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Florida's Early Childhood
Integrated Data System

Understanding the Determinants of Parent Enrollment in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program

FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY RESEARCH GROUP (ECPRG)

University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies



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Executive Summary

The Florida Division of Early Learning (DEL) partnered with the Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG) at the University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies to inform the understanding of families' choices related to enrollment in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK). This report describes factors, as indicated by families, that influenced their enrollment decisions for the 2022-2023 VPK program year.

This study used administrative data regarding the application and enrollment for the VPK program supplied by the DEL coupled with survey data collected from families who applied for but did not enroll in the VPK program. The DEL administrative data included all available information on VPK applications and enrollments between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. Additionally, the ECPRG developed a survey which was distributed by the DEL to all families who applied for VPK but did not enroll between July 1, 2023 and November 1, 2023. There were 23,690 families who received the survey, among whom 1,105 (4.7%) successfully completed the survey. The research team used descriptive statistics and machine learning approaches to analyze the data.

Results

The data files provided by the DEL contained 181,802 unique application records and 158,202 enrollment records. After matching the records across data sources and including only applications that were submitted after July 1, 2022, 44,471 VPK applications were included in the analysis. Among those applicants, 35,688 children enrolled in the program (80.3%) and 8,783 (19.7%) did not enroll in the program. Enrollment rates varied widely by Early Learning Coalition (ELC), ranging between 11.7% and 35.3% of applicants who did not enroll. Please see the full report for more details.

The survey targeted the 19.7% of families who did not enroll in VPK. The most common reason families identified for not enrolling in VPK were:

1. Had trouble finding a VPK provider that met their needs (34%)
2. Intended to enroll later (17%)
3. Wanted full-day care and could not afford to pay for the rest of the day (16%)
4. Circumstances changed and no longer needed services (13%)
5. Wanted to stay at current provider, who did not participate in VPK (12%)

6. Wanted to enroll at a new provider who did not participate in VPK (9%)

The primary challenge in finding a VPK was the lack of available slots meeting parent/child needs (44%), followed by cost (17%) and location (16%).

Family Preferences

Of the applicants who did not enroll in the VPK, 45.9% indicated a preference for public school settings which is considerably higher than the preference for public school settings among all (enrolled and not enrolled) applicants, however, this preference varies by location. In Nature Coast, for example, 77% of non-enrolled applicants prefer a public-school setting compared to Emerald Coast where 35% of applicants prefer a public-school setting. Additionally, 93.1% of applicants chose to participate in the school-year session, which encompasses 540 instructional hours (approximately 3 hours/day). Please see the full report for more information.

The survey collected additional information on childcare preferences. The 1,105 respondents indicated price (64%), quality (60%), and location (50%) as the first or second most important factor. A majority of families said they preferred to spend \$50 or less per week for wrap-around services, which supplement the 3-hours provided by the VPK program to receive full-day childcare. Approximately 74% of families preferred childcare to be near their home. Finally, the majority of families preferred providers with operating hours spanning from 7-9 am to 4-6 pm. This indicates a demand for full-day services, underscoring the relevance of pricing considerations.



Recommendations

More than 80% of eligible VPK applicants chose to enroll. The recommendations provided through this report, therefore, are focused on identifying relatively minor tweaks to the operations of these programs, that might prompt more families who apply for these services to enroll in them.

Provide program service descriptions that more clearly reflect reality. Through the responses provided by families regarding the barriers that they faced when enrolling in the VPK program, it seemed that family expectations (e.g., hours of service that cover the working day, low or no cost of enrollment) were not consistent with the way services are broadly advertised in their communities. To address this misalignment of expectations, the DEL and the ELCs should develop a clearer description of the services that are made available to families via the VPK program as well as common service provider practices (e.g., charging for wraparound services). If families had a better understanding of what to expect prior to searching for a suitable VPK provider, they might be more inclined to participate in the program.

Local School Districts should account for family demand and plan to make accommodations. An often-cited reason for not enrolling in the VPK program was the lack of available space in public schools. This preference for VPK in the public-school setting was more pronounced among families that elected not to enroll in the VPK program, which might suggest that for some families, they are interested in public school enrollment or nothing at all. To better accommodate the preferences of these families, the local public-school programs that offer VPK services should actively monitor their demand for VPK services and make accommodations by opening additional classrooms when demand consistently outpaces supply.

Increase individual family support through Child Care Resource and Referral services. A primary barrier to accessing the VPK program for some families is the difficulty in finding VPK providers that meet their needs. The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) personnel situated locally within each ELC are uniquely positioned to provide families with the necessary information to navigate and overcome their identified barriers for enrollment. As such, local CCR&R personnel should be provided the supports necessary to be more proactive in reaching out to families who do not immediately connect with a childcare provider or Preschool program following their eligibility determination.



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Introduction

In the pursuit of enhancing the quality of early childhood education and fostering optimal child development, this report is an initial look at parental decision-making concerning childcare and preschool arrangements in the context of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK). As Florida continues its commitment to providing accessible and high-quality early learning opportunities for children, it is important to understand the factors that influence parental preferences and enrollment patterns. This report describes socio-economic and logistical factors that shape parental decisions.

Importance of Understanding Parent Enrollment

A comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to parent enrollment decisions is indispensable for the continuous improvement of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education program. The Florida VPK Program is a state-funded program that seeks to support universal kindergarten readiness via a 540-hour school year program (300 hours for summer only) accessible to all children in Florida the year immediately preceding kindergarten entry. This program aims to improve the educational outcomes of Floridian children by providing services that serve as a solid foundation from which subsequent learning will be built. For this program to deliver the intended outcomes however, families who are eligible must be willing to participate by enrolling their children in this program. Identifying barriers that deter eligible families from enrolling in VPK is paramount for fostering widespread participation. Whether financial, logistical, or related to awareness, a comprehensive understanding of these barriers empowers policymakers to implement strategic interventions. Initiatives aimed at alleviating these obstacles, such as improved accessibility and community engagement programs, can be devised to encourage greater enrollment across diverse demographics.

Purpose of the Research

This research, conducted in collaboration with the Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning (DEL), extends beyond the examination of enrollment statistics. This comprehensive endeavor aims to enrich our understanding of the factors that shape enrollment decisions in the VPK program. The purpose of this research is to describe the family-level contextual factors that shape parental decisions regarding non-enrollment of their children in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) program. Specifically, this report will describe factors influencing parent enrollment by integrating administrative data, survey data, and stakeholder feedback. The findings from this study are poised to contribute to the early childhood educational policy landscape. By shedding light on the preferences regarding parent enrollment, we aim to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy enhancements that support the continued evolution of the VPK program to meet the changing needs of Florida's families.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This research is a holistic exploration of the factors influencing parent enrollment. Expanding upon administrative aspects, such as income eligibility and geographic distribution, this research seeks to uncover the nuanced interplay of socio-economic and logistical features associated with enrollment in the VPK program. By examining the preferences of Florida's diverse families, we aim to present a comprehensive view of the complexities surrounding enrollment decisions.

A key strength of the research lies in its methodological approach, integrating administrative data and survey responses from families. The amalgamation of these two data sources enables a more robust analysis. Administrative data offers insights into broader trends and programmatic aspects, while survey responses provide a family-centered dimension, allowing us to understand the motivations, challenges, and preferences of families. This comprehensive approach ensures a well-rounded perspective on the dynamics of parent enrollment.

In recognizing the collaborative nature of this research, feedback from stakeholders, including the DEL staff, Early Learning Coalitions (ELCs) personnel, parents, and providers, have been actively obtained and incorporated. This iterative approach ensures that the research is not only methodologically robust but also relevant and impactful for those directly involved in the implementation and utilization of the VPK program.

Administrative Data Analysis

This research includes descriptive analyses of administrative data from the academic year 2022-2023, which were delivered to UF researchers by the DEL in three files, Application, Eligibility, and Enrollment records. These files were used to delineate the number of applications and enrollments at the state and ELC levels. These analyses provide crucial context for interpreting the survey data. By contrasting application rates with enrollment metrics, the research results in the identification of enrollment patterns, regional variations, and potential gaps. Additionally, insights from administrative data contribute to the selection of specific ELCs for more in-depth analysis in the subsequent survey phase.



Families' Survey Data Collection and Analysis

Survey data collection focused on eliciting insights related to factors influencing parental enrollment-related decisions. The survey, specifically for families who were eligible for but did not enroll in VPK were collaboratively designed in both English and Spanish (see questionnaires in Appendix 1) with the help of the DEL. Drafts underwent a thorough vetting process that included cognitive interviews with families, expert review by early childhood experts, community based stakeholders, and were ultimately reviewed and accepted by the DEL. Surveys were implemented using Qualtrics and accessible via anonymous links, which were emailed to families by the DEL. Invitations to participate were distributed in waves, starting on Monday 11/27/2023, followed by subsequent reminders distributed on Wednesday 11/29/2023, Friday 12/1/2023, and Tuesday 12/5/2023. To ensure broad and inclusive responses, the ELCs were proactively involved, with bilingual (English and Spanish) invitations extended on Thursday 11/30/23, Friday 12/1/23, and Monday 12/4/23 (refer to the email invitation messages in Appendices 2 and 3).

Due to the compressed timeline to complete this work, the initial focus of this report's survey analysis will center on statewide, overarching trends. Subsequent research will undertake more targeted examinations of families' responses from selected ELCs, aiming to offer a more detailed understanding of regional dynamics.

