

Early Learning Coalition of Florida's Heartland, Inc.

Policy Snapshot: VPK Child Eligibility and Enrollment

The purpose of this policy is to provide an overview of eligibility and enrollment procedures including child age, residency, parent consultation, class transfer, re-enrollment and confidentiality of records.

Subject: VPK Child Eligibility and Enrollment Attachment 1.3.4		Procedure # VPK-01	
Page: 1 of 8	Adoption Date: 12-20-06	Revision Date:	
Approved by: ELCFH Board	Title: Andrew Bible, Chair		
Approved by:	Title:		
Distribution: All Client Services Policy/Procedure Manuals			
Authority References: ELCFH Board, Federal and State Statutes			

- I. **PURPOSE:** To establish consistent application of child eligibility determination and enrollment procedures for the VPK program.
- II. **REVIEW HISTORY:** This policy replaces any previous written or verbal directives issued in any of the four counties.
- III. **CONTACT:** Anne Bouhebent, Executive Director.
- IV. **PERSONS AFFECTED:** Parents, Coalition Eligibility/VPK Staff and VPK Providers.
- V. **POLICY:** This policy sets the process in which eligibility of children for the VPK Program will be determined and the manner of enrollment.
- VI. **CROSS REFERENCE:** Chapter 1002.51-79, Florida Statutes, Rule 60BB-8, Florida Administrative Code. AWI policies OEL-PI-0013-05; OEL-PI-0014-05; OEL-PI-0035-06; OEL-PI-0031-05; and OEL-PI-0026-05.
- VII. **DEFINITIONS:**
 - “**Authorized entity**” refers to approved VPK providers specifically authorized by the Coalition to have the limited authority to enroll children in the VPK programs offered by that particular provider.
 - “**AWI**” refers to the Agency for Workforce Innovation.
 - “**Coalition**” refers to “**Early Learning Coalition of Florida’s Heartland**” Inc. (ELCFH), a coalition created under s 411.01, F.S. and serving Charlotte, DeSoto, Hardee and Highland counties.

“Dismissal” from a VPK program means that a private prekindergarten provider or public school removes a student from its VPK program, resulting in the coalition or its designee recording a termination and assigning “DISMISSED” as the reason for the termination in the statewide information system.

“EFS System” refers Enhanced Field System which is the primary computer program for Voluntary PreKindergarten and School Readiness.

“Enroll” or “enrollment” means recording an association in the Enhanced Field System (EFS) between a child who has been determined eligible for the VPK program and the provider or school chosen by the child’s parent or guardian.

“Fiscal Year” refers to each year beginning July 1 and ending June 30 of the following year.

"Homeless child" means the following according to ss 1003.01 (12) FS:

- (a) One who lacks a fixed, regular nighttime residence;
- (b) One who has a primary nighttime residence that is:
 - 1. A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill;
 - 2. An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - 3. A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; or
- (c) One who temporarily resides with an adult other than his or her parent because the parent is suffering financial hardship.

“Parent” means a parent by blood, marriage or adoption and also means a legal guardian, licensed foster parent or individual identified with the legal ability to provide care for the eligible child and with whom the child lives.

“Provider” means the individual or facility responsible for the provision of Voluntary PreKindergarten services.

“Re-enrollment” means that a coalition or its designee records the termination of an eligible student’s enrollment in a VPK program in the statewide information system and subsequently records an enrollment in the statewide information system between the student and another provider or school delivering the VPK program.

“Register” or “registration” means recording a parent’s or guardian’s request for his or her child to be determined eligible to participate in the VPK program.

“VPK” means Voluntary PreKindergarten Education Program pursuant to Chapter 1002, Part V, Florida Statutes

“VPK Reimbursement Rate” means the hourly rate approved by the Legislature for voluntary prekindergarten services for a child in the VPK program. Pre-payment and reimbursement rates for children are based on, but not limited to, the status and duration of the child’s care, the amount designed by the legislature and the Agency for Workforce Innovation.

“Withdrawal” from a VPK program means that a parent or guardian removes his or her student from a private prekindergarten provider’s or public school’s VPK program, resulting in the coalition or its designee recording a termination and assigning **“WITHDRAWN”** as the reason for the termination in the EFS system.

VIII. PROCEDURES:

General

1. The VPK program is an entitlement offered by the State of Florida, at no cost, to any parent whose child meets all the eligibility requirements.
2. Eligibility is determined by age, residency and whether they have been previously enrolled.
3. There is no limit to the number of eligible children who can participate.
4. The Coalition is responsible for determining child eligibility entering the voluntary prekindergarten program, and ensuring each child meets all aspects of the eligibility requirements.
5. Parents registering his or her child for the VPK program must either:
 - (a) Register online at www.vpkflorida.org; or
 - (b) Complete Form AWI-VPK 01 Parent Application and submit to the Coalition.
6. Upon receipt of an application, the Coalition agency shall contact the parent, within 15 business days of receiving the application, to provide instructions on how to submit the documentation necessary to complete the application process. This contact must be documented.

