

# Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards: What Parents Should Know



## It's Okay to Play in VPK!

Introduction to the Standards

Developmentally Appropriate Environments and Diverse Learners

Physical Health

Approaches to Learning

Social and Emotional Development

Language and Communication

Emergent Literacy

Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

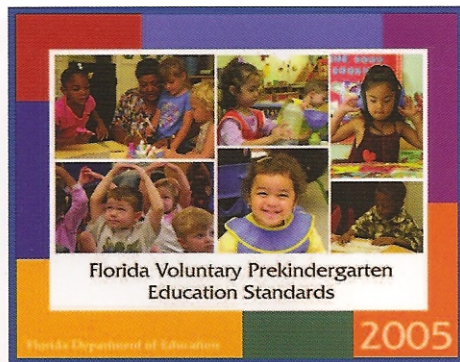
Motor Development

## Introduction to the Standards

The Constitutional Amendment approved by Florida's voters in 2002 requires that a high quality prekindergarten learning opportunity be available to all four-year-old children in the state. The program is free and participation is voluntary. The implementing legislation required the Florida Department of Education (DOE) to adopt performance standards for children in the VPK Education Program. Performance standards are examples of the knowledge and skills that children should have by the end of their VPK year and are based on the way children naturally grow and develop.

To ensure that the VPK standards were based on the most current research and evidence-based, effective practice in the fields of early childhood education and emergent literacy, DOE, through its Office of Early Learning and in collaboration with the Florida Center for Reading Research, established a Panel of Experts. The Panel included individuals with expertise in the area of early childhood with a research emphasis on emergent literacy, individuals with expertise in the area of early childhood with other research emphases, and early learning practitioners.

The Florida VPK Education Standards were approved by the State Board of Education on March 15, 2005.





## Purpose of this Guide

The Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards describe skills that four-year-old children should know and be able to do by the end of their VPK experience. Fully recognizing parents as their child's first teacher, this guide is designed to help families understand how these standards can help them create developmentally appropriate learning environments for children.

This guide begins by describing the characteristics of developmentally appropriate learning environments. Then it talks about how the VPK Education Standards can be used to help children of all different backgrounds, abilities, temperaments, and interests to learn and develop.

The guide also introduces the seven “domains” of development that are included in the VPK Education Standards:

- Physical Health
- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Communication
- Emergent Literacy
- Cognitive Development and General Knowledge
- Motor Development

For each domain, families will find examples of play activities that support children's development—not only in the classroom, but also in the home and in the community.

## Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments—Play with a Purpose!

Research shows that young children learn best through hands-on experiences that have been planned by knowledgeable teachers. To parents, this may look like “just play,” but it is actually active learning. When young children explore things directly with their senses and practice new skills through play, they are learning in ways that are meaningful to them at their stage of development.

Here are some characteristics of a developmentally appropriate environment in VPK:

- The children look happy, healthy, and involved in activities.
- The prekindergarten teachers are friendly, kind, calm, and patient.
- The prekindergarten teachers get on the children’s eye level to listen, talk, and play with them.
- The prekindergarten teachers give individual attention to each child daily.
- There are various learning centers and play spaces available (such as dramatic play, art center, blocks, library, manipulative toys, music, sand/water tables).
- There are plenty of books, blocks, puzzles, toys, and materials for all the children in care.
- The physical layout/classroom arrangement provides enough space for a variety of learning centers and activities.
- The daily schedule is well-planned and includes time for outdoor play and learning.
- The facility is cheerful, clean, and safe, and the equipment is in good repair.
- Instruction is linked to the Florida VPK Education Standards.





## Using the Florida VPK Education Standards with Diverse Learners

The Florida VPK Education Standards are not “one size fits all.” Children learn at different rates and have different experiences, abilities, and interests. When adults understand and embrace these differences, trust develops, relationships grow, and healthy learning follows. Teachers must be aware of individual differences and respond to them in ways that will meet each child’s needs. This is especially true when the VPK classroom includes children with disabilities, children of different cultures and ethnicities, and children whose native language is not English.