VPK Administrative Data Analysis and Interpretation

VPK Applications and Enrollments

A total of 44,471 VPK applications were submitted after July 1, 2022, of the 22-23 program year. Of those, 35,688 children enrolled resulting in an overall enrolled applicant rate of 80.3%, resulting in an overall non-enrolled applicant rate of 19.7% (8,783 children). In examining the VPK application patterns during the fiscal year 2022-2023, the data revealed a narrative of demand, met by both successful enrollments and noteworthy non-enrollment rates. Table 1 presents an overview of VPK applications and enrollments, along with the percentage of applicants who did not enroll in the program, both statewide and across ELCs.



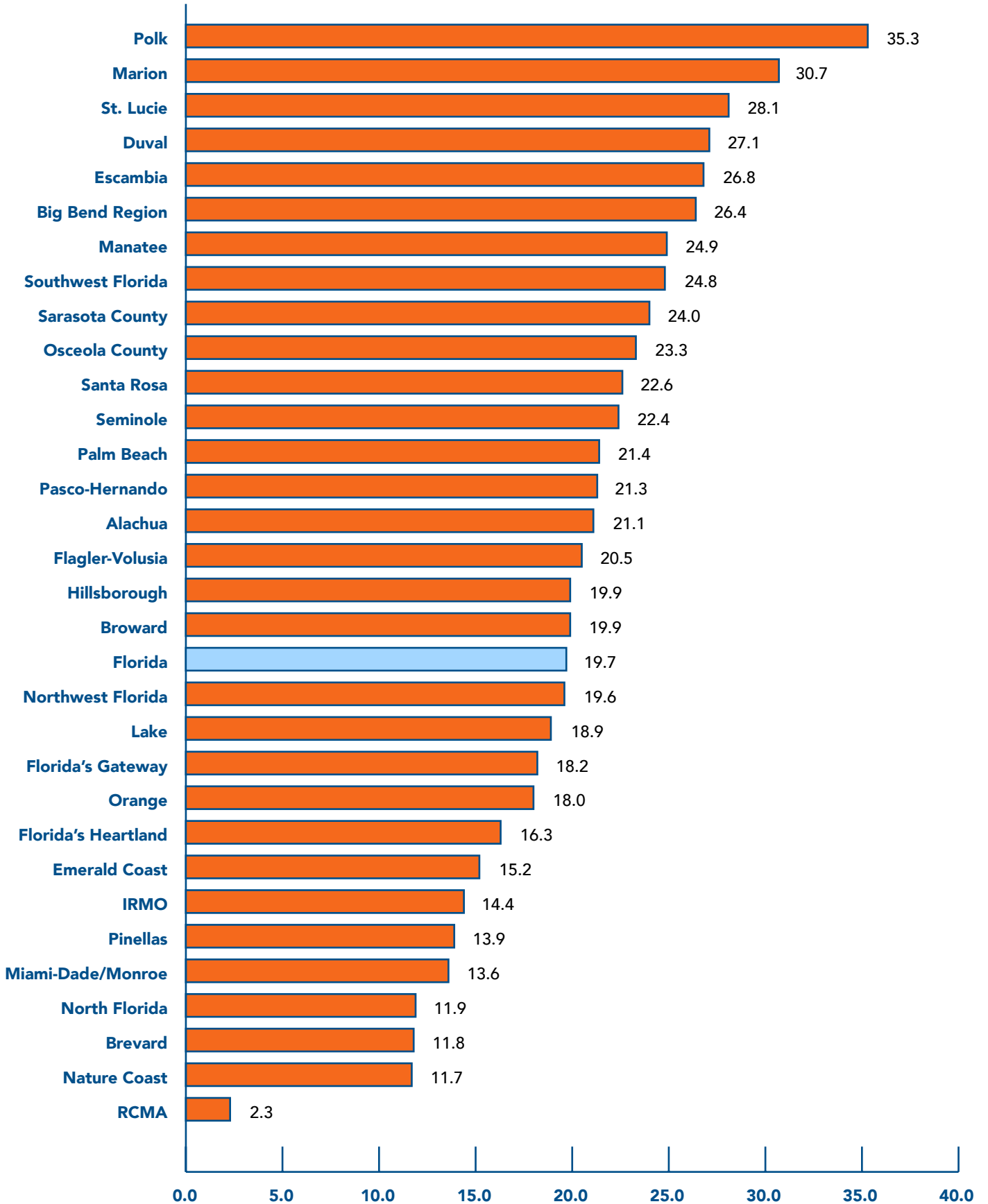
Table 1. VPK Applications, Enrollments, & Percentage of Non-enrolled Applicants

	Applications	Enrollments	Non-enrolled Applicants (%)
Florida	44,471	35,688	19.7
Coalitions			
Miami-Dade/Monroe	6,670	5,763	13.6
Broward	4,573	3,663	19.9
Hillsborough	3,376	2,703	19.9
Orange	3,376	2,767	18
Palm Beach	2,735	2,150	21.4
Duval	2,710	1,976	27.1
Southwest Florida	1,949	1,466	24.8
Polk	1,454	941	35.3
Flagler-Volusia	1,409	1120	20.5
Pasco-Hernando	1,337	1052	21.3
Pinellas	1,313	1131	13.9
North Florida	1,296	1142	11.9
Brevard	1,152	1016	11.8
Big Bend Region	962	708	26.4
Osceola County	946	726	23.3
Seminole	858	666	22.4
Marion	703	487	30.7
Manatee	679	510	24.9
Northwest Florida	653	525	19.6
RCMA	645	630	2.3
Escambia	626	458	26.8
St. Lucie	609	438	28.1
Nature Coast	607	536	11.7
IRMO	596	510	14.4
Florida's Heartland	583	488	16.3
Lake	546	443	18.9
Emerald Coast	505	428	15.2
Sarasota County	500	380	24
Alachua	494	390	21.1
Santa Rosa	301	233	22.6
Florida's Gateway	291	238	18.2

Notes. VPK: Voluntary Prekindergarten Education voucher program. Counts based on matching child-level unique identifier across the application & enrollment files, fiscal year 2022-2023.

To review the geographic variation in the percentage of non-enrolled applicants, the research team created Figure 1 which shows the coalition level rate of nonenrollment ranked from the highest to the lowest. Some ELCs, like Polk and Marion, show higher non-enrollment percentages exceeding 30%, while others, like Pinellas or Miami-Dade/Monroe, exhibit non-enrollment percentages which are less than half of the aforementioned rate. More specifically, Polk stands out with 35.3% of applicants not enrolling, followed by Marion (30.7%), St. Lucie (28.1%), and Duval (27.1%). In contrast, Pinellas, Miami-Dade/Monroe, and North Florida ELCs showcase non-enrollment rates of 13.9%, 13.6%, and 11.9%, respectively.

Figure 1. Percentage of Non-Enrolled Applicants



Preferred Program Settings: Overall Applicants vs. Non-Enrolled Applicants

The data presented in Tables 2 and 3 show the preferred program settings among overall applicants and non-enrolled applicants within the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK). The contrast between these two tables provides insights into the choices made by parents and guardians, revealing distinct patterns and preferences.

Table 2. Preferred Program Settings – Overall Applicants

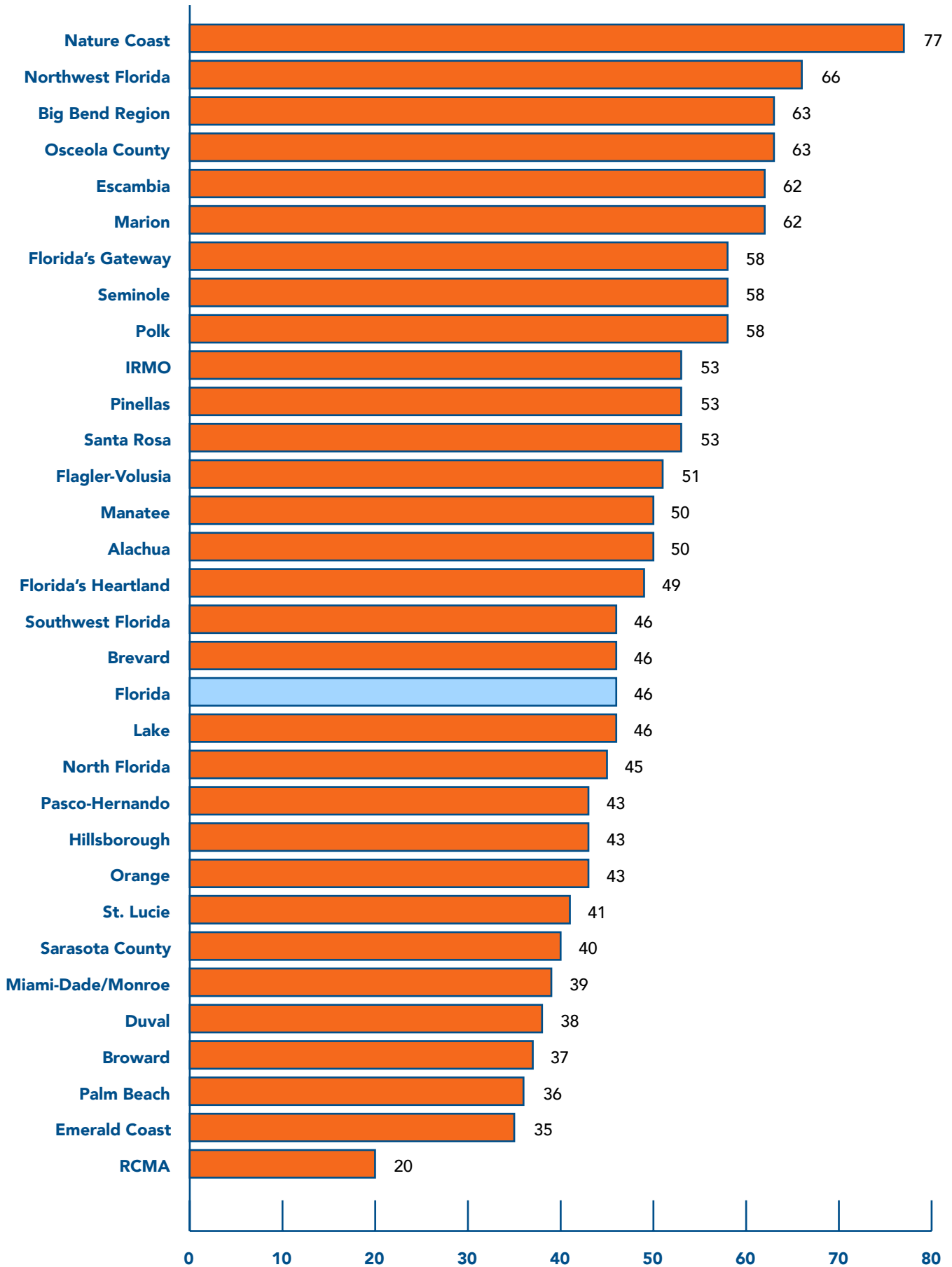
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Private	22,480	50.55	50.55
Public	15,396	34.62	85.17
Prefer not to answer	6,595	14.83	100
Total	44,471	100	