Child Age Eligibility Requirements

7. Children must attain the age of 4 years on or before September 1 of the school year considered. Eligibility continues until the beginning of the school year for which the child is eligible to enter kindergarten in the public school, or until the child is admitted to kindergarten, whichever occurs first.
8. This age requirement may not be waived for any reason, including a child’s disability or circumstance.
9. As a part of the application process, the Coalition must collect and retain in the child’s file, a photocopy of at least one of the following documents for purposes of verifying age:
 - (a) A duly attested transcript of the child’s birth record filed according to law with a public officer charged with the duty of recording births;

- (b) A duly attested transcript of a certificate of baptism showing the date of birth and place of baptism of the child, accompanied by an affidavit sworn to by the parent;
- (c) An insurance policy on the child's life that has been in force for at least two years, which reflects the child's birth date;
- (d) A bona fide contemporary religious record of the child's birth accompanied by an affidavit sworn to by the parent;
- (e) A passport or certificate of arrival in the United States showing the birth date of the child;
- (f) A transcript of record of age shown in the child's school record from at least four (4) years prior to application, stating date of birth;
- (g) An immunization record indicating the date of birth, signed by a public health officer or by a licensed practicing physician;
- (h) A valid military dependent identification card showing the date of birth; or
- (i) 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 reflecting the child's birth date, 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.

Residence Eligibility Requirements

10. To be eligible for the VPK program, the 4-year-old child must reside in the State of Florida. Families who have not established Florida as their legal residence, but are residing for an extended period of time, are qualified to receive services (*e.g.*, work and education visas or immigrants).

11. The Coalition must only establish where the child lives through supporting documentation. During the application process, the coalition shall collect and retain a copy of at least one document for purposes of verifying residency. Each item must also contain the name of the parent of the child and the address of the parent as submitted on Form AWI-VPK 01 Parent Application. Post office boxes are not sufficient to documentation. During the application process, the coalition shall collect and retain at determine residency. The following are acceptable documents to establish where a child resides:

- (a) Utility bills,
- (b) Bank statements,
- (c) Insurance policies,
- (d) Pay stubs, or
- (e) Government documents (*e.g.*, prior tax returns).

12. A homeless child, as defined in s. 1003.01, F.S., must have access to the VPK program. The Coalition must assist homeless families and their children by helping to locate needed documentation to determine residency, i.e. letter from homeless shelter or sworn affidavit from parent. (Note: A child who is imprisoned, detained, or in the custody of the state

pursuant to a state or federal law is not considered a homeless child).

Participation Eligibility Requirements

13. The Coalition must determine whether the child has been previously enrolled in the VPK program. If child has never participated, the Coalition is responsible for ensuring that a child receives services and funding for one full-time equivalent as established in s. 1002.71(4), F.S.

14. In an effort to determine whether the child was previously enrolled, the Coalition must interview the parent about the child's previous child care placement and inquire about the possibility of prior VPK participation. In addition, the Coalition must check the EFS system by the parent's name, child's name and child's birth date.

15. If the child attended a child care program outside the four county area, the Coalition must make every effort to contact the responsible Coalition to determine the child past participation status.

16. If it is determined the child was previously enrolled, the child may only re-enroll if the circumstances meet the criteria described in paragraphs 25 through 32.

Parent Consultation and Enrollment

17. The Coalition is required to perform a face to face, in-person parent consultation with the parent of every child that registers for the VPK program. However, a face to face consultation is not required if ALL three of the following conditions are met:

- a. The Coalition previously conducted a face to face, in-person interview with the parent for purposes of other early learning services (i.e. School Readiness, Head Start, etc.) and;
- b. the Coalition maintains a current child's birth and residency record for the other programs documentation submitted by the parent or guardian, and;
- c. the Coalition staff verifies the information against those records.

18. Upon determining that a child is eligible for the VPK program, the Coalition must give the child's parent a Certificate of Eligibility (Form AWI-VPK 02), as an electronically generated and printed form using the EFS system.

19. The Coalition staff must provide the parent with a choice of providers approved by the Coalition to provide voluntary prekindergarten services, and profiles of the VPK providers, {in accordance with ss1002.53 (5) F.S.} that includes the provider's services, curriculum, instructor credentials and instructor-to-student ratio, and kindergarten school readiness rate. In addition, the parent must be advised of their rights and responsibilities as a VPK participating parent.

20. A parent may enroll the child in one of the following programs:

- (a) A school-year prekindergarten program delivered by a VPK provider 540 hour program under s. 1002.55, F.S. and approved by the Coalition; or
- (b) A 300 hour summer prekindergarten program delivered by a public school or private prekindergarten provider under s. 1002.61, F.S. and approved by the

Coalition.

21. To complete a child's enrollment, the selected VPK provider must submit the child's name and certificate number from Form AWI-VPK 02 to the Coalition. The Coalition will associate the provider information with the child into the EFS system within three business days of receipt of Form AWI-VPK 02.