Here are some strategies that should be used to support the growth and learning of all children in VPK and help them attain the VPK Education Standards and be ready for kindergarten:

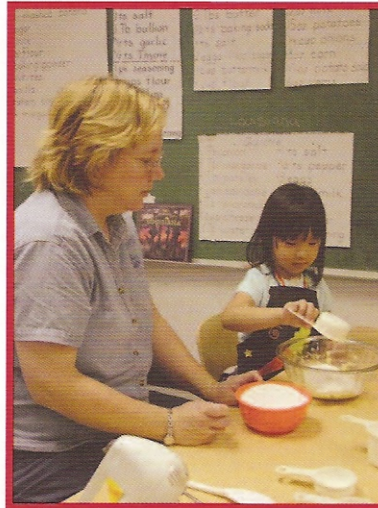
- Acknowledge that children can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in many ways.
- Recognize that a child’s native language serves as a foundation for knowledge acquisition.
- Use the strengths and skills children already have as the starting point for new experiences and instruction. Build on what they know.
- Make sure that all children are included in group activities.
- Help children develop communication skills by using words along with gestures or actions. Use lots of repetition.
- Give all children many opportunities to participate, so their language and communication skills can develop.
- Add new activities and materials to meet specific needs of the children.
- Modify materials and activities so the children can participate as independently as possible.
- Use peers as models, helpers, and friends to provide praise and encouragement.
- Adapt the flow of the room, activity areas, and seating options to help all children to participate actively.

## Physical Health

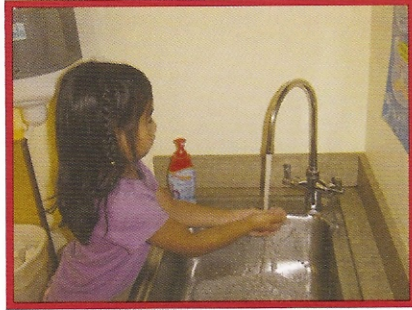
Learning and physical health go hand-in-hand. Physical health impacts every aspect of development. With their increased coordination, balance, and strength, four-year-old children are great explorers of their environments. They are able to accept learning challenges that were out of their reach just a few short months ago. When children are physically active and healthy, their social well-being is enhanced. By using their bodies to move, act, and react, children gain self-confidence. Their vision and hearing skills are refined in ways that facilitate language learning. They are also developing skills that enable them to be active partners in managing their health, safety, and physical fitness.

There are two main components of physical health in the VPK Education Standards:

- Physical Health (such as dental care, nutritional choices)
- Knowledge of Wellness (for example, following basic health and safety rules and habits)







Here are examples of activities that support children's physical health:

#### At Home

- Talk about the importance of brushing and flossing teeth. Practice together.
- Encourage children to wash their hands often. Talk about how germs are spread.
- While grocery shopping or fixing a snack, talk about choosing healthy, nutritious foods.
- Shedule regular well-child check-ups with a doctor or other health care provider.

#### During Outdoor Play

- Set up an obstacle course in the yard or on the playground for children to explore.
- Act out fire safety procedures (stop, drop, and roll).
- Create simple exercise routines with music.

#### In the Classroom

- Let children safely help prepare nutritious foods.
- Conduct regular fire and emergency drills.
- Plan and provide movement activities every day.

## Approaches to Learning

"Approaches to Learning" is not about specific knowledge or skills. It is about how the child learns new skills. Some four-year-olds seem to be bursting with the desire to explore and accept new challenges. Others need more structure and encouragement when trying new things. The role of teachers, parents, and other adults is to provide opportunities for success for all styles of learning. All children, regardless of learning style or special needs, can learn and be successful.

There are four main components of approaches to learning in the VPK Education Standards:

- Eagerness and Curiosity (like showing interest in stories, asking questions about how things work)
- Persistence (for example, trying again and again to button a shirt)
- Creativity and Inventiveness (such as trying different ways of carrying a cup to keep it from spilling)
- Planning and Reflection (for example, talking about plans to build a fort)







Here are examples of activities that encourage children to explore their environment and actively engage in learning:

#### At Home

- Ask questions that will encourage children to think, wonder, and ask questions of their own. Try open-ended questions that begin with who, what, when, where, why, or how, and that cannot be answered with just “yes” or “no.”
- Include children in planning special events (such as birthday parties, family vacation, weekend activities).
- During dinner, in the car, or at bath time, provide opportunities for children to discuss and review what they did during their day.