Table 3. Preferred Program Settings – Non-enrolled Applicants

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Private	3,126	35.59	35.59
Public	4,031	45.90	81.49
Prefer not to answer	1,626	18.51	100
Total	8,783	100	

Table 2, Preferred Program Settings – Overall Applicants, shows that more than half of families expressed a preference for Private VPK settings. When comparing program setting preferences between Overall Applicants vs. Non-enrolled Applicants, we note that the non-enrolled applicants more often prefer for public school settings (45.90%) compared with all applicants who preferred a public-school setting (34.62%) of the time. When the VPK setting preferences of nonenrolled families are aggregated at the coalition level, further variation is observed. Figure 2 shows the variation in the proportion of non-enrolled families who indicated a preference for VPK services within public school settings. After ordering the rates of public-school preference among non-enrolled families by coalition, Nature Coast stands out with 77% of families preferring public school settings, which is 31 percentage points higher than the statewide percentage.

Figure 2. Percentage of Non-enrolled Applicants Public Setting Preference



Understanding the variations in preferred program settings between enrolled and non-enrolled applicants may be important for informing outreach strategies. The increased preference for public settings among non-enrolled applicants may warrant further work to understand reasons why some parents prefer public-school VPK settings.

Type of VPK Session (School-year/Summer)

In the aggregate, a predominant trend emerges, as shown in Table 4, 93.1% of applicants opted for the school-year session, which encompasses 540 instructional hours. In stark contrast, a smaller subset, constituting 6.1% of applicants, expressed a preference for the shorter duration Summer session, which spans 300 hours.

Table 4. VPK Session – Overall Applicants

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
School-year (540 hours)	41,417	93.13	93.13
School-year SIS	153	0.34	93.48
Summer (300 hours)	2,730	6.14	99.62
Summer SIS	171	0.38	100
Total	44,471	100	

Table 5. VPK Session – Non-enrolled Applicants

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
School-year (540 hours)	7,477	85.13	85.13
School-year SIS	93	1.06	86.19
Summer (300 hours)	1,060	12.07	98.26
Summer SIS	153	1.74	100
Total	8,783	100	

This preference for the school-year session is similar among non-enrolled applicants (Table 5), where approximately 85.1% of families opted for the extended schoolyear session, while approximately 12.1% favored the Summer session.

Administrative Processing: Time Investment in VPK Application Process

The time that it takes for the agency to make an eligibility determination after a family has completed an application is the administrative processing time. It is thought that if the application process is time-consuming, families may encounter challenges that lead them to abandon the enrollment process prematurely. The available administrative data do not support this hypothesis. The median time intervals between the creation and approval of applications are relatively brief, ranging from one day (e.g., St. Lucie) to seven days (e.g., Pinellas). This application timeframe does not suggest that administrative processing time influences families' participation in the VPK program.

Summary

The analysis of VPK applications across Florida revealed notable variations in nonenrollment rates across Early Learning Coalitions. Preferred program settings indicate a consistent preference for private options among enrolled applicants, but a noteworthy shift occurs for non-enrolled applicants, with preference for public care settings surpassing that of private settings. Contrary to concerns about administrative barriers, the short median time intervals (one to seven days) between application creation and approval suggest administrative timelines do not contribute to non-enrollment.



VPK Families Survey

The administrative data analysis for the 2022-2023 fiscal year revealed 8,783 applicants did not enroll in the VPK program. Since the primary focus of this research was to gain the perspectives of families regarding why they chose not to enroll in the VPK program, the DEL created a list of e-mail addresses from families who applied for the 2023-2024 VPK program but had not enrolled as of November 1, 2023. The DEL sent 23,690 invitations to the target population inviting them to complete the VPK survey. A total of 2,344 respondents accessed the survey invitation link, leading them to the participation consent page. Within this group, 2,191 respondents opted to participate. Among these, 1,352 respondents affirmed their completion of an application for Florida's VPK program without subsequent enrollment. This subset then continued with the survey. In the final tally, 1,105 (4.7%) respondents successfully completed the survey, while 247 did not. Detailed breakdowns of these figures at both the state and ELC levels can be found in Appendix 4, Table A1. With over 1,000 responses to the survey, the research team determined that the sample size was adequate to conduct a preliminary state level analysis to identify common factors that are related to families' decisions regarding VPK enrollment. While the sample size is adequate for state-level analyses, the representativeness at the coalition level was not. Due to the low cell size at the coalition level the survey responses were analyzed and interpreted only at the state level.



Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of the VPK Survey Respondents

	Frequency	Proportion
Total Household Income:		
\$100,000 or more	219	0.20
\$75,000 to \$100,000	101	0.1
\$40,000 to \$74,000	239	0.22
\$15,000 to \$39,000	274	0.24
Less than \$15,000	122	0.11
Education:		
Graduate or professional degree	246	0.22
Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, AB)	252	0.23
Some college	324	0.30
High school graduate or GED	195	0.18
Secondary Ed. (no HS diploma)	84	0.07
Employment status:		
Employed full-time	538	0.49
Homemaking (not paid)	220	0.20
Employed part-time	155	0.14
Seeking job opportunities	121	0.11
Marital Status:		
Married	687	0.62
Single	246	0.22
Living with partner	104	0.09
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	76	0.07
Household Size:		
5+	412	0.37
4	408	0.37
3	232	0.21
2	64	0.05
Home Language:		
English	825	0.74
Spanish	203	0.18
Haitian Creole/Other	83	0.08
Ethnicity:		
Hispanic or Latino	362	0.33
Race:		
White	596	0.54
Black or African American	241	0.22
Other	165	0.18
N	1,104-1,116	

Notes. Proportion within characteristics might not add to 1 (“Prefer not to answer” choices are not shown).

Table 6 presents a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of respondents who chose not to participate in the VPK program, offering valuable insights into the diverse composition of the surveyed population. The data are organized across various key demographic variables, providing a nuanced understanding of the sample. The survey's representativeness is noteworthy, capturing a diverse cross-section of the population in terms of marital status, household size, language, ethnicity, and race among VPK respondents. The inclusion of participants across various socioeconomic and demographic groups suggests that the survey provides a comprehensive reflection of the program's reach and appeal, reinforcing its ability to cater to the needs of a broad and varied participant base.

Total Household Income Distribution: The income distribution showcases the economic diversity within the respondent pool. Notably, 20% of respondents reported an annual income of \$100,000 or more, while 11% indicated an income less than \$15,000 per year. The majority falls within the low-to-middle-income brackets, with 22% in the \$40,000 to \$74,000 range and 24% in the \$15,000 to \$39,000 range.

Education Attainment: Educational attainment among respondents varied – 22% had a graduate or professional degree, 23% had a bachelor's degree, 30% completed some college, while 18% were high school graduates or held a GED, and 7% did not obtain a high school diploma.

Employment Status: Nearly half of the respondents (49%) were employed full-time. Homemaking (unpaid) represented 20%, and 14% were employed part-time, while 11% were actively seeking job opportunities.

Marital Status and Household Composition: Marital status revealed that a significant portion of respondents, 62%, were married. Single individuals constituted 22%, those living with a partner represented 9%, and 7% were either divorced, separated, or widowed. Household size was diverse – 37% had five or more members, and an equal percentage had four members.

Language and Ethnicity: The majority of respondents (74%) reported English as their home language, while 18% indicated Spanish, and 8% reported Haitian Creole or other languages. Regarding ethnicity, 33% of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino, a figure that aligns with the demographic representation of individuals with this cultural background in Florida (27%; US Census 2022). The racial makeup of the respondents was diverse – 54% identified as White, 22% as Black or African American, and 18% fell into the "Other" category encompassing Asian and Multi-racial backgrounds. This highlights a mix of racial backgrounds within the surveyed population.

