores on-line within 15 calendar days after the last day of the VPK class schedule.
 - c) Assessment Period 3 (AP3) is the post-assessment, which is the last 30 calendar days of the VPK program ending on the last VPK instructional day and including non-instructional days. Data must be entered within 15 days of the end of VPK.

- d) Summer scores for AP1 & AP3 must be submitted by August 15th.
- c. *Failure to comply with assessment requirements has serious consequences!* If a VPK provider fails or refuses to comply, the Office of Early Learning requires the Early Learning Coalition to revoke the eligibility of the VPK provider to deliver VPK for a period of five (5) years.

7. VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate

- a. The Florida Department of Education/State Board of Education is required by law to calculate a kindergarten readiness rate every year for each private or public school. The readiness rate for VPK providers is for either the school year or summer program.
- b. The VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate (FLKRS) measures how well a VPK provider prepares 4 year olds to be ready for kindergarten based on the standards. These standards describe what 4 year old children should know and be able to do by the end of their prekindergarten year.
- c. Providers who do not meet the minimum standards set by the Office of Early Learning and measured by FLKRS are placed on probation and required to submit an improvement plan. The Coalition or school district must approve an improvement plan for a VPK provider on probation.
- d. In order to continue running the VPK program providers on probation are required to:
 - Year 1: Submit an improvement plan for approval by the Coalition or school district and implement the plan. The provider must select two target areas for improvement. The first target area is mandatory; providers must purchase and implement a DOE-approved curriculum or complete the DOE-Approved Staff Development Plan for Providers on Probation.
 - Year 2: Remain on probation and submit a VPK Education Program Annual Probation Progress Report.
 - Year 3: Apply for and be granted a good cause exemption or be removed from the VPK program for five years.

Providers must complete all steps of the improvement process electronically on the website: <https://vpk.fldoe.org>

Additional Program Requirements

The following requirements apply to both the school year and the summer VPK programs

1. Statewide Provider Agreement

Prior to being authorized to provide VPK services, every VPK provider applicant must enter into a contractual agreement with the Coalition by signing a VPK Statewide Agreement (VPK-20) through the provider portal. This document outlines the following established requirements of each VPK Provider and the provider's commitment to comply with those requirements:

- a. Prohibition of starting VPK program before approval: VPK providers must have a fully executed copy of the Statewide Contract (OEL-VPK-20) for the current fiscal year prior to beginning their VPK program.
- b. Locations of VPK programs: Each location where VPK is offered must, at all times, meet every qualification and requirement for offering the VPK program.
- c. Notification of Changes: VPK providers are required to notify the Coalition as follows:
 - Providers will report changes in ownership, corporate structure, name or location to the Coalition or designee a minimum of fourteen (14) calendar days BEFORE the change. Notification must also include prompt submission of a new VPK Application (VPK APP in the provider portal). Depending on the change, a new contract may also be required.
 - Other changes: Any of the following circumstances must be reported to the Coalition within 14 days using the Provider Notification of Change form (available on the ELC website) You may notify your mentor or the VPK Provider Coordinator
 - Any changes to information previously provided to the Coalition on in the VPK APP.
 - Loss or change of Director
 - Loss or change of VPK teacher or VPK secondary teacher
 - Loss or change in accreditation or licensure status (i.e. Gold Seal)
 - VPK class schedule change, addition or deletion to information previously submitted to the Coalition as a part of the provider's eligibility to conduct VPK services
 - Changes that directly affect the operation of their program (i.e. emergency closure) or the ability to be contacted (i.e. telephone numbers, mailing address, e-mail etc.)

2. Child Enrollment and Attendance

- a. To be eligible for reimbursement, the VPK provider may only enroll a child who has a VPK certificate issued from the Family Portal online system.
- b. Upon enrollment, the VPK provider will promptly enter the child's information in the provider portal. VPK providers must provide parents with copies of their attendance policy.
- c. If you discharge a student, you must document on the provider portal that you have removed the child.
- d. VPK providers must document daily attendance both in the facility (sign-in/sign-out sheets) and in the classroom. This documentation supports the attendance certification each month of the child's attendance.

- e. VPK providers are responsible for ensuring that parents certify their child's attendance each month by signing the Student Attendance and Parental Choice certificates and maintaining these records.
- f. The provider is responsible for complying with ELC regarding submission of attendance records and other required information in order to be paid promptly, through the provider portal.

