

**League of Women Voters of The Villages/Tri County Area
and
Lake / Sumter American Association of University Women**

Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Project

Early Learning Definitions

1. **Day Care** is a term that is not used anymore in professional child care circles.
2. **Nursery School** is another term not used much anymore, although it denotes more of a learning environment or educational establishment than babysitting.
3. "**Child Care** means the care, protection, and supervision of a child, for a period of less than 24 hours a day on a regular basis, which supplements parental care, enrichment, and health supervision for the child, in accordance with his or her individual needs, and for which a payment, fee, or grant is made for care." (Florida Statutes Chapter 402). Most child care is purchased by families for children birth-to-5 years, but many families also seek after-school child care for their school-aged children.
4. **Head Start** is a federally-funded program designed to provide education, health, and social experiences for 3- and 4-year-old children from very low-income families. Recently, funds have been available to expand services to children birth-to-3 years. This program is called **Early Head Start**. Both Early Head Start and Head Start have a family income requirement for children to participate.
5. **School Readiness (SR) Program** "offers financial assistance to low-income families for early education and care so they can become financially self-sufficient and their young children can be successful in school in the future" (Florida School Readiness Fact Sheet). The program serves children from birth to age 13 years who come from low-income families and whose parent(s)/guardians are working or participating in an educational activity at least 20 hours/week. Families must pay a copayment for child care based on income and family size. The program is funded primarily by a federal Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant, but matching funds from the Early Learning Coalitions also support this program.
6. **Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)** is a free, state-funded program that "prepares early learners for success in kindergarten and beyond" (OEL website). It was mandated in Florida in 2002 with a constitutional amendment that requires high-quality programming for all 4-year-olds in our State. "Children must live in Florida and be 4 years old on or before September 1 of the current school year. If their fourth birthday falls February 2 through September 1 in a calendar year, parents can postpone enrolling their child in VPK that year and wait until the following year when their child is 5" (OEL website).

A Comparison of Florida’s Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten and School Readiness Programs

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten	School Readiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entirely state-funded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded by federal block grant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No matching funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires matching funds from the ELCs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a parent co-pay
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves 4-year-olds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves children from birth to 13 years of age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No eligibility criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family eligibility criteria (e.g., income, work status)

Some facts about VPK Today

1. Although the voters mandated **high-quality VPK**, the reality is that Florida meets only 3 of 10 criteria of quality, and the legislature-defined characteristics of the VPK program place Florida at the lowest level of quality.
2. Florida's VPK is underfunded – by a lot. Even at only 3 hours per day, with minimally qualified teachers and high pupil/teacher ratios, we are still underfunded by about \$800 per child.
3. In terms of resources devoted to VPK, Florida ranks 40th among 44 jurisdictions with VPK programs.