



# Parents' Pages

*The Official Newsletter of the Division of Early Learning*

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## Spring into Action: Family Activities

March is the perfect time for families with young children to welcome the start of spring and enjoy new adventures and hands-on activities that spark curiosity and joy together.

### Spring Nature Walks

As flowers begin to bloom and animals become more active, take a family nature walk to look for signs of spring. Encourage little ones to spot butterflies, budding leaves or colorful flowers. Bring along a small notebook so your child can draw what they see.

### St. Patrick's Day Crafting

Celebrate March's most colorful holiday with easy crafts like creating shamrock collages or decorating paper leprechaun hats. Add in a fun treasure hunt for "gold" (chocolate coins) to make the day extra magical.

### Garden Starter Projects

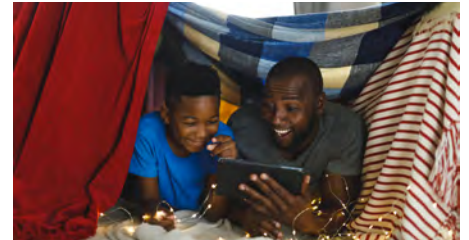
Young children love getting their hands dirty! March is a great time to plant seeds indoors or in small outdoor pots. Choose fast-growing plants like beans or marigolds so you and your child can watch the plants' progress throughout the month.

### Family Picnic Adventure

Plan a simple picnic in the backyard or at a local park on a warm, sunny day. Let children help pack snacks, spread out the blanket and choose games to play.

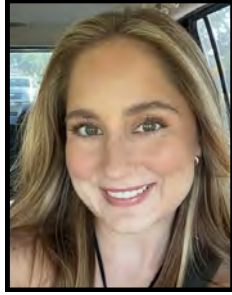
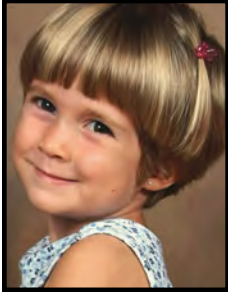
### Rainy Day Learning Fun

March weather can be unpredictable, making it a great time for cozy indoor activities. Build forts with blankets or enjoy story time with books about spring. These calm moments encourage imagination and learning while giving families a chance to slow down and connect.



March is full of opportunities for families to explore, create and play together. With each activity, young children build memories and skills that enrich their learning and strengthen family bonds.

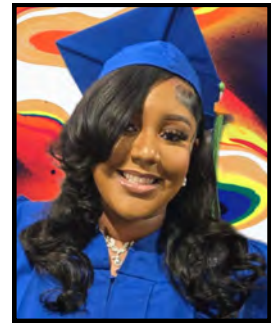
# Celebrating VPK's 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday!



**Lily Ghela**

Lily started at Village Academy in St. Augustine, received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Florida in 2023 and now works for St. Johns County and is pursuing a Master's degree.

**Bright  
Futures  
Happen  
Here!**



**Jasmine Howell**

Jasmine started at The Oaks of Durkeeville and now attends Florida State College in Jacksonville.

Your child may be eligible to participate in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program. To be eligible for VPK, 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. Families are encouraged to register early for VPK. Registration for the 2026-2027 school year is underway! To apply, visit the [Family Portal](#).

As you complete your VPK application, you will find two [Florida Prepaid](#) questions. Selecting YES to the first lets you open a college savings plan, receive a \$100 bonus, and start saving for future education costs. Selecting YES to the second enters your child for a chance to win a \$1,000 college scholarship. Both options require consent to share your information with Florida Prepaid and receive email details.



Help celebrate VPK's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday! If you have a student who participated in the 2005-2006 VPK program or know of teachers, directors or programs that have been supporting the VPK program for the past 20 years, share pictures and details with DEL at [VPKQuestions@del.fldoe.org](mailto:VPKQuestions@del.fldoe.org).

## VPK Provider Highlight



Annsworth Academy, located in Tallahassee, Florida, is a family-owned, National Association for the Education of Young Children accredited early childhood education center serving children ages 18 months to 5 years and recognized by the Florida Gold Seal Quality Program.

Established in 1984, the academy offers full- and part-time programs, including VPK and summer care, with a play-based, theme-driven comprehensive curriculum. With a low student-teacher ratio of 6:1 and a highly qualified faculty (83% holding advanced degrees), Annsworth emphasizes the critical first five years of development by fostering independence and confidence in a safe, nurturing environment.

As a VPK provider for 20 years, Annsworth Academy is widely respected in the Tallahassee community and praised for its nurturing staff, kindergarten readiness outcomes and high demand, often resulting in a waitlist.

During Celebrate Literacy Week, in January, a team from the Division of Early Learning, including Chancellor Cari Miller, visited Annsworth and read to the children for the statewide simultaneous reading event.



## Make a Splash Safely

With Spring Break on the horizon, many families take advantage of this time to travel to beaches, pools and water parks. Florida is known for its warm climate, sunny days and beautiful waterways, which make it the perfect setting for water activities. With so many water-based adventures available, it is important to make water safety a top priority.

