

Choosing Appropriate Learning Activities and Curricula

for Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Programs



The [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds \(2011\)](#) identify what children should know and be able to do by *the end of their VPK experience*. Not every child will be able to master every skill within the Standards for Four-Year-Olds because of the great deal of variability within the age and skill levels among four-year-olds. While mastery of the Standards for Four-Year-Olds can be viewed as an outcome of VPK participation, it is recognized that there are many different ways to help children learn new skills and concepts. VPK providers have the flexibility to choose the curriculum to be used in their classrooms. Most of these curricula will share some common characteristics.

In order to provide Florida's four-year-olds with a high-quality, developmentally appropriate learning opportunity, several elements should be considered carefully.



Children need **one-on-one interactions** with classroom teachers and classmates each day. Through one-on-one interactions with children, teachers scaffold children's activities and can provide feedback and support.



Additionally, they build rapport through trusting relationships. When children are given many daily experiences and opportunities to interact with classmates, they begin to develop social skills in negotiating, turn-taking, and cooperative play. Four-year-old children are very curious and inquisitive by nature. The curriculum used in a VPK classroom should include **active learning experiences** that are child-initiated, as well as those planned and initiated by the teacher.

The curriculum should be **developmentally appropriate**, meaning that it is **appropriate for four-year-olds** and can be modified for individual children who have skills at either end of a developmental continuum (**individually appropriate**). Also, the teacher should take into account a child's personal knowledge, often related to culture (**culturally appropriate**), and then use this information to build on a child's strengths and skills when planning the curriculum. It is developmentally inappropriate to use a kindergarten curriculum with four-year-olds.





Throughout the course of the day, the curriculum should include **instruction in varying formats**, such as large group, small group, and learning centers. Teachers that use **intentionality** when planning the environment and the curriculum can create high-quality classrooms where four-year-olds thrive and learn.

Teachers have a very distinct responsibility to **observe, facilitate** and **scaffold** the activities of the classroom; it is not developmentally

appropriate for four-year-olds to spend extended amounts of time in teacher-directed activities. Of course, children’s attention spans will grow over the year and they will be maximally engaged by an enthusiastic, invigorating teacher.

As a part of active learning within a VPK classroom, children should be engaged in many **hands-on experiences** throughout the day. Children should not learn about concepts through paper and pencil activities, work sheets, or coloring pages. Healthy learning occurs when the child is engaged in the activity (teacher- or child-directed), and a child’s attention span tends to be longer in activities and topics that are of interest to the child. Just as internships or student teaching experiences are valuable for giving college students an opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge in real life settings, the VPK classroom’s hands-on experiences help children to make meaning of the knowledge and skills learned in context.



Early literacy skills are critical to children’s success in K-12, and curricula used in VPK classrooms must be designed to prepare a student in this area. There is a large body of empirical research in the area of emergent literacy, specifically phonological awareness and letter knowledge, which shows that daily attention to these skills, as little as twenty minutes a day, can make a significant impact on children’s emergent literacy skills.

Early mathematical thinking skills are also important to children’s later learning. Children explore their world as they learn about concepts such as number, shapes, symmetry, measurement, and space through **hands-on** math activities that help children develop **critical thinking skills** that will further children’s learning significantly.

Children who participate in a VPK program build a strong foundation for kindergarten. Just as a building with a shaky foundation will require more repairs over time, without a solid educational foundation children will require more intensive intervention later in their educational experiences.

It’s not a matter of giving children more information faster or requiring skills earlier; rather, it is about ensuring that the child’s knowledge base has developed to include concrete understandings of concepts, as a foundation for success in kindergarten and beyond.



For more information about [curricula in VPK classrooms](#), the [Standards for Four-Year-Olds](#), available Emergent Literacy Trainings, online courses, teacher resources, or other services offered by the Department of Education, please visit our website at www.fldoe.org/earlylearning.
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