



Questions and Answers about Early Learning Legislation – HB 7165 Related to Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

During the 2013 session, the Florida Legislature passed important early learning legislation. Designed to improve quality and bring more accountability and transparency to the state's early learning programs, the law moved the Office of Early Learning into the Department of Education and consolidated duties and responsibilities for VPK within OEL.

Contracts with VPK Providers

1. Will coalitions need to execute the *new* VPK contract when the coalition has already executed the current VPK Statewide Provider Agreement (dated April 30, 2010) with providers?

No. Coalitions will *not* need to execute the new VPK contract if the coalition has already executed the current VPK Statewide Provider Agreement (dated April 30, 2010) with a provider. However, OEL staff is developing an addendum to the current VPK Statewide Provider Agreement that will capture all modifications made to VPK law since 2010. Coalitions will need to execute the addendum with those providers who already have an executed VPK Statewide Provider Agreement (dated April 30, 2010) in place.

2. Will private providers and public school providers execute the same VPK Statewide Provider Contract?

Yes, to a large extent. However, House Bill 7165 requires the Office of Early Learning to adopt a standard statewide provider contract by rule with standardized attachments by provider type. In those instances where requirements differ between private providers and public schools, there will be separate attachments.

3. Must an individual who owns or operates multiple private prekindergarten providers within a coalition's service area execute a VPK Statewide Provider Agreement with the coalition for each individual site/provider it owns?

No. HB 7165 permits an individual who owns or operates multiple private prekindergarten providers within a coalition's service area to execute a single VPK Statewide Provider Agreement with the coalition on behalf of each provider. [s. 1002.55(3)(i), Florida Statutes (F.S.)]

4. Must a school district execute a VPK Statewide Provider Agreement with the coalition for each individual public school site within the coalition's service area?

No. HB 7165 permits a school district to execute a single VPK Statewide Provider Agreement with the early learning coalition on behalf of all district schools within a coalition's service area. [ss. 1002.61(3)(b) and 1002.63(3)(b), F.S.]

Enrollment of Children in the VPK Program

5. The bill states that public schools and private providers who meet specified requirements can enroll and determine eligibility for the VPK program. Are providers who participated in the pilot program still eligible to enroll children on site along with other VPK providers who meet the specified requirements?

Yes. Private providers and public schools meeting specified requirements can predetermine eligibility and enroll students in their VPK programs. However, early learning coalitions must still review and make the final determination for these students. For providers who did not participate in the pilot program, the requirements will be specified in Rule 6M-8.201, Florida Administrative Code.

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- 6. The bill requires that each parent enrolling a child in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program must complete and submit an application to the early learning coalition through the Single Point of Entry website. Does this mean every parent must apply online; they cannot just walk in and fill out an application?**

No. A parent is not limited to completing the VPK student application on the Single Point of Entry website. While that option is available, a parent may also complete the VPK student application in-person at the early learning coalition's office.

Expectations for VPK Students and Instructors

- 7. Does HB 7165 make any changes to the existing VPK student performance standards?**

No. However, HB 7165 requires the office to “examine the existing performance standards in the area of mathematical thinking and develop a plan to make appropriate professional development and training courses available to prekindergarten instructors.” The office must do this by October 1, 2013. [s. 1002.67(1)(a)2., F.S.]

- 8. Are there any new requirements for VPK instructors?**

Yes. HB 7165 requires all VPK instructors in prekindergarten programs to successfully complete a student performance standards training course approved by OEL by July 1, 2014. [s. 1002.55(3)(c)2., F.S.]

- 9. How long will the student performance standards training course be?**

HB 7165 provides that each student performance standards training course comprise at least three clock hours. [s. 1002.59(2), F.S.]

- 10. What will the content of the student performance standards training course be?**

Course content will provide instruction in strategies and techniques to address the age-appropriate progress of each child in attaining student performance standards. [1002.59(2), F.S.]

- 11. The training is required to be online. Are older standards trainings still acceptable? When will the new online training be available?**

VPK instructors can currently register for *Standards for Four-Year-Olds*, an educator-led standards training class, on the Department of Children and Families website at <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-care/training>. The new online training is under development and OEL will provide updates to stakeholders as we progress.

- 12. Does the bill make any changes with regard to emergent literacy training?**

Section 1002.55(3)(c)2., F.S., states that a prekindergarten instructor must successfully complete an emergent literacy training course *and* a student performance standards training course approved by OEL. Completing an approved emergent literacy course has been required since the VPK program began. Instructors can register for *Emergent Literacy for VPK Instructors*, available online only, at <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-care/early-literacy>.

VPK Providers on Probation

- 13. Previously a provider could remain on probation for three years before needing a good cause exemption. HB 7165 mentions two years. Was this effective July 1, 2013? What about providers who have already been on probation for two years but did not apply for an exemption because it was not necessary until year three before? Have they missed the deadline to apply?**

The legislature reduced the number of years a provider may be on probation in 2011 and that is currently in effect. HB 7165 did not change this time frame. If a provider who was on probation for two years did not apply for and was not granted a good cause exemption by the Department of Education, that provider is not eligible to offer VPK instruction for a period of five years.

14. Providers on probation must submit an improvement plan. Failure to do so will result in terminating the provider's contract and the provider will not be eligible to offer VPK for five years. After five years is the slate wiped clean or does the provider still have to submit an improvement plan? Will the system allow them to submit a plan five years later?

After a period of five years, the provider will be eligible to offer VPK instruction without being on probation.