Always closely supervise children around water, even when lifeguards are present. It's important to put away distractions such as books and cell phones.

Here are some water safety tips:

- Follow all safety procedures at pools and other swimming areas.
- Designate a responsible adult as the “water watcher” to actively watch all children in the water.
- Never leave children unattended near any body of water.
- Apply sunscreen to protect your skin against ultraviolet rays and drink water to prevent dehydration.
- Take a CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) course to learn lifesaving skills.
- Check local weather and water conditions before heading out, especially when visiting the beach.
- Know your child's limits. Never push beyond their swimming abilities and encourage regular breaks.
- Enroll your child in swimming lessons.
- Talk with your child about water safety. Read them a book that conveys how to be safe near water, like *Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim* by Kimberly Leonard and Lawrence Shapiro.

Stay alert and prepared. By taking these precautions, you can help ensure an enjoyable Spring Break experience and a safe return to the classroom.

For more information on safety tips, visit the following programs: the Florida Department of Children and Families [water safety program](#) and the Florida Department of Health “[Water Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility](#)” initiative.



## Pi Day Fun with Young Children

Every year on March 14, math lovers around the world celebrate Pi Day, a fun nod to  $\pi$  (3.14). While Pi may sound like a concept for older children, Pi Day is an opportunity to introduce young children to early math in playful, hands-on ways. With a little creativity, you can plan a memorable day of learning, exploration and family fun.

### Make a Pie Together

It would not be Pi Day without delicious pie. Baking a small pie is an enjoyable sensory experience for little helpers. Children can:

- Stir ingredients.
- Press the crust into a pan.
- Count scoops, sprinkles or shapes.

Baking promotes early math skills like measuring, sequencing and comparing sizes. Plus, sharing a warm pie makes the day feel special!



### Read Pi or Shape Themed Books

Choose books that explore shapes, patterns or counting. While there may not be many Pi-themed picture books, books about shapes help your child develop visual-spatial skills. Titles like *Circles* by David A. Adler or *Mouse Shapes* by Ellen Stoll Walsh introduce concepts in a simple, engaging way.

### Measure and Compare

Introduce the idea of circumference by measuring different round objects with yarn or string. It's an easy and playful introduction to early measurement. Your child may not grasp the concept fully but will enjoy:

- Wrapping string around objects.
- Comparing which items are “bigger” or “smaller.”
- Lining up items in the home to compare sizes.

Pi Day is more than a math holiday. It's a chance to show how learning can be joyful, playful and woven into everyday moments. With a little imagination, Pi Day becomes a delightful celebration filled with curiosity, creativity, and plenty of giggles.

**Happy Pi Day!**

## Practicing Phonological Awareness

**What is Phonological Awareness?** Phonological awareness is the ability to pay attention to the sounds in spoken language and know that they are made up of units or chunks of sound. These pre-reading skills help young children learn how to read and write.

Here are some ways families can support their child's phonological awareness development at home:

- Read books that rhyme.
- Sing simple songs and lullabies, such as those with repeating initial sounds.
- Clap, tap, jump or stomp one time for each syllable in a word or one time for each word in a sentence or nursery rhyme.
- Play a word game, saying a compound word and asking your child to say the first or second part of the word (e.g., say "sunshine" and encourage responses of "sun" or "shine.").

Practicing phonological awareness is important because it is one of the strongest predictors of later reading abilities. Using these tips will help your child enter kindergarten ready to start their reading and writing journey.

### April Upcoming Events

#### Child Abuse Prevention Month

During April, you will see blue pinwheels planted throughout Florida's communities. Pinwheel gardens are a national symbol of child abuse prevention, representing the healthy, happy and carefree childhood every child deserves. If you suspect or know of a child being abused or neglected, report it to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).

#### April is Autism Awareness Month!

April is Autism Awareness Month, a time to educate about the differences of people with autism and respect their experiences, strengths and perspectives.

## Summer Camp Planning Begins Early

Summer break is right around the corner, and many summer programs open registration in March. As spots fill up quickly and with so many choices available, finding the right fit can feel overwhelming. But, it doesn't have to be. By planning early, focusing on your child's interests, needs and comfort level, you can choose a summer experience that is both fun and enriching.

Summer Programs come in many types and locations, such as school-based, parks and recreation, youth service agencies, family child care homes, child care centers and specialty camps. A camp that aligns with what your child enjoys will keep them engaged, confident and excited to participate each day. Let your child's passions guide the search.

As you explore options, keep these essentials in mind:

- Determine which days/weeks care is needed and ask about the fees for services offered.
- Confirm the deadline to submit your application.
- Ask if enriching educational experiences are provided, such as off-site learning opportunities.
- Assess if the location is convenient for you and your family.

A [checklist](#) is available to assist you with selecting the best summer camp for your child. You may also visit the Department of Children and Families website for information on [Choosing a Safe Summer Camp](#). Your local [early learning coalition's](#) Child Care Resource and Referral program can customize a list of summer camps in your community.

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