The trends in household income, educational attainment, employment status, marital status, and language ethnicity collectively depict the VPK respondent pool as diverse. This suggests that the program is valued by families across a spectrum of socioeconomic and demographic circumstances.

VPK Non-Participation: Primary Reasons

The initial review of the respondent-reported primary reason for not participating in the VPK program, as outlined in Table 7, sheds light on diverse factors influencing parental decisions, suggesting potentially valuable insights for program refinement and outreach strategies.

Table 7. “What is the primary reason that you did not participate in the VPK program?”

	Frequency	Percent
I had trouble finding a VPK provider that met my needs	415	34%
I intend to enroll later	205	17%
I wanted full-day care and could not afford to pay for the rest of the day	192	16%
My circumstances changed, and I no longer needed services	153	13%
I wanted to stay at my current provider, and they did not participate in VPK	140	12%
I wanted to enroll my child at a new provider who did not participate in VPK	103	9%

In addition to being asked about the primary reason for not participating, all families who did not enroll in the VPK program were also asked, “If you no longer need VPK services, why?”. The responses to this question are of particular interest as they provide insight regarding the outcome of the search for early learning services. The least frequent responses, “I moved” (4.0%), “I decided to have my child stay with family or friends” (2.2), and “I decided to stay home with my child” (9.0%), represent a change in setting that the family decided to take their child for the year immediately preceding kindergarten. The most frequent response to the question about no longer needing VPK services was “Not Applicable” or “Other” representing 60.5% of respondents. This can be interpreted to mean that while these families did not enroll in the VPK program, they still needed it. The next most frequent response was “I found alternative PreK arrangements without enrolling in VPK” representing 21% of the families who completed the survey. This group of families enrolled in a setting like the VPK program but not a publicly supported preschool program.

Characteristics and Preferences of Families that Enrolled in a VPK Alternative

The Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG) utilized a machine learning approach to identify the characteristics most relevant to respondents not enrolling in VPK and instead chose to enroll in a formal alternative to VPK. We chose this outcome because it includes families that are interested in a formal PreK arrangement for their children, but for some reason did not enroll in the state funded option. Understanding the characteristics and preferences of families that made this decision might help to inform program changes that would lead to increased participation in the VPK program. In conducting these analyses, the ECPRG scientists constructed a classification and regression tree model (i.e., conditional inference tree) using a select set of characteristics that might predict the outcome of respondents not enrolling in VPK and choosing to enroll in a formal PreK alternative to VPK.

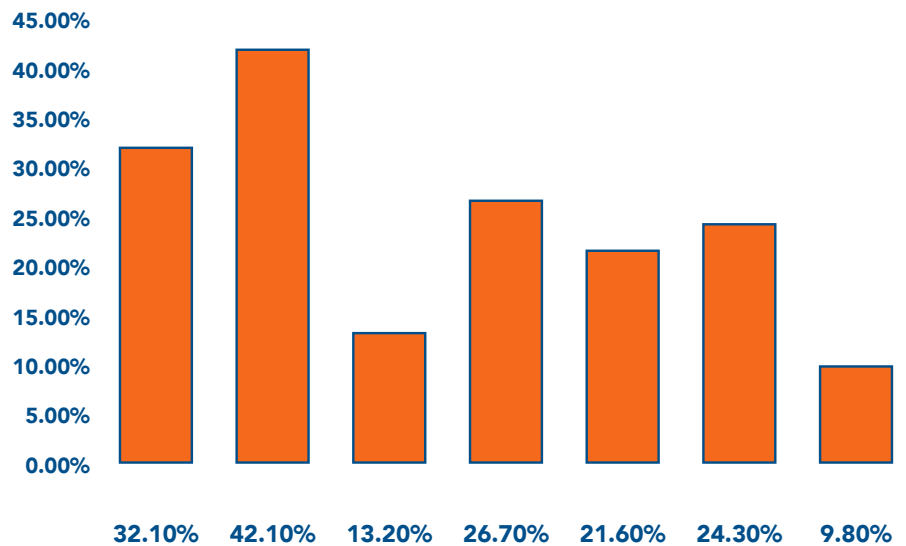
The following family characteristics and preferences were included in the conditional inference tree analysis:

Variable	Measure Type	Factor
Marital Status	Categorical	Family characteristic
Household Income	Ordered Category	Economic Status
Number of Children Entering Kindergarten	Continuous	Family characteristic
Amount Willing to Spend	Ordered Category	Value
Transportation Mode	Categorical	Logistical consideration
No Public School Available	Indicated, Not Indicated	Preference
No Private School Available	Indicated, Not Indicated	Preference
Service was Too Expensive	Indicated, Not Indicated	Value; Preference
Location Not a Good Fit	Indicated, Not Indicated	Logistical
Parent Perceived the Provider as Not High Quality	Indicated, Not Indicated	Preference
Not a Good Fit	Indicated, Not Indicated	Preference
Operating Hours Not a Good Fit	Indicated, Not Indicated	Logistical
Don't Speak Preferred Language	Indicated, Not Indicated	Preference
Other	Indicated, Not Indicated	
No Challenges	Indicated, Not Indicated	

The final conditional inference tree model, with choosing to enroll in an alternative to the VPK program as the outcome, is displayed in Figure 3. Among the respondent characteristics included in the original model, six were identified by the algorithm as being associated with significant differences in the outcome. These six respondent characteristics included the following: (1) reporting ‘no challenges’ in finding child care, (2) household income, (3) not finding available child care at public schools, (4) not finding care during preferred hours, (5) not finding a provider that was a good fit, and (6) not finding a provider with a perceived high level of quality.

Figure 3. Characteristics that Predict Enrollment in Alternative PreK

% Enrolling Children in Alternative PreK



Trouble Finding Care: No Challenges Reported	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Household Income < \$100k or Prefer not to answer		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trouble Finding Care: No Public School Availability		No	Yes				
Trouble Finding Care: Provider Hours				Yes	No	No	No
Trouble Finding Care: Provider Fit					Yes	No	No
Trouble Finding Care: Provider Quality						Yes	No

Starting from the top row, for parents who had no challenges finding care, 32.1% enrolled their children in non-VPK childcare. Among those who *did* report challenges and who had higher income (\geq \$100k), 42.1% of parents, who reported that no public schools were available, enrolled their children in formal non-VPK childcare, compared to 13.2% of parents for whom public schools were available. The remaining parents, all of whom were making $<$ \$100k, were grouped into subsets with respect to challenges relating to provider characteristics. Among these parents who identified provider hours as a challenge, 26.7% enrolled their children in formal non-VPK childcare. Among parents without this challenge, 21.6% of those for whom provider fit was instead a challenge enrolled their children in formal non-VPK childcare. Among parents without either of these challenges, 24.6% of those for whom provider quality was a challenge enrolled their children in non-VPK childcare, whereas of the remaining parents, who expressed other challenges besides these (cost, transportation, private vs public school, language, and other), 9.8% enrolled their children in non-VPK childcare.

Reasons Related to Difficulties of Finding a Suitable VPK Provider

In a subsequent survey question, respondents were asked, “If you had trouble finding a provider, what were the reasons? Select all that apply” (see questionnaire in the Appendix 1). Among the primary challenges reported, about 44% cited a lack of available open slots, whether in public or private settings. Additionally, 17% indicated that available providers were too expensive, and 16% mentioned inconvenient locations as a hurdle.

These findings directly align with the availability and accessibility issues discussed earlier. Notably, 28% responded with “Other”, suggesting that the choices provided did not entirely capture their difficulties in finding a suitable VPK provider. This highlights the need for continued work to better understand the specific needs and preferences of families who are interested in VPK.

