

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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October 22, 2008

Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1514
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Dear Commissioner Smith:

The attached six-month follow-up of Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability report 08-23, *61% of Voluntary PreKindergarten Children Are Ready for Kindergarten; Accountability Process Needs Improvement* is for your information.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 245-9418.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Ed W. Jordan".

Ed W. Jordan
Inspector General

EWJ/br

Attachment

c: OPPAGA
Florida Joint Legislative Auditing Committee
Sandy Cho, Chief Strategy Officer
Shan Goff, Executive Director

JLAC
Rec'd 10/27/08

Florida Department of Education

Agency Six-Month Follow-up to OPPAGA's April 2008 Report 08-23: *61% of Voluntary Prekindergarten Children Are Ready for Kindergarten; Accountability Process Needs Improvement* October 22, 2008

Finding:

- *The department should report additional information on program effectiveness.*

The State Board of Education Rule (Rule 6A-1.099821, FAC) that describes the Department's methodology for calculating the VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate is promulgated annually following policy discussions by the State Board of Education and extensive public input. In response to the public input received for the 2006-07 Readiness Rate calculation, the Department revised the VPK Providers' Readiness Rate Report (available for all VPK providers at <https://vpk.fldoe.org>) to include the percent of children included in the Readiness Rate. We will include OPPAGA's recommendation to also report the number/percent of VPK children who are "ready for kindergarten" across all three kindergarten screening measures as part of our policy discussions for the 2007-08 Readiness Rates.

Six-Month Follow-up:

The agenda for the June 17, 2008, State Board of Education meeting included *2007-08 VPK Provider Readiness Rate* as an issue for policy concurrence. To continue to provide transparency and stability in the readiness rate calculation, the State Board concurred that the methodology for 2007-08 would remain unchanged. However, the methodology for calculating the 2008-09 readiness rates will be reviewed and revised as the instruments that comprise the kindergarten screening will change in 2009-10.

Finding:

- *The process the department uses to identify low performing providers has shortcomings.*

The current model used to calculate the readiness rate is a compensatory model, patterned after school grades. It gives providers "credit" for higher scores on ECHOS which may "balance out" the expected lower performance on the DIBELS. As indicated in the report, each kindergarten screening measure captures a different aspect of a child's development toward kindergarten readiness. The ECHOS is a "whole child-oriented measure" based on national standards in seven domains. The skills assessed by ECHOS are those one would expect to see in a typically developing child in most preschool settings. The two DIBELS probes measure very discrete skills associated with emergent literacy which require a much higher level of direct and intentional teaching by the VPK instructor.

Given the above, the majority of kindergarten children and VPK providers do score higher on the ECHOS than on either of the two DIBELS measures. This scoring trend was also present in 2004-05 and 2005-06 when the Early Screening Inventory (ESI-K) was administered along with the two DIBELS measures. A VPK provider's scores on these three measures do provide information to identify areas for improvement. For example, if a VPK provider scored low on the ECHOS and did not have any extenuating circumstances, such as the majority of their children were identified as children with significant disabilities, the "treatment" for improvement should include a review of the basic components of a quality child care program. Lower scores on DIBELS typically indicate that the VPK instructor needs more professional development in the

area of concepts of print and phonological awareness, which is where the Department continues to focus its training.

As shared with OPPAGA staff, the State Board of Education, at their February 2008 meeting, specifically asked for the Department to provide additional options for calculating the Readiness Rate within the current statutory boundaries (i.e., minimum rate is set so that no more than 15 percent of the VPK providers are identified as not meeting the minimum readiness rate). The Department will be reviewing options, such as revising the definition of "ready for kindergarten" to include only the level of "Consistently Demonstrating" on the ECHOS instead of the current use of "Consistently Demonstrating" and "Emerging/Progressing," for consideration by the State Board.

Six-Month Follow-up:

As indicated above, the methodology for calculating the 2007-08 readiness rate will be the same as in the previous two years.

Finding:

- *Almost one-half of all unrated VPK providers in 2006-07 were excluded from the rating because the children they served were not screened on at least one measure.*

As indicated in the report, Rule 6A-1.099821, FAC, requires that a VPK provider serve at least four children who are enrolled for 70% or more of the total number of instructional hours and participated in each of the three screening measures. The cell size of four was determined to be appropriate given that the VPK providers must enroll at least four children in order to be an eligible VPK provider (section 1002.55(1)(e), F.S.).

It should be noted that a higher percentage of VPK providers (90% or 4,595) received a readiness rate for 2006-07 than for 2005-06 (83% or 3,772). The Department attributes this to the increase in private school children participating in the kindergarten screening, increase of VPK providers participating in the data verification process, and refinement of matching rules for the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) VPK data and the Department's kindergarten screening data. As also indicated in the report, although the percentage of records matched remained at 83%, the number of VPK providers increased from 2005-06 to 2006-07 by 12% or 551 providers. The Department continues to work with AWI, VPK providers, coalitions, and school districts to increase the number of private school children participating in the kindergarten screening and to improve the percentage of records matched.

To gather additional information about VPK providers without rates, the Department reviewed the status of VPK providers who did not receive a readiness rate in 2005-06. Of the 255 VPK providers who did not receive a rate in 2005-06 due to having fewer than four children screened, 77 or 30% were not VPK providers in 2006-07 and 178 or 70% have a 2006-07 readiness rate. Additionally, only 41 VPK providers did not receive a readiness rate in either year due to not having four children screened. The Department will work with AWI and the respective coalitions and school districts to review details related to these 41 VPK providers.

Six-Month Follow-up:

The Department has continued its activities to increase the number of children included in the calculation of the readiness rates. As indicated above, these activities include increasing the awareness of the responsibility to screen VPK participants attending kindergarten in private schools, increasing the number of VPK providers participating in the data verification process, and refinement of the matching rules for the kindergarten screening and VPK provider data.

Based on the preliminary 2007-08 VPK provider data, it appears that only half of the 41 VPK providers who did not have a readiness rate for two consecutive years remained VPK providers in 2007-08. The Department will work with AWI and the respective coalitions and school districts to review the details of any providers who do not have a readiness rate for 2007-08.

Finding:

- *Providers serving high numbers of at-risk and minority children are more likely to lose eligibility to provide VPK services.*

The Department agrees that there may be unintended consequences for some VPK providers with unique circumstances. Therefore, as indicated in the report, the Department is seeking legislative authority to establish a "good cause exemption" from not meeting the minimum readiness rate for three consecutive years.

As demonstrated by the much earlier 2006-07 release of the readiness rates, the Department and AWI are committed to continuing to improve the timeliness of the release of the readiness rates. The delay between the Fall 2006 screening and the release of final 2005-06 readiness rates was also due to the receipt of the AWI VPK data in February 2007, rather than solely due to the Department's "analytical processes" as stated in the report. Again, both agencies are reviewing their respective data processes to continue to improve the timeliness of the release of the readiness rates.

Six-Month Follow-up:

As indicated above, the Department is seeking legislative authority for the State Board of Education to promulgate rules to define a "good cause exemption" for not meeting the minimum readiness rate for three consecutive years in limited situations. Additionally, in collaboration with AWI and the respective early learning coalitions, an in-depth review of VPK providers that did not meet the minimum rate for three consecutive years will be conducted after the calculation of the 2007-08 readiness rates.