3. Maintenance of Records

- VPK child enrollment and attendance records are confidential and must be kept by the provider for at least five (5) years after the child's last day of attendance.

Be sure to keep copies of all documents for your files
and retain for five years.

- Records of the VPK director and the VPK instructors must be kept for at least five (5) years after the employee's last day of attendance.
- Parents of VPK children have the right to inspect and review the individual record for only his or her child and to obtain copies of the records if requested.
- If you will no longer offer VPK, your VPK records of the past 5 years of VPK need to be submitted to the Early Learning Coalition by your last day or you may forfeit your final payment.

4. Nondiscrimination

PROVIDER agrees to comply with the antidiscrimination requirements of 42 U.S.C. s. 2000d, regardless of whether PROVIDER receives federal financial assistance. PROVIDER agrees not to discriminate against a parent or child, including the refusal to admit a child for enrollment in the VPK Program, in violation of the antidiscrimination requirements.

5. Parent Rights

- a. It is against the law for a VPK provider to charge parents a fee or require a payment for a child in the VPK program, whether as a condition of enrollment or participation in the VPK program.
- b. A VPK provider may not require a child be enrolled full time, or spend extended hours in their facility as a condition of enrollment in the VPK program.
- c. A VPK provider may not charge a parent for any VPK days. The provider is further prohibited from charging a parent for any fee or reimbursement for funds lost due to the provider's non-compliance with the VPK rules and regulations.

6. Compliance Verification Monitoring

- a. The Coalition has an ongoing obligation to verify a VPK provider's compliance with Florida Statutes, state rules; and policies and procedures of the Coalition and the Florida Office of Early Learning.

- b. The provider must allow the Coalition to enter the VPK site at any time for this purpose.
- c. The provider must also allow the Coalition or designated staff to inspect and copy the records maintained by the provider concerning the VPK program, VPK instructors, VPK directors, and VPK children.
- d. The provider must submit corrective action plans for any non-compliance documented during a VPK monitoring inspection.
- e. The provider's non-compliance with any terms of the VPK Provider Agreement may result in the Coalition withholding funds. The Coalition will notify the provider in writing of any financial penalties.

7. Termination as VPK Provider

The Coalition may terminate the VPK Provider agreement if the provider fails to comply with the requirements of the statute, rule, corrective action or agreement. Repeated failure to meet VPK requirements could result in termination of the provider's VPK contract. Revocation will be for a period of five years.

8. Provider Application Process

A provider who intends to offer VPK creates a provider profile on the Office of Early Learning's Provider Portal, if one does not already exist for the fiscal year for which you want to contract. The provider services portal is available at <https://providerservices.floridaearlylearning.com/Account/Login>. Once you have completed a profile, you need to contact the Early Learning Coalition of SWFL to receive guidance on next steps. Send an email to Bernadette.Russello@elcofswfl.org for more information.

The VPK contract is annual and must be renewed to continue as a provider. First, the provider profile needs to be updated for the fiscal year for which you want to contract. Once this is complete, contact your Early Childhood Specialist to have them initiate a contract and VPK APP for you. Fill out the VPK APP completely for the new fiscal year and submit and certify. Sign the VPK contract, submit and certify. Once your contract has been signed, you will be sent a certificate and VPK cling for your display purposes. Your signed contract can be downloaded from the provider portal, and you have access to it as long as you are contracted with ELC of SWFL.



Child Enrollment in the VPK Program

1. Eligibility Requirement

- a. Child must turn 4 years old on or before September 1st of the service year (whether enrolling for a school year or summer program), or turn 5 between February and August of the year previous to enrollment. Parents must provide proof with documented birth verification, preferably birth certificate.
- b. Child must reside in the State of Florida. (Parent must provide proof of residence such as a driver's license, utility bill or payroll stub).
- c. Providers may assist families to enroll in VPK to receive a certificate through the Family Portal on the Florida Office of Early Learning website at <https://familyservices.floridaearlylearning.com/Account/Login>.

2. Delayed Enrollment

- a. A provider may enroll a child in a VPK classroom after the class has begun, if at least 10% of the instructional hours remain (54 hours for school-year program or 30 hours for a summer program).

