

**April 2023 - Vol 9 Issue 4**

# **EARLY LEARNING PARENTS' PAGES**

**THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DIVISION OF EARLY LEARNING**

## **Join More Than 2.6 Million Florida Children On the Road to Success in School and Beyond**



To date, Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program has helped more than 2.6 million Florida children enter kindergarten ready to learn, graduate and succeed. Registration for the 2023-2024 year is open, so now is the time to learn more if you have a child who lives in Florida and will be 4 on or before September 1, 2023.

To register your child for VPK, visit the [Family Portal](#) or contact your local [early learning coalition](#).

Parents can choose from different educational settings and various program options, such as private child care centers, public schools and specialized instructional service providers.

The Division of Early Learning's Annual Reports, which can be found at [www.floridaearlylearning.com](http://www.floridaearlylearning.com), show that children who attend a VPK program consistently exceed non-VPK participants in Kindergarten readiness test scores.



### **Parents Choose**

Parents may choose one of three program types for their child:

1. **School Year Program** - Class sizes are not to exceed 11 students with a single lead instructor or up to 20 students with a lead instructor and an assistant. Instructors must have a minimum of a Florida Child Care Professional Credential.
2. **Summer Program** - Classes are not to exceed 12 students with a single lead instructor. Instructors must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree.
3. **Specialized Instructional Services Program** - VPK Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) is a program option available for VPK-age children with a current Individual Educational Plan (IEP). This option allows parents of a VPK-age child to choose additional therapy services consistent with the child's IEP in lieu of attending VPK in a traditional classroom setting.



# April is Child Abuse Prevention Month



## *Show Your Support by Displaying Pinwheels*

Are you seeing blue pinwheels spinning in the wind in your neighborhood or at businesses in your community? That's because April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and the blue pinwheels are displayed to signify the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect through collaboration, prevention services and support.

The Pinwheels for Prevention is a campaign held as part of Child Abuse Prevention Month. This campaign is coordinated in Florida by [Prevent Child Abuse Florida](#), the [Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida](#) and the [Florida Department of Children and Families](#).

You can support Child Abuse Prevention Month by displaying pinwheels. You can also help prevent child abuse and raise awareness by supporting agencies that serve children and families within your community.

If you suspect or know a child is being abused or neglected in Florida, report it to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).



## Early Detection is Key

During the first years of your child's life, it is important to watch and listen closely as your child interacts with you and others. You can pick up clues to potential developmental disabilities and seek assistance early.

Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental disability often linked to challenges with communication skills. ASD affects the way your child's brain processes information and how the brain's nerve cells connect and organize.

ASD affects everyone differently. Pediatricians and parents can look for specific indicators, and early intervention can improve overall development.

The [Center for Autism and Related Disabilities \(CARD\)](#) is another resource available to support families impacted by autism and related disorders. CARD offers supports at no cost to individuals. There are seven CARD sites throughout the state. To find a site near you, access the [map feature](#).

The [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) will help you understand more about your child's learning and development from birth to age 5. If you are concerned about your child's development, contact your child's pediatrician. The state's [Warm Line](#) services also provide consultation and support to families who do or may have a child with autism or other special health care needs. To locate a Warm Line Specialist in your area, contact your local [early learning coalition](#) or call 1-866-357-3239.

# Take Family Time to Explore Your Local State Parks



Family time is a wonderful opportunity to get outdoors and enjoy your day at a state park! Florida has a variety of hiking and accessible trails that provide activities for the whole family! With 175 state parks, trails and historic sites spanning nearly 800,000 acres and 100 miles of sandy white beach, you can find the closest state park near you by visiting [bit.ly/FLParksTrails](http://bit.ly/FLParksTrails).

## Enjoy Time Outdoors

Take time this month to educate your child about the importance of appreciating our environment. [Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards Scientific Inquiry domain](#) addresses children exploring the world around them. Children are natural investigators and their levels of understanding deepen over time with varied experiences. Exploration and discovery are ways that young children learn about their worlds by first using their senses and reflexes. The initial spontaneous responses of infants become more purposeful as they gain mobility. The expanding physical and motor capacities of toddlers enable them to engage in ever-widening explorations which can promote new brain connections.

## Share Valuable Time With Your Children on 'Take Your Child to Work Day'

One question young children hear often is, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" This question can really get a child thinking and asking questions.

To inspire a strong work ethic and educational foundation for young children, many parents will participate in Take Your Child to Work Day on April 27. This event gives children a glimpse into the working world and instills the significance of education. Check with your employer to see if they are hosting any events for this day at your office. You can even make suggestions on how to implement activities surrounding and recognizing this day.

If an event like this is not an option for you and your child, take time to share with them about the work you do and why it's important. Find books related to your occupation and read them together. If your child can attend a day with you, plan for activities that will be a learning experience and expand their minds to the opportunities available in the workplace.







## Getting a 'Head Start' on Learning

Head Start is a statewide, income-based program that provides educational and comprehensive (mental health, health and nutrition, disabilities, family engagement) services at no cost to pregnant mothers and children through age 5.

- Families who fall below federal poverty guidelines as well as families of students with disabilities are encouraged to apply.
- Families receiving SNAP benefits who are homeless, receiving public assistance or have children in foster care are automatically eligible for a Head Start program.
- Parent choice is a priority. Head Start programs are located in school districts, private facilities, family child care homes and home based programs.

Visit the [Division of Early Learning website](#) to locate a Head Start program near you and submit an application.



## Finding Quality Child Care Options

Early learning is important from birth to 5 when the brain develops most rapidly!



The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network can help you find the right education program whether you are:

- A parent, grandparent or guardian needing help with finding and enrolling in an early child care or education program;
- A teacher or child care worker wanting to learn more about child development research; or
- An administrator or early learning advocate trying to locate resources.

Contact CCR&R at 1-888-357-3239 for information on quality child care options and community resources.



Children are the next generation of future leaders in Florida. Start saving for college now by exploring [Florida Prepaid](#).



Manny Diaz, Jr.  
Commissioner

Cari Miller  
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