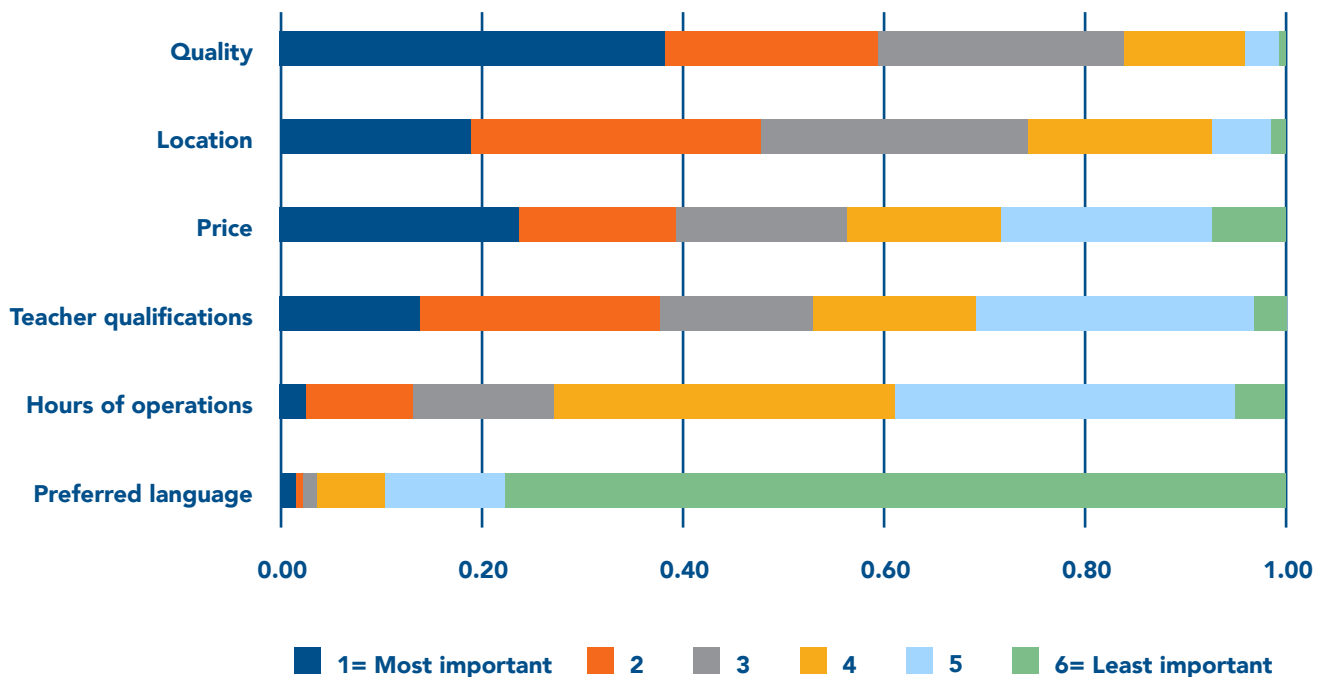
Unfortunately, there were no questions in the survey regarding special-needs populations. Related to that shortcoming, some families contacted researchers, noting concerns about providers being unable to accommodate children with special needs or the inability of providers to meet the specific needs of those children and their unique disabilities. This insight underscores the importance of future research specifically focusing on children with special needs and their access to childcare and preschool providers, potentially shedding light on the observed discrepancy between application and enrollment rates.



Family Reported PreK Priorities

Another important feature of the survey completed by families related to the characteristics of PreK providers that they prioritized in their search for a suitable PreK learning environment for their children. Figure 4 illustrates respondents' prioritization, on a scale from 1 to 6 (1 being the most important and 6 the least important), regarding various factors influencing their choices for not enrolling their children in VPK providers. The results highlight a distinct emphasis on quality, with a significant majority assigning a ranking of 1 or 2 to this factor (60%). This suggests a strong parental inclination towards valuing the quality of the preschool program when selecting a provider. Price is also a significant consideration, with 24% ranking it as the most important factor and approximately 40% when including it as the second most important consideration. Location is highly valued, with about 50% of respondents considering it as the most or second most important characteristic (19% ranking it as the most important). Regarding hours of operation (see questionnaire in the Appendix 1), the majority of parents or guardians preferred providers with operating hours spanning from 7-9 am to 4-6 pm. This indicates a demand for full-day services, underscoring the relevance of pricing considerations (given that the VPK voucher covers payment for 540 hours which is typically offered to families 3 hours per day per child).

Figure 4. “What are the most important characteristics that you want in a VPK provider?”

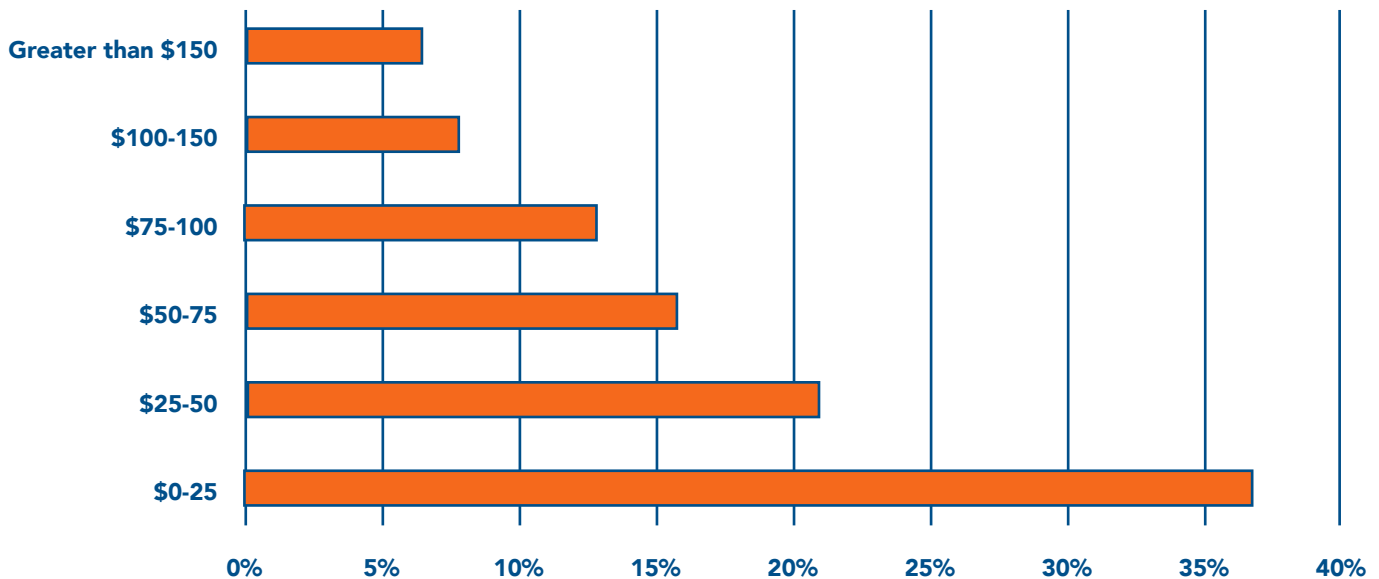


Preferred Cost of Enrollment

The majority of parents preferred to spend \$50 or less per week for wrap-around services when enrolling their children in the VPK program. Therefore, the cost of preschool remains a notable concern within families' budgets. However, this cost preference does not appear to be a tangible reality based on the current childcare market conditions. The consideration of cost for enrollment becomes particularly prominent when factoring in the preference for full-day services.



Figure 5. “How much are you willing to spend on before-and/or-after care (wrap around services) per week for your child/children who need(s) services?”



Location and Transportation Preferences

The responses to questions concerning providers' location and geographical accessibility reveal a strong preference for preschools to be near the home (approximately 74%) or, to a lesser extent, to other children's schools (approximately 17%). This preference aligns with about 75% of families who indicated a preference for traveling less than 10 minutes to reach their VPK provider. Notably, over 80% of respondents used a personal motor vehicle as their primary mode of transportation, with the remainder mainly divided between public transportation (approximately 8%) and walking (4%).



Summary

The survey findings highlight key reasons for non-enrollment in the VPK program, offering valuable insights for improvement. Thirty-four percent of respondents (non-enrolled VPK applicants) encounter challenges finding suitable providers, pointing to potential availability and/or accessibility gaps. When examining the characteristics and preferences of families that elected to enroll in PreK services that are not funded by the state, household income, hours of service, provider quality, and local availability of public school based VPK programs predicted differences. Financial constraints underscore affordability challenges, pointing to the need for assistance programs. Some respondents express a preference for staying with or selecting non-VPK providers, indicating a potential misalignment that warrants further exploration among providers across the state. With respect to VPK provider characteristics, families prioritize quality, location, and the cost of services. There is a marked preference for affordable full-day services, and location is crucial, with a large majority of respondents favoring preschools closer to home.

Recommendations

It is important to note that more than 80% of eligible applicants chose to enroll in the VPK program. The recommendations provided through this report, therefore, are focused on identifying relatively minor tweaks to the operations of this program, that might prompt more families who apply for this service to enroll in them.

Resulting from this expedited study of non-enrollment in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten, the research team has identified a few recommendations for consideration by the DEL. The ECPRG believes the following recommendations may improve the already high participation rate among families eligible for this service. These recommendations focus primarily on increasing the effectiveness of communication with families regarding the availability of service providers, the type and amount of service available through the program, and actively monitoring fluctuations in demand preferences.

Increase individual family support through Child Care Resource and Referral services.

Through the analysis of family-reported preferences and challenges, it has become clear that for some families, the primary challenge is finding providers with whom they are comfortable enrolling their children. This is seen in the reported challenges associated with finding a provider of sufficient quality, location, and type of service provider (public-school or private provider). These challenges are not necessarily a problem with the availability of supply but are more likely the result of parents underleveraging existing information systems like Florida's Child Care Provider Search, which is hosted by the Department of Children and Families. The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) personnel situated locally within each ELC are uniquely positioned to provide families the necessary information to navigate and overcome their identified barriers for enrollment. As such, local CCR&R personnel should be provided the supports necessary to be more proactive in reaching out to families who do not immediately connect with a childcare provider or Preschool program following their eligibility determination.



Actively screen for SR eligibility among VPK applicants.

Many families that responded to the VPK survey indicated that the price of wraparound (i.e., full-day) services presented a barrier to their enrollment in the VPK program. When asked about a reasonable price that they were willing to pay, families overwhelmingly reported the willingness to pay a price that is far below fair market value. While this difference between parent preference and the reality of the cost to provide quality early learning experiences is not likely solved through policy, actively supporting the identification of families who are eligible for the SR program through a universal screening process should be implemented, such as support provided through local CCR&R, if it is not already.

Local School Districts should account for family demand and plan to make accommodations.

An often-cited reason for not enrolling in the VPK program was the lack of available space in public schools. This preference for VPK in the public school setting was more pronounced among families that elected not to enroll in the VPK program, which might suggest that for some families, they are interested in public school enrollment or nothing at all. To better accommodate the preferences of these families the local public-school programs that offer VPK services should actively monitor their demand for VPK services and make accommodations by opening additional classrooms when demand consistently outpaces supply.

