

2005

Celebrating 20 years

2025

Florida VPK

Parents' Pages

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Florida's VPK Program Celebrates 20 Years of Excellence

3.1 Million Florida Children Served to Date

The Division of Early Learning (DEL) proudly commemorates a historic milestone in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program—the 20th year of a program that has shaped the early learning journey of millions of children across the state.

Florida was one of the first states in the country to offer free prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds. Since its inception in 2005, the VPK program has served more than 3.1 million children, and state data show that children who participate in VPK are better prepared to enter kindergarten ready for school.

DEL celebrates this milestone and the dedication of the educators, parents and policymakers who have contributed to VPK's success. With continued commitment, Florida ensures every child has the opportunity for a high-quality early learning experience.

See the next page highlighting VPK graduates from 20 years ago!



Start Strong: Tips for A Successful School Year

As a new school year begins, you can help your child thrive in the classroom by establishing clear expectations, routines and schedules to smooth the transition to school so they arrive each day ready to learn.

At Home:

- Set a morning and evening routine to ensure your child gets adequate sleep and wakes feeling refreshed.
- Limit screen time and establish a consistent bedtime to help your child get settled before reading a book.
- Set clothes out the night before and have school bags packed and ready to grab on the way out the door to prevent rushing in the morning.
- Plan a nutritious breakfast, including some favorite items to fuel their day.
- Check backpacks or school planners daily for notes from teachers and create a quiet dedicated space for your child to practice what they learned.

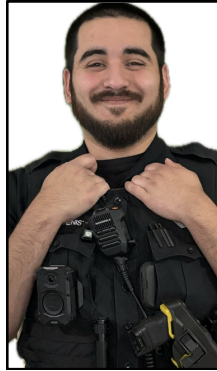
At School:

- Be involved as much as possible with your child's school and extracurricular activities. Volunteer and attend family events at the school.
- Communicate regularly with your child's teachers, openly sharing any concerns you have. Stay informed and up to date on what your child is doing at school and what they may need to practice at home.
- Encourage your child to talk about their new friends.

A positive and encouraging approach will contribute to a successful experience for both you and your child.

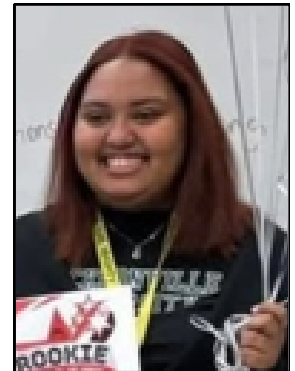
VPK: Bright Futures Happen Here!

As we kick-off VPK's 20th Birthday, let's take a look at the lives of original graduates and celebrate their educational and life successes that started in one of the first VPK classrooms 20 years ago.



Joshua Benveniste

Joshua started at Childtime Learning Center in Jacksonville and today is a Tallahassee policeman.



Dasia Stevenson

Dasia started at Kingdom Kids in Jacksonville and today is a social studies teacher at Alfred I. duPont Middle School.



Jazzlin Johnson

Jazzlin started at Good Samaritan Academy in Tallahassee and today is working as a preschool teacher's aide.



Jaime Washington

Jaime started at The Oaks of Durkeeville and is now pursuing her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Florida State College in Jacksonville.

Celebrate the Big Day!

If your child is entering VPK, celebrate your child's first day by taking their picture with the [First Day of Florida VPK sign](#) as a way to celebrate the exciting event. You all should be very proud. Children who complete a Florida VPK program are better prepared to enter kindergarten ready for school.

Also, congratulations to you for being a subscriber to Parents' Pages. Every issue offers tips and information on how you can support your child's learning both at school and home. You can support their success by ensuring their regular attendance at school.

To enroll your child in VPK, go to the [Family Portal](#).

If you are not currently receiving Parents' Pages by monthly email, sign up to receive issues on the [Parents' Pages](#) web page.



Back to School Books and Activities

A new school year can bring excitement but also a few jitters, especially for young children who may be starting school for the first time or those entering a different classroom and meeting new teachers and friends. While change can feel overwhelming at any age, talking about what they can expect will help them feel confident and prepared.

One of the best ways to support this transition is by reading back-to-school books to help ease their worries. The following are just a few recommended titles, along with some simple activities to help your child feel ready for the year ahead.