3. Transfer Procedure

- a. Providers may accept children who transfer from one program to another. However, the parent may only transfer one time and only if child has attended less than 70% (378 hours) of the 540 program hours.
- b. The parent must obtain a new Certificate of Eligibility through the Family portal prior to transferring the child. Providers will not receive payment unless the parent obtains and submits a new certificate.

4. Withdrawal from the VPK Program

If a child withdraws from the VPK program, the provider will not receive payment for any days after the last instructional day that the child attended the program.



Attendance and Payment

1. Providers Attendance Policy

Providers are paid the full monthly rate for each child as long as they are in compliance with the VPK attendance policy as follows:

- a. Providers must inform parents of their attendance policy prior to the start of the VPK program. Parents must agree to comply with the individual program's attendance policy. The VPK attendance policy may not be changed once the VPK year has begun.
- b. A provider may dismiss a child who does not comply with their attendance policy and a child may re-enroll in another provider's program.

2. Temporary Closure

A temporary closure is eligible for payment if a VPK provider submits a written statement and provides documentation which demonstrates that the closure is temporary and caused by circumstances beyond the provider's control.

- a. Documentation is not required if a state of emergency is declared, not to exceed 10 instructional days.
- b. If a temporary closure is caused by other circumstances, then the closure is not eligible for payment.
- c. Provider must revise the VPK class schedule or calendar.

3. Documentation of Daily Attendance by Provider

VPK providers must maintain attendance documentation on each child through one of the following methods:

- a. A daily sign-in record that documents the date, the child's name, and the signature of the child's parent or other designee
- b. An electronic system that records attendance instead of a paper record
- c. Another method to document attendance which reflects each child's daily attendance in the VPK program (i.e. a school based program's classroom attendance sheet). Alternative processes must be pre-approved by the Coalition.

Commented [GT1]: Not sure this works anymore

4. Submitting Information for Payment

The provider must submit their signed student attendance roster by the 3rd of each month. VPK absence documentation does not need to be submitted to the Coalition. Be sure to include the VPK Long or Short form for each child signed by the parent or guardian monthly.

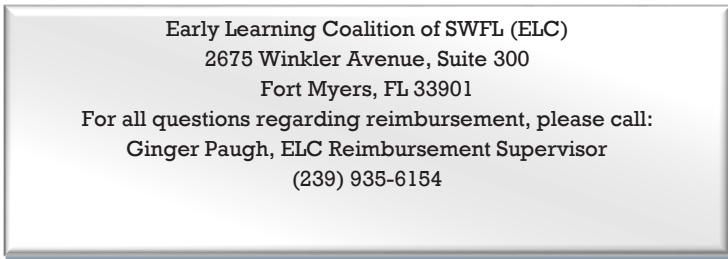
5. Payment for VPK Services

- a. Providers have the option to receive advance payment for VPK services which is based on projected perfect attendance for each child enrolled. Advance payments are normally dispersed on the first day of the month at 95% of the VPK rate.
- b. Payment for services can be made in advance (prepaid) and adjusted monthly to reflect current enrollment. Providers can choose to opt out of prepayment and receive reimbursement based on actual child attendance.
- c. Rates are determined by the amount of funding from the legislature every year. Once known, the Office of Early Learning divides resources to the Coalitions based upon various criteria.

6. VPK Provider Fees

- a. Providers may not charge fees for the VPK program including, but not limited to:
 - Registration fees
 - Other supplemental fees
 - Book fees, or supply lists
- b. A provider can request that a parent voluntarily pay fees for offsite activities, etc. but it cannot be a mandatory fee for the VPK program.
- c. Parents must be notified in writing that they are voluntary fees, not mandatory.
- d. VPK does not allow late fees; however, once VPK time is over, the parent is paying for non-VPK time and therefore may be charged late fees.

7. VPK Post Attendance Audit & Payment VPK providers must be audited at least once during the fiscal year. Attendance may be audited for any period in which the provider received VPK funding. Every VPK provider is required to have the parents verify their child's



attendance for the prior month.

Parents must verify the child's attendance on Form OEL-VPK 03S (Student Attendance and Parent Choice Certificate Short Form) or Form OEL-VPK 03L (Student Attendance and Parent Choice Certificate Long Form).