Provide program service descriptions that more clearly reflect reality.

Through the responses provided by families regarding the barriers that they faced when enrolling in the VPK program, it seemed that family expectations (e.g., hours of service that cover the working day, low or no cost of enrollment) were not consistent with the way services are broadly available in their communities. To address this misalignment of expectations, the DEL and the ELCs should develop a clearer description of the services that are made available to families via the VPK program as well as common service provider practices (e.g. charging for wraparound services). If families had a better understanding of what to expect prior to searching for a suitable VPK provider, they might be more inclined to participate in the program.

Several recommendations could be proposed to effectively address the challenge of low survey participation. These recommendations underscore a multifaceted approach, with a specific focus on adaptive strategies aimed at ensuring the representativeness of the collected data.

1. Overhaul of Outreach Strategies:

- Devise targeted communication campaigns, emphasizing the survey's significance and attempting to mitigate any barriers to engagement.

2. Enhanced Incentive Structure:

- Reassess and enhance the incentive structure to markedly increase participant motivation.
- Consider more enticing monetary and non-monetary incentives that resonate with the target audience, with the aim of broadening and diversifying the pool of respondents.

3. Diversified Communication Channels:

- Diversify and expand the use of communication channels to reach a wider audience.
- Leverage not only social media and community forums, but also consider direct engagement through community organizations, educational institutions, and other relevant channels to heighten awareness and encourage survey participation.

4. Real-Time Monitoring and Adaptive Adjustments:

- Establish a system for real-time monitoring of response rates and promptly adapt strategies based on emerging trends.

The recommendations outlined above form a tentative strategic framework addressing the challenge of low survey participation. The goal is to enhance response rates by amplifying outreach through diverse communication channels and introducing attractive incentives. Additionally, a commitment to real-time monitoring and adaptive adjustments is expected to maintain the relevance and effectiveness of the proposed strategies.

Implementing some of these recommendations or exploring alternative strategies might initiate a positive shift in survey participation dynamics. This positive change could result in a more comprehensive and representative dataset, offering robust insights into the factors influencing applicants' non-enrollment in the state supported programs.

These recommendations aim to address the multifaceted challenges identified in the analyses, promoting inclusivity and responsiveness to diverse parental needs while optimizing the effectiveness and accessibility of the VPK program.

Concluding Statement

Key findings, derived from administrative and survey data analyses, provide practical insights into the dynamics of early childhood education enrollment decisions in Florida. By identifying barriers and trends among families, the research contributed to ongoing efforts to enhance policies and programs, ensuring they align with the diverse needs of Florida's families and support the educational journey of the next generation. The outcomes of this study contribute to the ongoing efforts to foster a supportive and enriching environment for early childhood care and education in the Sunshine State.

Next Steps: Studying the Provider Perspective

Following this research project, which was focused on families' participation in the VPK program, the research team will embark on the process of studying childcare and early care and education providers' decisions to participate in the VPK Program. An initial survey for that phase of the research has been drafted, shared with select ELCs and have been shared with several childcare providers to check for clarity and content (see Appendix 5). Once this survey has been reviewed and approved by the DEL, it will be distributed to all licensed or exempt providers (Department of Children and Families) directly by the ECPRG in January and February 2024. The collected responses will be analyzed and then reported in the annual progress report which is due to the DEL in May 2024.



Consent/Introduction

Study of Parents' VPK Decision Making

The Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies at UF is conducting a study to help understand parents' decision-making related to Florida's VPK Voucher Program. We are hoping that you will complete a survey describing your choices related to VPK. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this survey which should take less than 10 minutes. Your anonymous responses will be used to help inform policy for Pre-K in the state of Florida.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time. If you agree to participate, please click the "I agree to participate" button below. If you do not wish to participate, please click the "I do not wish to participate" button below or exit the survey at this time.

If you have questions, please contact the Principal Investigator, Herman T. Knopf, at 352-273-4243, or the Institutional Review Board at 352-273-9600. If you would like a copy of this for your records, please contact Dr. Knopf at hknopf@ufl.edu.

- I agree to participate.
- I do not wish to participate.

Check point

Our records show that you completed an application for Florida's VPK program but did not enroll in the program. Is this correct?

- Yes
- No

VPK Families

What is your county of residence?

What is the primary reason that you did not participate in the VPK program?

- My circumstances changed, and I no longer needed services.
- I wanted to stay at my current provider, and they did not participate in VPK.
- I had trouble finding a VPK provider that met my needs.
- I wanted to enroll my child at a new provider who did not participate in VPK.
- I wanted full-day care and could not afford to pay for the rest of the day.
- I intend to enroll later.

If you no longer needed VPK services for your child(ren), why did you no longer need it?
Select all that apply.

- I moved.
- I decided to have my child stay with family/friends.
- I decided to stay home with my child.
- I found alternative Pre-K arrangements without using VPK.
- Other
- Not Applicable.

If you had trouble finding a provider, what were the reasons? *Select all that apply.*

- I did not experience any challenges.
- Available providers were too expensive.
- Available providers were not conveniently located.
- Available providers were not open during the hours I needed.
- Available providers were not high quality.
- Available providers did not speak my preferred language.
- There were no private school providers available with open slots.
- There were no public school providers available with open slots.
- None of the available providers were a good fit for my needs.
- I did not feel comfortable with any available providers.
- Other

What are the most important characteristics that you want in a VPK provider?

Please rank the following options from most important (1) to least important (6) by dragging and dropping the answer choices in the order of importance to you.

Price

Location

Quality

Hours of operation

Teacher qualifications

Preferred language

How many children do you have that will enter Kindergarten next year?

- 1 child
- 2 children
- 3 children
- 4 children
- 5 or more children

How much are you willing to spend on before-and/or-after care (wrap around services) per week for your $\{q://QID9/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$ who need(s) services?

- \$0-25
- \$25-50
- \$50-75
- \$75-100
- \$100-150
- Greater than \$150

Were you looking for a VPK provider closer to...

- Home
- Work
- My other children's school
- Relatives
- Other location

What is your primary mode of transportation?

- Bus or other public transportation
- Personal motor vehicle
- Paid rideshare (for example: Uber, Lyft, etc.)
- Carpool with friends, family, or coworkers
- Bicycle
- Walking

How far from $\{q://QID11/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$ would you like your VPK provider to be located?

- Less than 5 minutes
- 5 to 10 minutes
- 10 to 20 minutes
- 20 to 30 minutes
- Greater than 30 minutes

What are your preferred hours of VPK services?

Provider opens at... (AM)

Provider closes at... (PM)

Demographics

What is your household size? *Including yourself, all children, and all adults currently living in your home.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

What is your marital status?

- Married
- Living with partner in same household
- Single
- Divorced/Separated
- Widowed

Please select the language that you most commonly speak at home.

How well do you speak English?

- Very well
- Well
- Not well
- Not at all

Which of the following categories do you think best describes your total household income last year (wages and salaries from all jobs)?

- Less than \$14,000
- \$15,000 to 19,000
- \$20,000 to 29,000
- \$30,000 to \$39,000
- \$40,000 to \$49,000
- \$50,000 to \$74,000
- \$75,000 to \$100,000
- \$100,000 or more
- Prefer not to answer

What is the highest grade or level of schooling that you have completed?

- 8th grade or less
- 9th-12th grade (no high school diploma)
- High school graduate or GED completed
- Some college credit but no degree
- Associate degree (AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, AB)
- Graduate or professional degree

What is your current employment status?

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Seeking job opportunities
- Homemaking (not paid)
- Retired
- Prefer not to say

Are you enrolled in school or a career/technical training program?

- Yes
- No

What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino
- Don't know/Prefer not to answer

What is your race? *Select all that apply.*

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other
- Don't know/Prefer not to answer

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Consent/Introduction

Estudio sobre la Toma de Decisiones de los Padres respecto al Prekindergarten Voluntario (VPK)

El Centro de Anita Zucker para la Excelencia en Estudios de la Primera Infancia de Universidad de Florida está realizando un estudio para ayudar a comprender las decisiones de los padres en relación con el Programa de Vales VPK de Florida. Esperamos que complete esta encuesta describiendo sus decisiones con relación a VPK. No se conocen riesgos asociados con su participación en esta encuesta que debería tomar menos de 10 minutos. Sus respuestas anónimas se utilizarán para ayudar a informar a la política de educación preescolar en el estado de Florida.

Su participación en esta encuesta es completamente voluntaria y puede cancelarla en cualquier momento. Si acepta participar, haga un clic en el botón "Acepto participar." Si no desea participar, haga clic en el botón "No deseo participar" o salga de la encuesta.

Si tiene preguntas, comuníquese con el investigador principal, Herman T. Knopf, al 352-273-4243, o con la Junta de Revisión Institucional al 352-273-9600. Si desea una copia de esto para sus registros, comuníquese con el Dr. Knopf en hknopf@ufl.edu.

- Acepto participar.
- No deseo participar.

Check point

Nuestros registros muestran que usted completó una aplicación para el programa VPK de Florida, pero no se inscribió en el programa. ¿Es esto correcto?

- Sí
- No

VPK Families

¿Cuál es su condado de residencia?

¿Cuál es la razón principal por la que no participó en el programa VPK?