22. The Coalition will follow this procedure by sending the parent a letter confirming the child's enrollment in the EFS/VPK system and reminding the parent of their responsibilities to notify in the event they withdraw the child from the program.

Class Transfers

23. A VPK provider has the discretion to change a child's enrollment from one VPK class to another VPK class in the same facility. Such a change does not affect the child's enrollment status as long as the provider does not report the child for funding as more than one FTE. However, the provider must contact the Coalition for any class transfers to ensure that the hours of service are the same and also to ensure that the class is not over enrolled.

24. The provider must obtain the written consent of the parent and the Coalition before making the change if the change would:

- a. Count as the child's one-time reenrollment for good cause or extreme hardship;
- or
- b. Cause a change in the times or days of the child's VPK schedule.

Re-enrollment

25. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from the VPK program. In addition, providers may experience a circumstance in which the child may be dismissed from the program. Children may re-enroll with another VPK provider under the following circumstances:

- a. The child was withdrawn or dismissed before the first day of attendance
- b. Child completed fewer than 10 percent of instructional hours for "good cause."
- c. Has not substantially completed the VPK program.

26. "Good cause" is satisfied if a parent attests in writing to the Coalition that one or more of the following applies:

- a. Illness of the student or the student's immediate family member.
- b. Conflict between the parent and the provider concerning policies, practices, curriculum or the procedures of the VPK program
- c. Change in child's residence.
- d. Change in the parent's employment schedule or place of employment.
- e. Transportation problems
- f. Extreme hardship circumstance.

27. Extreme hardship is satisfied when the following has occurred:

- a. Extended illness of the child or child's immediate family member, as documented by a medical professional, if the illness results in
- b. Absence for more than 20% of the time,
- c. Dismissal by the VPK program for non-compliance with the attendance policy
- d. Dismissal of the child due to documented behavior issues
- e. Termination of the VPK class prior to the completion of the required 540 school

- year hours or 300 summer hours required to be delivered by the provider,
- f. Provider's misconduct or failure to comply with the laws, rules provider agreement (Form AWI-VPK 20), as documented by the Coalition.
- g. Change in the student's residence, as documented by rent, mortgage or utility payments,
- h. Termination of transportation as documented by the provider
- i. Causes that require the child's travel time to exceed 50 minutes from the child's residence to the provider, or extends the parent's total travel time by 50 minutes or more from the child's residence, to the provider, and to the parent's place of employment.
- j. Changes in the parent's employment schedule, as documented by the employer, which prevents the parent from providing the child transportation to the VPK provider
- k. The inability to meet the basic needs of the child or the child's immediate family, including but not limited to, food, shelter, clothing, transportation, as documented by a professional; (e.g. law enforcement, social worker, counselor, etc.)
- l. Other emergency situations or extraordinary circumstances (e.g. hurricane, military deployment, etc.)

28. A child may not re-enroll with a provider if the child has "substantially completed" the VPK program. Substantially completing the program is when the child attends 60 percent of the VPK programs instructional hours. An absence is not counted as a day of attendance for determining substantial completion.

29. In order to re-enroll a child, the parent must complete the Re-enrollment Application (Form AWI-VPK 05), attach documentation of an extreme hardship, if applicable, and submit the completed application to the Coalition.

30. If the child is re-enrolled with a coalition other than the coalition of the previous enrollment, the parent must complete and submit Child application Form AWI-VPK 01)

31. Re-enrollment shall follow all the other requirements of initial enrollment with a recommendation of a face to face interview, although not required.

Confidentiality of Child Records

32. Individual records of a child enrolled in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program are confidential and exempt from the Public Records Section 119.07, of the Florida Statutes. Such records include assessment data, health data, records of teacher's observations, and personal identifying information of an enrolled child and his or her parent.

33. A parent always has the right to inspect, review and receive a copy, if requested, of the individual VPK record of his or her child.

34. All records may be reviewed at any time by staff of the Agency for Workforce Innovation, or the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

35. Confidential and exempt VPK records may be released to:

- (a) The United States Secretary of Education, the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Comptroller General of the United States for the purpose of federal audits.

- (b) Individuals or organizations conducting studies for institutions to develop, validate, or administer assessments or improve instruction.
- (c) Accrediting organizations in order to carry out their accrediting functions.
- (d) Appropriate parties in connection with an emergency if the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the child or other individuals.
- (e) The Auditor General in connection with his or her official functions.
- (f) A court of competent jurisdiction in compliance with an order of that court pursuant to a lawfully issued subpoena.
- (g) Parties to an interagency agreement among early learning coalitions, local governmental agencies, VPK providers, or state agencies for the purpose of implementing the VPK Program. Any agencies, organizations, or individual receiving such confidential and exempt records must protect the records in a manner that will not permit the personal identification of an enrolled child or his or her parent by persons other than those authorized to receive the records.