#### During Outdoor Play

- Plan a project (such as woodworking or gardening) and ask children for input.
- Plan and build a fort in the yard or on the playground together.
- Introduce new equipment and materials and talk about the different ways they might be used.

#### In the Classroom

- Invite special guests and plan field trips based on children’s interests.
- Offer various choices of learning centers and materials, and plenty of time for the children to become engaged.
- Change classroom activities and materials regularly to keep things interesting and encourage curiosity.

## Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional readiness is critical to a child's successful transition to kindergarten. Young children who are able to understand and express their own feelings, understand the viewpoint and feelings of others, cooperate with peers and adults, and resolve conflicts, are more likely to be successful in school. Positive relationships with adults lead to positive relationships with peers. Four-year-old children are developing important skills like how to join in conversations, ask questions, and listen to other people. They learn how to interact with a variety of people and in different situations.

There are five main components of social and emotional development in the VPK Education Standards:

- Self-Concept (being able to identify one's own characteristics and preferences)
- Self-Control (for example, waiting patiently for a turn at the water fountain)
- Relationships with Adults (such as responding appropriately when an adult says "Good morning," or going to an adult for help when a friend falls and gets hurt)
- Relationships with Peers (like talking with a friend to plan their play on the playground)
- Social Problem-Solving (for example, asking an adult for help when another child keeps taking his or her toy)







Here are examples of activities that encourage children's social and emotional development:

#### At Home

- Support children when they make mistakes. Acknowledge their efforts by saying things like "I see you worked hard on that," or "You almost made it."
- Model respect for others and good conversational skills like not interrupting others when they are speaking.
- Introduce children to other adults in the community.

#### During Outdoor Play

- Encourage friendships by setting up playground play-dates with other children.
- Encourage turn taking on outdoor equipment.
- Create activities that require children to work together in order to accomplish goals.

#### In the Classroom

- Recognize and display children's art work.
- Introduce new materials and encourage children to try them.
- Follow a consistent daily routine so children know what to expect.

## Language and Communication

When placed in environments that are rich in language, new experiences, and conversation, children develop their skills in understanding what others say to them and in using spoken language to express their own ideas and experiences.

There are five main components of language and communication development in the VPK Education Standards:

- Listening—receptive language (for example, listening to a story and showing that he or she understands it by pointing to a picture, answering a question, acting out the story)
- Speaking—expressive language (talking clearly enough for a visitor to understand)
- Vocabulary (such as knowing the names for objects, colors, foods, tools, body parts; using action words such as “skip,” “roll,” “throw”; using descriptive words such as “small,” “huge,” “slow”)
- Sentences and Structure (like being able to ask questions and give answers using complete sentences)
- Conversation (such as introducing oneself to a new neighbor; looking at the person one is talking to; asking questions and then listening to the answers)







## At Home

- Ask children questions like, “How was your day?” “What did you do at school?” “Whom did you play with?”
- Read stories to children and ask who, what, where, when, and why questions about the stories.
- Speak clearly, at a comfortable pace and an easily heard volume, inside and outdoors.

- Play “Simon Says” and scavenger hunt games using specific location, action, and descriptor words (such as “behind the big red slide”).
- Take children on field trips and to assemblies to create a social setting and give them a shared topic to discuss.
- Take children on nature walks and ask questions about what they see to get a conversation going.

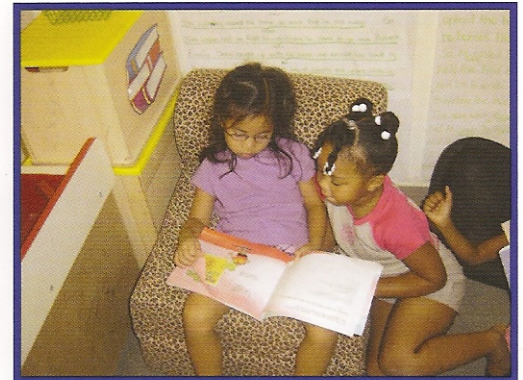
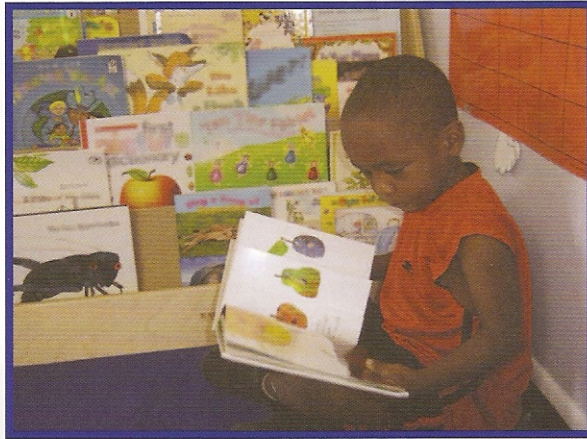
- Read concept-related books to the children.
- Engage children in conversation. Follow their lead in the conversation.
- When creating a bulletin board or mural for a new theme, label and discuss the meaning and function of the pictures and objects.