- Mis circunstancias cambiaron y ya no necesitaba los servicios.
- Quería quedarme con mi proveedor actual y ellos no participan en VPK.
- Tuve problemas para encontrar un proveedor de VPK que satisficiera mis necesidades.
- Quería inscribir a mi hijo en un nuevo proveedor que no participaba en VPK.
- Quería atención de día completo y no podía pagar el resto del día.
- Tengo la intención de inscribirme más tarde.

Si ya no necesitaba los servicios de VPK para su(s) hijo(s)/hija(s), ¿por qué ya no los necesitaba? *Seleccione todo lo que corresponda.*

- Me mudé.
- Decidí que mi hijo se quedara con familiares/amigos.
- Decidí quedarme en casa con mi hijo.
- Encontré arreglos alternativos de educación preescolar sin usar VPK.
- Otro
- No aplica.

Si tuvo problemas para encontrar un proveedor, ¿cuáles fueron las razones? *Seleccione todo lo que corresponda.*

- No tuve ningún problema.
- Los proveedores disponibles eran demasiado caros.
- Los proveedores disponibles no estaban convenientemente ubicados.
- Los proveedores disponibles no estaban abiertos durante las horas que necesitaba.
- Los proveedores disponibles no eran de alta calidad.
- Los proveedores disponibles no hablaban mi idioma preferido.
- No había ningún proveedor de escuelas privadas disponible con espacios abiertos.
- No había ningún proveedor de escuelas públicas disponible con espacios abiertos.
- Ninguno de los proveedores disponibles se adaptaba bien a mis necesidades.
- No me sentí cómodo/a con ningún proveedor disponible.
- Otro

¿Cuáles son las características más importantes que desea en un proveedor de VPK?

Clasifique las siguientes opciones desde la más importante (1) hasta la menos importante (6) arrastrando y soltando las opciones de respuesta en el orden de importancia para usted.

Precio

Ubicación

Calidad

Horas de operación

Calificaciones de los profesores

Idioma preferido

Cuántos hijos/hijas tiene que ingresar en el jardín de infantes (Kindergarten) este próximo año?

- 1 niño
- 2 niños
- 3 niños
- 4 niños
- 5 o más niños

¿Cuánto está dispuesto/a a gastar en pre o post atención (servicios integrales) por semana para su(s) $\{q://QID9/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$ que necesita(n) servicios?

- \$0-25
- \$25-50
- \$50-75
- \$75-100
- \$100-150
- Más de \$150

Estaba buscando un proveedor de VPK más cercano a...

- Casa
- Trabajo
- La escuela de mis otros hijos/hijas
- Familiares
- Otra ubicación

¿Cuál es su método principal de transporte?

- Autobús o otro transporte público
- Vehículo motorizado personal
- Viaje compartido pagado (por ejemplo: Uber, Lyft, etc.)
- Viaje compartido con amigos, familiares o compañeros de trabajo
- Bicicleta
- Caminar

¿A qué distancia de $\{q://QID11/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$ le gustaría que estuviera ubicado su proveedor de VPK?

- Menos de 5 minutos
- 5 a 10 minutos
- 10 a 20 minutos
- 20 a 30 minutos
- Más de 30 minutos

¿Cuáles son sus horarios preferidos de servicios VPK?

El proveedor abre a las... (AM)

El proveedor cierra a las... (PM)

Demographics

¿Cuál es el tamaño de su hogar? *Incluido usted, todos los niños y todos los adultos que viven actualmente en su hogar.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

¿Cuál es tu estado civil?

- Casado/a
- Pareja, no casado/a
- Soltero/a
- Divorciados/Separados
- Viudo/a

Seleccione el idioma que habla con más frecuencia en casa.

¿Que tan bien hablas inglés?

- Muy bien
- Bien
- No muy bien
- Nada bien

¿Cuál de las siguientes categorías cree que describe mejor el ingreso total de su hogar el año pasado (sueldos y salarios de todos los trabajos)?

- Menos de \$14,000
- \$15,000 a 19,000
- \$20,000 a 29,000
- \$30,000 a \$39,000
- \$40,000 a \$49,000
- \$50,000 a \$74,000
- \$75,000 a \$100,000
- \$100,000 o más
- Prefiero no contestar

¿Cuál es el mayor grado o nivel escolar que usted ha completado?

- Octavo grado o menos
- Algo de preparatoria (high school), pero no se graduó
- Graduado/a de preparatoria o GED
- Algunos créditos universitarios pero sin título
- Título asociado (AA, AS)
- Título bachiller (BA, BS, AB)
- Título de posgrado o profesional

¿Cuál es su situación laboral actual?

- Empleado/a tiempo completo
- Empleado/a tiempo parcial
- Buscando oportunidades laborales
- Tareas del hogar (sin pago)
- Retirado/a
- Prefiero no decir

¿Estás actualmente inscrito/a en una escuela o en un programa de entrenamiento técnico o profesional?

- Sí
- No

¿Cuál es su etnia?

- Hispano o Latino
- No Hispano ni Latino
- No sé/Prefiero no responder

¿Cuál es su raza? *Seleccione todo lo que corresponda.*

- Indio americano o nativo de Alaska
- Asiático
- Negro o afroamericano
- Nativo de Hawái o otra isla del Pacífico
- Blanco
- Otro
- No sé/Prefiero no responder

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Appendix 2: Survey Invitations (Sent by DEL)

Subject: We'd Love to Hear from You – Florida's VPK Program Survey

Dear [Recipient's Name],

We hope this message finds you well. At the Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning, we value your feedback and strive to continuously improve our services.

We understand that not every family is enrolled in Florida's Preschool VPK voucher program, and so we would like to learn more about your experiences and reasons if you did not participate.

Your input is incredibly valuable to us, as it helps us make informed decisions and enhancements to better meet the needs of our community and provide high-quality preschool options for families like yours.

Please take a few moments to complete this brief survey by clicking one of the links below:

[VPK Survey Link English](#)

[Enlace de la Encuesta VPK Espanol](#)

The survey should only take a few minutes to complete, and we sincerely appreciate your time and effort in sharing your thoughts with us. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary, and all responses will remain confidential.

Thank you for considering our request, and we look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to our research partners at the University of Florida, Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies: remypages@ufl.edu or hknopf@ufl.edu.

Warm regards,

Appendix 3: Survey Invitation Reminders (Sent by Early Learning Coalitions)

Subject: Friendly Reminder: Your Input Matters – Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning (DEL), VPK Survey --- Su Opinión es Importante – Encuesta VPK

Dear Families,

We hope this message finds you well. We wanted to remind you about the important survey sent by the Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning (DEL) and kindly ask for your participation.

Your feedback is invaluable to DEL as it helps shape and improve the services provided to families in our community. DEL has sent out a survey, and they will be sending it again to ensure that your voices are heard.

If you have already received and completed the survey, we appreciate your participation! If you haven't had the chance to complete it, please take a few moments to complete this brief survey by clicking the link below:

[VPK Survey Link English](#)

We immensely appreciate your continued support and participation in making our community's early learning programs the best they can be. -----

Estimadas Familias,

Esperamos que este mensaje les encuentre bien. Queríamos recordarles acerca de la importante encuesta enviada por DEL y pedirles amablemente su participación.

Sus comentarios son invaluable para DEL, ya que ayuden a dar forma y mejorar los servicios proporcionados a las familias en nuestra comunidad. DEL ha enviado una encuesta y la enviará nuevamente para asegurarse de que sus voces sean escuchadas.

iSi ya recibió y completó la encuesta, agradecemos su participación! Si no ha tenido la oportunidad de completarla, por favor, tómese unos minutos para hacerlo a través del siguiente enlace :

[Enlace de la Encuesta VPK Espanol](#)

Apreciamos enormemente su continuo apoyo y participación para hacer que los programas de aprendizaje temprano en nuestra comunidad sean lo mejor posible.

Appendix 4: Table A1. VPK Families Survey Overview Response Counts

Table A1. VPK Families Survey Overview Response Counts

		Consented		Response to Screening		Finished Survey	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Statewide	2,191	153	1,352	839	1,105	247
Coalition:	County:						
NA	NA	866	153	27	839	0	27
Polk	Polk	141	0	141	0	124	17
Broward	Broward	118	0	118	0	87	31
Orange	Orange	103	0	103	0	89	14
Hillsborough	Hillsborough	90	0	90	0	75	15
Miami-Dade/Monroe	Miami-Dade	85	0	85	0	68	17
Miami-Dade/Monroe	Monroe	2	0	2	0	2	0
Southwest Florida	Lee	46	0	46	0	37	9
Southwest Florida	Collier	30	0	30	0	24	6
Southwest Florida	Hendry	2	0	2	0	2	0
Palm Beach	Palm Beach	71	0	71	0	57	14
Duval	Duval	64	0	64	0	54	10
Flagler-Volusia	Volusia	39	0	39	0	33	6
Flagler-Volusia	Flagler	14	0	14	0	12	2
Big Bend Region	Leon	40	0	40	0	32	8
Big Bend Region	Gadsden	4	0	4	0	4	0
Big Bend Region	Wakulla	3	0	3	0	2	1
Big Bend Region	Liberty	1	0	1	0	1	0
Big Bend Region	Taylor	1	0	1	0	1	0
Big Bend Region	Jefferson	1	0	1	0	1	0
Pasco-Hernando	Pasco	40	0	40	0	34	6
Pasco-Hernando	Hernando	6	0	6	0	5	1
Osceola County	Osceola	41	0	41	0	32	9
St. Lucie	St. Lucie	35	0	35	0	26	9
Seminole	Seminole	34	0	34	0	31	3
Marion	Marion	33	0	33	0	31	2
Sarasota County	Sarasota	30	0	30	0	26	4
Escambia	Escambia	29	0	29	0	24	5
North Florida	Clay	13	0	13	0	12	1
North Florida	St. Johns	9	0	9	0	9	0
North Florida	Nassau	2	0	2	0	2	0
North Florida	Putnam	2	0	2	0	2	0
North Florida	Baker	1	0	1	0	0	1
Northwest Florida	Bay	13	0	13	0	11	2