- a. If a provider uses the short form for attendance verification, then daily sign in/out logs that record the date, child's name, and signature of the parent or person dropping off or picking up the child must be submitted for post attendance audit.
- b. If a provider uses the long form for attendance verification, then this is the only form submitted for post attendance audit.

8. VPK Payments

VPK payments are based on the number of hours children attend VPK programs, starting with the first day of attendance and ending with the last day of attendance, and the number of hours of payable absences. A child is considered attending for a whole day, even if he/she attends part of the day.

9. Attendance

- a. If a child attends more than 80% of the VPK class time, then the provider is paid for the whole month. If the child attends less than 80% of the time, the payments are a portion of the month.
- b. This payment formula is applied every month. VPK payments are reconciled at the end of the program. Absences are paid up to 20% of the month, and 20% of

the year. Providers will receive the full payment upon the final reconciliation of the classroom.

- c. Due to this method of determining payment, it is no longer necessary to obtain written excuses from the parent for any absences in the VPK Program.

Complaint and Dispute Resolution Procedure

The Complaint Resolution process shall be used to resolve issues when parents or providers are dissatisfied by actions or services offered through the Coalition. There are four possible stages of resolution. The complainant shall have the opportunity to express his/her concerns at each stage of the process.

1. Informal Communication

The first stage is informal communication and occurs immediately when the person expresses dissatisfaction verbally. The first line employee must immediately address the matter at that time. The activities that occur in this stage will be documented.

2. Secondary Review

- a. If the issue is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, then the supervisor is contacted for further assistance. If the supervisor is available and immediately able to resolve the issue, then no further action is necessary.
- b. If the supervisor is not available or unable to address the complainant's concerns, the initial counselor or staff person will complete a complaint report form and provide a copy to the supervisor.
- c. The supervisor will, within two (2) business days from the date of complaint:
 - Contact the complainant
 - Review the complaint
 - Attempt to mediate the issues
 - Document the content of their communication

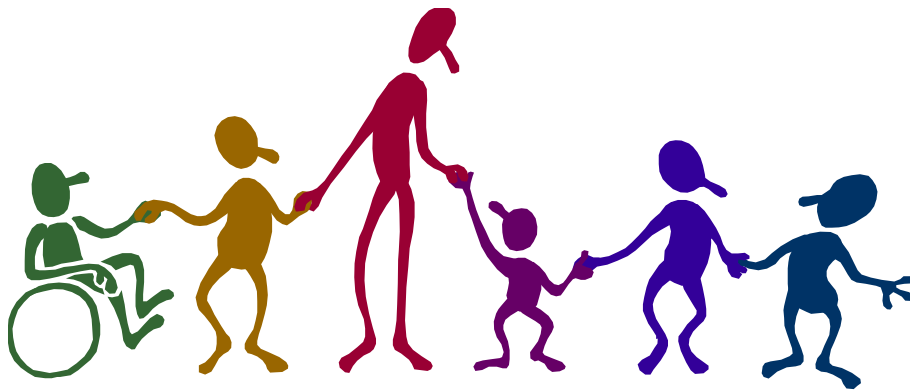
3. Managerial Review

- a. If the informal communication is unsuccessful and the complainant still considers the matter unresolved, the supervisor will contact the designated manager for further action.
- b. Within 5 business days, the designee will:
 - Communicate directly with the complainant
 - Review all available information
 - Attempt to resolve the matter, if possible
- c. Within 15 business days, the designee will provide a letter summarizing the decision or outcome of the complaint dispute.

4. Appeal to Coalition

- a. If the matter remains unresolved, the Coalition CEO will make a final determination and notify the grievant in writing of the decision. The letter will include a notice of the right to hearing before the Coalition Review Hearing Committee.

- b. The letter will be sent by certified, return receipt requested United States mail, or may be hand-delivered. A copy of the correspondence must be maintained by the Coalition and a copy must be placed in the provider's file.
- c. Should the provider request a hearing, it will be processed in accordance with EII.QS.C.6.5.2 "Appeals and Hearings."



Helpful Websites

The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida

<https://elcofswfl.org/>

Child Care Training

<https://training01-dcf.myflorida.com/studentsite/admin/login.jsf>

Florida Office of Early Learning:

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

Background Screening Clearinghouse

<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/backgroundscreening/>

VPK Program Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate:

<https://vpk.fldoe.org>

DCF Child Care Training- 888-352-2842; fax – 850-922-2895