Back-to-School Book Picks:

- "I Am Too Absolutely Small for School" by Lauren Child
Lola isn't sure she's big enough or brave enough for school, but her big brother Charlie helps her see how fun and important it can be.
- "If You Take a Mouse to School" by Laura Numeroff
This playful story shows how a school day might go if a curious little mouse tags along. It's a fun way to explore the routines of school life.
- "Rafa's First Day" by Dave Mills
Follow Rafa as he tackles his first day with nervous energy and big imagination, learning that new beginnings can bring great surprises.
- "The Kissing Hand" by Audrey Penn
A heartwarming classic, this book introduces a simple ritual that can comfort children who are worried about being away from home.

Set the Stage for Success:

- Do a pretend school day: Set up a small "classroom" at home and let your child play the role of student or teacher. Talk about what might happen during snack time or play time.
- Establish a goodbye routine: Whether it's a heartfelt hug or a playful handshake, a consistent goodbye routine can provide comfort and reassurance that you will return at the end of the school day.
- Talk about feelings: Let your child know it's okay to feel nervous or unsure. Share a story from your own school days or ask open-ended questions to help put them at ease.

Joining a new classroom may require some adjusting, but with your encouragement your child can feel more prepared for this milestone in their education journey.

Teachable Moments Are Everywhere, Every Day

From the moment your child is born they are learning. They learn new words, concepts and ways of thinking every day and everywhere they go. Watching the people and the world around them, they develop language, literacy and social skills as well as emotional understanding, setting the stage for their learning journey.

The first five years of life are especially important for brain development. During this time, your child will acquire many skills and concepts through play and interactions with others. That is why you are your child's first and best teacher.

As a parent, you may feel you are so busy taking care of your family that you do not have enough time to plan learning activities for your child. However, now that you know your child will learn through everyday routines and activities and while simply listening to and watching you, you can make a significant difference through simple interactions, such as:

- Greeting your child each morning and talking as you change their diaper or clothing to help them learn words and concepts.
- Being attentive to your child's needs and soothing them when they cry to help your child develop self-regulation skills.
- Talking with your child during mealtimes and playtime or rocking your infant to sleep to help them develop language and communication skills.

Everyday moments – riding in the car or on a bus, taking a walk, eating a snack or lunch, taking a bath, shopping, getting dressed, playing with toys and listening to you read a book – are all opportunities for learning. Use the [Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) to find more practical suggestions for turning daily routines into learning opportunities.

How can you make learning part of their daily routine? Think small, use the standards regularly, and soon you will naturally find ways to engage your child every day in meaningful learning.

Empowering Parents, Enriching Preschoolers: The Impact of Florida's HIPPY Program

Being a parent of a preschooler is exciting and an important time to build the foundation for your child's future success in school and life. Florida's Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program can help you begin teaching your child at home with easy-to-follow and fun lesson plans.

HIPPY gives eligible parents structured curriculum that includes fun and engaging role-play and hands-on direct support from coordinators and home visitors. Interactive group meetings boost parents' confidence as their child's first teacher.

Research finds that children who participate in HIPPY are more prepared for school success and five times more likely to be promoted to first grade compared to non-participants.

It's not just about school readiness. Parents in the program say they feel less stressed and better able to handle everyday parenting challenges. Children who participate in HIPPY also show stronger social skills and have fewer behavior problems.

Let HIPPY be your partner in helping your child prepare for lifelong academic success. Learn about the program and eligibility requirements by contacting a [HIPPY](#) program near you.



Developmental Screenings Help Your Child Thrive

Every child grows and learns at their own pace, but how can you be sure your child is on track? That's where developmental screenings come in. Screenings offer a snapshot of how your child is meeting age-appropriate milestones, which is vital to their success in school and life.

Through the School Readiness program, parents have access to Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ), an easy-to-use screening tool that helps parents, teachers and early learning providers understand how children aged birth-5 are developing in the key areas of communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving and social skills.

What is the ASQ?

These screenings are a way to celebrate what your child can do and make sure they are on track. You can complete your child's screening on your own or with help from your child's teacher or [early learning coalition](#).

Why Screenings Matter

When done regularly, screenings help show progress and can catch potential delays early. This means your child can get extra support right away if needed.

How to Get Started

Talk to your [local early learning coalition](#) to learn more about developmental screenings and how to participate. It's a simple step that can have a lasting impact on your child's journey toward school readiness and lifelong learning.

Looking ahead to September...

Grandparents' Day

Grandparents Day is Sunday, September 7. Celebrate the day by honoring and thanking the grandparents in your life. Begin now planning a special way that you and your child can show how much they mean to you.

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