Northwest Florida	Jackson	8	0	8	0	8	0
Northwest Florida	Franklin	2	0	2	0	2	0
Northwest Florida	Washington	2	0	2	0	2	0
Alachua	Alachua	23	0	23	0	21	2
Pinellas	Pinellas	23	0	23	0	20	3
Lake	Lake	21	0	21	0	18	3
Manatee	Manatee	20	0	20	0	14	6
Emerald Coast	Okaloosa	14	0	14	0	13	1
Emerald Coast	Walton	6	0	6	0	6	0
Brevard	Brevard	17	0	17	0	16	1
Santa Rosa	Santa Rosa	12	0	12	0	10	2
Nature Coast	Sumter	5	0	5	0	4	1
Nature Coast	Citrus	4	0	4	0	3	1
Nature Coast	Dixie	1	0	1	0	1	0
Nature Coast	Gilchrist	1	0	1	0	0	1
Nature Coast	Levy	1	0	1	0	1	0
Florida's Heartland	Highlands	5	0	5	0	3	2
Florida's Heartland	Charlotte	4	0	4	0	4	0
IRMO	Indian River	3	0	3	0	1	2
IRMO	Okeechobee	3	0	3	0	2	1
IRMO	Martin	2	0	2	0	2	0
Florida's Gateway	Columbia	2	0	2	0	2	0
Florida's Gateway	Lafayette	1	0	1	0	1	0
Florida's Gateway	Hamilton	1	0	1	0	1	0
Florida's Gateway	Suwannee	1	0	1	0	0	1

Appendix 5: Draft Childcare Provider Survey

Consent/Introduction

Study of Providers' Decisions to Participate in VPK/SR Programs

The Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies at UF is conducting a study to help understand Early Childhood Care and Education providers' decisions related to Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) and the School Readiness Subsidy Program (SR). We are hoping that you will complete a brief survey describing your choices related to VPK and/or SR.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this survey which should take less than 5 minutes.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time. If you agree to participate, please click the "I agree to participate" button below. If you do not wish to participate, please click the "I do not wish to participate" button below or exit the survey at this time.

If you have questions, please contact the Principal Investigator, Herman T. Knopf, at 352-273-4243, or the Institutional Review Board at 352-273-9600. If you would like a copy of this for your records, please contact Dr. Knopf at hknopf@ufl.edu.

- I agree to participate.
- I do not wish to participate.

Descriptives

What is your role in the organization?

- Owner
- Director
- Teacher
- Staff
- Other

What is your county of operation?

What type of provider is your organization?

- Family Child
Care Home
- Licensed Child
Care
Center/Facility
- Licensed
Exempt Child
Care
Center/Facility
- Public School
- School Age

Is your organization faith-based?

- Yes
- No

How many children does your organization intend to serve?

- Less than 13

- 13 to 24
- 25 to 49
- 50 to 74
- 75 to 100
- More than 100

Check point 1

Please select the program(s) that your organization **currently** participates in (*Select all that apply*):

- Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK)
- Florida's School Readiness Program (SR)
- Early Head Start (EHS)
- Head Start (HS)
- None of these programs

Motivations to participate in SR; VPK; HS; EHS

How important is the ability to serve vulnerable families who otherwise couldn't afford childcare expenses in $\{q://QID31/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$?

- Very important
- Important
- Not very important
- Not important

Do you believe participating in $\{q://QID31/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$ could lead to more enrollment for your site?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

To what extent does the possibility of becoming eligible for additional financial assistance (i.e., grants from Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) or Florida's School Readiness Program (SR)) motivate your participation in $\{q://QID31/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all

How important is the opportunity for additional professional development to your decision to participate in $\{q://QID31/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$?

- Very important
- Important
- Not very important
- Not important

To what degree do better advertising opportunities motivate your interest in participating in $\{q://QID31/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices\}$?

- To a great degree
- To a moderate degree
- To a small degree
- Not at all

How important is the need to remain competitive for 4-year-old enrollment in your decision to participate in VPK?

- Very important
- Important
- Not very important
- Not important

Open-ended Feedback: From your perspective as a provider who is participating in [\\$q://QID31/ChoiceGroup](#)

/SelectedChoices}, what could be improved to make your participation easier and/or more beneficial?

Check point 2

Please select programs that your organization has participated in **previously**, but no longer participates (*Select all that apply*):

- VPK
- SR
- EHS
- HS
- None of these programs

Decision - Stopped SR

Why did your organization **stop** participating in SR? *Select all that apply*

- No longer eligible
- Enrollment reached full capacity without SR
- Reimbursement rates were too low
- Participation in SR generated a financial burden for the organization's operations
- SR quality requirements (please describe)
- Too much added administrative work
- Concerns about private-pay parents' reactions
- Difficulties receiving Florida's School Readiness Program (SR) reimbursements
- Prefer not having external influence interfering with the organization's operations
- Other (please specify)

Would any of the following encourage your organization to renew participation in SR? *Select all that apply*

- Higher reimbursement rates
- Fewer administrative requirements
- Fewer quality requirements
- No additional supports would encourage the organization to renew participation in SR at this point in time
- Other (please specify)

Stopped VPK

Why did your organization stop participating in VPK? *Select all that apply*

- No longer eligible
- Enrollment reached full capacity without VPK
- Reimbursement rates were too low
- Participation in VPK generated a financial burden for the organization's operations
- VPK quality requirements (please describe)
- Too much added administrative work
- Concerns about private-pay parents' reactions
- Difficulties receiving Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) reimbursements
- Prefer not having external influence interfering with the organization's operations
- Other (please specify)

Would any of the following encourage your organization to renew participation in VPK? *Select all that apply*

- Higher reimbursement rates
- Fewer administrative requirements
- Fewer quality requirements
- No additional supports would encourage the organization to renew participation in VPK at this point in time
- Other (please specify)

Decision - Never Participated in SR & VPK

Why has your organization never participated in SR? *Select all that apply*

- Enrollments are already at full capacity without SR
- Does not need additional financial support
- Reimbursement rates are too low
- Participation in SR might generate a financial burden for the organization's operations
- SR quality requirements (please describe)
- Too much administrative work
- Had concerns about private-pay parents' reactions
- Heard negative things or had negative experiences with subsidy programs
- Prefer not having external influence interfering with the organization's operations
- Other (please specify)

Would any of the following have encouraged your organization to participated in SR? *Select all that apply*

- Higher reimbursement rates
- Fewer administrative requirements
- Fewer quality requirements
- No additional supports would have encouraged the organization to participate in SR at this point in time
- Other (please specify)

Why has your organization never participated in VPK? *Select all that apply*

- Enrollments are already at full capacity without VPK
- Does not need additional financial support
- Reimbursement rates are too low
- Participation in VPK might generate a financial burden for the organization's operations
- VPK quality requirements
- Too much administrative work
- Had concerns about private-pay parents' reactions
- Heard negative things or had negative experiences with certificates
- Prefer not having external influence interfering with the organization's operations
- Other (please specify)

Would any of the following have encouraged your organization to participate in VPK? *Select all that apply*

- Higher reimbursement rates
- Fewer administrative requirements
- Fewer quality requirements
- No additional supports would have encouraged the organization to participate in VPK at this point in time
- Other (please specify)

Decision - Never Participated in SR

Why has your organization never participated in SR? *Select all that apply*

- Enrollments are already at full capacity without SR
- Does not need additional financial support
- Reimbursement rates are too low
- Participation in SR might generate a financial burden for the organization's operations
- SR quality requirements (please describe)
- Too much administrative work
- Had concerns about private-pay parents' reactions
- Heard negative things or had negative experiences with vouchers/certificates
- Prefer not having external influence interfering with the organization's operations
- Other (please specify)

Would any of the following have encouraged your organization to participate in SR? *Select all that apply*

- Higher reimbursement rates
- Fewer administrative requirements
- Fewer quality requirements
- No additional supports would have encouraged the organization to participate in SR at this point in time
- Other (please specify)

Decision - Never Participated in VPK

Why has your organization never participated in VPK? *Select all that apply*

- Enrollments are already at full capacity without VPK
- Does not need additional financial support
- Reimbursement rates are too low
- Participation in VPK might generate a financial burden for the organization's operations
- VPK quality requirements (please describe)
- Too much administrative work
- Had concerns about private-pay parents' reactions
- Heard negative things or had negative experiences with certificates
- Prefer not having external influence interfering with the organization's operations
- Other (please specify)

Would any of the following have encouraged your organization to participate in VPK? *Select all that apply*

- Higher reimbursement rates
- Fewer administrative requirements
- Fewer quality requirements
- No additional supports would have encouraged the organization to participate in VPK at this point in time
- Other (please specify)