

# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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April 12, 2005

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** District School Superintendents

**FROM:** John L. Winn, Commissioner

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John L. Winn".

**SUBJECT:** Class Size Reduction Requirement and School District Eligibility to Provide Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education School-Year Program for 2005-06

Florida has a unique opportunity to impact the lives of young children by preparing them for successful entry into kindergarten through quality VPK programs. To meet the expectations of these children and their parents, local school districts that are in compliance with their class size reduction obligation should be given the option to decide whether to continue to provide these services through the new VPK program.

Many of Florida's school districts are currently providing high-quality prekindergarten programs. In 2003-04, 24,124 four-year-olds or 35 percent of all four-year-olds served were provided services by school districts. For the first year of VPK, it is projected that almost 155,000 four-year-olds will participate.

In the first year of implementation it is important that the state make every effort to ensure that parents of four-year-olds have access to a constitutionally guaranteed VPK program. Not yet knowing if our capacity is sufficient to meet the demand, it is prudent to avoid unduly limiting options that may now exist for them.

HB 1A, passed during the 2004 Special Session, provides two options for the VPK program - the school-year program, which is permissive for school districts, and the summer program, which is required for school districts. This legislation also delineates specific requirements for school districts to be eligible to provide the VPK school-year program. Specifically, section 1002.63(4), Florida Statutes, requires:

(a)The district school board must certify to the State Board of Education that the school district:

1. Has reduced the average class size in each classroom in accordance with section 1003.03 and the schedule in s. 1(a), Art. IX of the State Constitution; and
2. Has sufficient educational facilities and capital outlay funds to continue to reduce the average class size in each classroom in the district's elementary school...and to achieve full compliance with the maximum class sizes... by the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year.

(b)The Commissioner of Education must certify to the State Board of Education that the Department has reviewed the school district's educational facilities, capital outlay funds, and projected student enrollment and concurs with the school board's certification under paragraph (a).

Given that the data needed to certify class size compliance through 2010-2011 is unknown, it is important that the Department rely on current and historical data related to class size compliance to implement the above requirements. To do otherwise leaves no choice but to deny certification to all 67 school districts. I do not think that is the intent of the Legislature. Therefore, for the first year of the VPK school-year program, the certification of districts as eligible to offer the school-year VPK program will be based on the 2004 class size compliance. Based on these data, 59 school districts are in compliance with class size calculation for grades Prek-3 (see Attachment A).

The State Board of Education certified this compliance during its meeting on February 15, 2005. These 59 school districts are now free to make the local and final determination of whether they will offer the school-year VPK program while balancing their obligation to meet class size reduction. These districts should also take into consideration that compliance for class size in 2006-07 will be based on school level averages, which will significantly increase the demand for classroom space for K-12 students.

Once eligible districts have made a determination regarding their participation in the 2005-06 school-year VPK program, we are requesting that you sign and submit Attachment B. This will enable the Department to have accurate information regarding your district's participation in the school-year VPK program.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Shan Goff, Director, Office of Early Learning, at (850) 245-5070, SunCom 205-5070, or via email at [shan.goff@fldoe.org](mailto:shan.goff@fldoe.org) or Linda Champion, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Finance and Operations, at (850) 245-0406, SunCom 205-0406, or [linda.champion@fldoe.org](mailto:linda.champion@fldoe.org).

Attachments (2)

Attachment A – *2005 District Class Size Averages, Grades Prek-3, Compliance Calculation, VPK Certification*

Attachment B – *Notification of School District Decision to Offer 2005-06 School-Year VPK Program*

cc: District Finance Officers  
Assistant Superintendents for Curriculum and Instruction  
District Prekindergarten Contact Persons  
Executive Directors, Early Learning Coalitions