## Emergent Literacy

Learning to read and learning to write are among children's most important achievements. These skills open the door to a world of learning, discovery, and creativity. Children who have early experiences with books and other forms of print (such as recipes and road signs) are more likely to come to school excited about learning to read and write.

There are two main components of emergent literacy development in the VPK Education Standards:

- Emergent Reading (the child enjoys being read to, understands that words are made up of different sounds, knows the names and sounds of letters)
- Emergent Writing (the child tries to write by scribbling, drawing, putting his or her name on pictures, trying to copy letters or numbers)







Here are examples of activities that support emergent literacy in children:

#### At Home

- Create comfortable, inviting spaces for reading. Provide good lighting, and make the space cozy by adding throw pillows, bean bag chairs, and a book basket.
- Model appropriate book handling on a daily basis by holding the books right side up and putting them back on the shelf or in the book basket.
- Play a clapping game with the children, clapping once while saying each syllable in children's names.

#### During Outdoor Play

- Provide dramatic play props (plastic dishes and food, red cloak, hats, pretend tools) for children to use when re-enacting a story.
- Provide books and writing materials in the yard or on the playground.
- Encourage children to practice writing letters in the sand or dirt.

#### In the Classroom

- Provide written materials such as lists, menus, songs, signs, and charts and show the children how they might be used.
- Encourage children to match magnetic letters to an alphabet chart attached to a magnetic board. Ask them to say each letter aloud as they make the match.
- Ask children to name the first letter in a word or to find a target letter when looking at books.

## Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

Cognitive development involves the skills and strategies that children use to explore and learn about their world. General knowledge is the information that children gain through their explorations with the environment and people. Children in safe, supportive, and stimulating environments can follow their natural inclination to engage with the world around them.

There are four main components of cognitive development and general knowledge in the VPK Education Standards:

- Mathematical Thinking (for example, figuring out how many plates are needed to set the table, sorting buttons by color or size)
- Scientific Thinking (such as taking apart a flashlight to see what is inside, using a whisk to whip up bubbles in a bowl, describing how things are the same or different)
- Social Studies (for example, pretending to be workers such as fire fighters, cooks, truck drivers, teachers; talking about the ways family members are related; and noticing differences between people, such as how they look or speak)
- The Arts (like experimenting with play dough by rolling it, cutting it, or forming it into an object; singing along with the radio or making up songs; dancing or moving to music; using different voices to tell a story)





Here are examples of activities that support children's cognitive development and general knowledge:

### At Home

- Incorporate math into everyday activities, such as counting body parts, or how many places to set at the dinner table, or how many seconds it takes for the traffic light to change from red to green.
- Ask children to dance or move to different tempos and styles of music such as classical, rock, and jazz.
- Introduce new items such as thermometers, calculators, and clouds and discuss their relationship to the environment.



### During Outdoor Play

- Go on a nature walk to collect leaves, rocks, and other items, calling children's attention to patterns and shapes in nature.
- Create obstacle courses that involve moving in different directions and locations.
- Teach songs, games, dances, and chants that include position words (such as "up," "down," "over," and "around").

### In the Classroom

- Provide one-to-one matching activities (such as pegs and peg boards, nuts and bolts).
- Label shapes in the classroom and describe how they are the same and different.
- Use charts to order, compare, and describe objects.
- Make family trees to show differences in family structure.



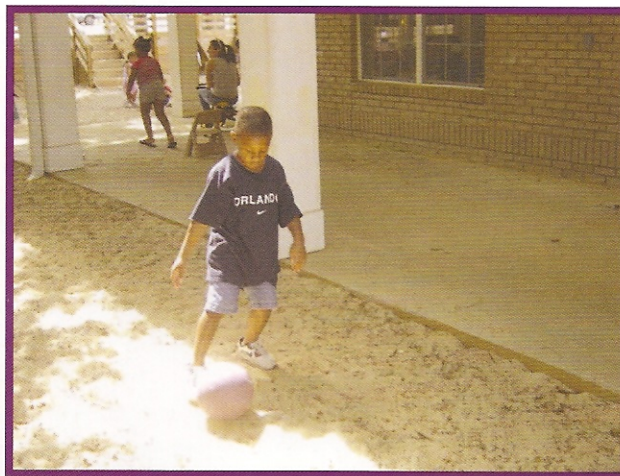


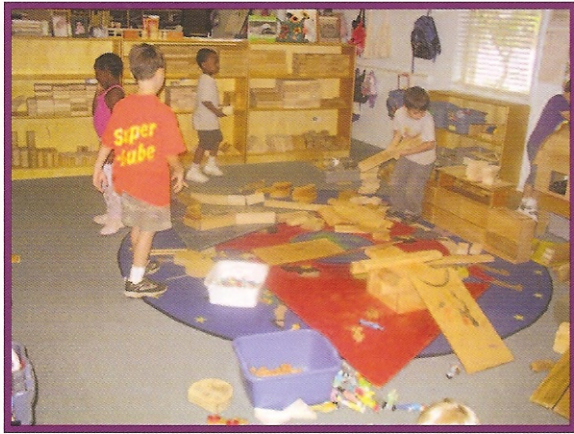
## Motor Development

Four-year-old children love to move, and their increasing coordination and motor skills open up new opportunities for active exploration of their environment. Research and experience confirm that free play alone is not sufficient for the development of physical skills; planned movement activities are needed. Exposure to many different types of movements should be the goal, rather than high performance in particular skills.

There are two main components of motor development in the VPK Education Standards:

- Gross Motor (balance, control, coordination of movements by the body's large muscles)
- Fine Motor (strength and control; eye-hand coordination; control of writing, drawing, and art tools)





Here are examples of activities that support children's motor development:

#### At Home

- Provide daily unstructured times for physical activities (going on a bike ride, kicking a ball back and forth, taking a walk).
- Provide children with opportunities to use a variety of tools (such as writing tools, tongs, egg beaters, screwdriver).
- Display children's writing and artwork on the fridge or display board, or frame as gifts for relatives.

#### During Outdoor Play

- Include children in playground clean-up tasks.
- Play games that involve kicking a ball with a two-step start.
- Allow children to practice riding a tricycle around the yard or playground.

#### In the Classroom

- Provide planned movement activities that use early skills to build up to more complex movement tasks.
- Display and store materials so that children have easy access and choice and can put things away independently.
- Provide a variety of materials for children to practice zipping, snapping, buttoning, and tying.



This document was developed by the Office of Early Learning, Florida Department of Education.

Authorization for reproduction is hereby granted to the State System of Public Education consistent with Section 1006.39(2), Florida Statutes, and to the Early Learning Coalitions authorized under the School Readiness Act (Section 411.01, Florida Statutes). Reproduction or distribution of this document outside these systems requires prior approval in writing from the Florida Department of Education.

For further information, please contact:

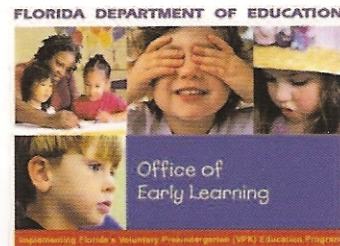
Office of Early Learning  
Florida Department of Education  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1524  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400  
[earlylearning@fldoe.org](mailto:earlylearning@fldoe.org)

**Graphic Designer:**  
Alice DeLeon

**Copyright**  
**Florida Department of Education**  
**2006**



Department of Education  
John Winn, Commissioner



Office of Early Learning  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1524  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400  
[earlylearning@fldoe.org](mailto:earlylearning@fldoe.org)

