



VPK Classroom Learning Environment Packet

The Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County has created this packet for VPK providers to ensure that VPK and all four year old programs have an appropriate, well equipped, high quality classroom environment in place. Included are general guidelines for room arrangement and schedules, specific lists of materials, and recommendations for charts and displays, to assist providers as they set up and evaluate their VPK programs.

When the Coalition or its representatives monitor VPK classrooms the expectation is that most of the materials on the lists will be available in a well planned classroom set up with learning centers, recommended charts will be displayed, and an appropriate daily schedule will be posted and followed. The Coalition will be available to advise or assist providers as they set up their VPK classrooms and additional resources are available at the Coalition's Resource Room.

The Coalition is focusing on the early learning environment because it is essential to achieving the goal of VPK, which is to offer four year old children a rich and rewarding preschool experience that will give them the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten. The importance of the classroom environment as part of a quality program is emphasized in the **Florida VPK Performance Standards** which states, ***“quality early learning environments are associated with improved cognitive, social, and language skills.”*** Since the curriculum and activities in the classroom should be correlated to the VPK Standards and teachers should be familiar with the Standards and use them as a guide when planning activities, a **VPK Standards Summary** of the *domains* (areas of development) and *indicators* (expectations of what children should know and do) is posted on the VPK page of the Coalition's web site, www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org. Also posted is the Department of Education Office of Early Learning overview of elements that an appropriate VPK program should have in place, **Learning Activities and Choosing Curricula for Florida VPK Education Programs**.

For additional information be sure to visit the Coalition's **Resource Room** to find a wide variety books and materials which focus on setting up the environment, ways to enhance learning centers, and how to utilize everyday materials, among other topics related to child development and early learning. Explore the range of possibilities that exist when it comes to creating rich meaningful learning environments in which children are encouraged to experiment and discover. **The Resource Room is located at 2886 Ringling Boulevard, Gold Tree Plaza in Sarasota, below the Coalition's Child Care Connection office.**



Guidelines for Room Arrangement, Displays, and Daily Schedule

A well-planned daily schedule, thoughtful room arrangement, meaningful charts and displays, and appropriate materials are the foundation of a preschool program. Each of these elements has a tremendous impact on how involved children become in activities, how they interact with other children, how they handle transitions, and how they manage frustrations and conflicts.

A predictable and appropriate daily schedule helps children feel secure by letting them know what will happen next; it helps children feel in control by allowing them enough time to become engaged in an activity without feeling rushed, by providing adequate time for outdoor play and transitions, and by giving opportunities for independent choices.

The way the classroom is arranged should send children a message that this is a space designed to meet their needs and interests. Many conflicts and challenging behaviors can be avoided if space is defined with clear traffic patterns, noisy and quiet areas are separated, learning centers are defined and accessible, and soft spaces are provided as a retreat for children when they feel overwhelmed.

Meaningful charts and displays are important because they offer visual cues to the daily routine, let children know they are significant members of the class, and provide learning opportunities throughout the day. Attendance charts, job charts, and center sign-in lists help children feel important and capable, and also give them the information they need to act independently in the classroom. Alphabet, number, color and shape charts at children's eye level are references to be discussed informally during the day. Displaying children's work lets children and parents know that what children do at school is interesting, valued, and meaningful.

A wide variety of appropriate materials should be set up in centers, which structure the learning experience in a way that allows children to proceed at their own pace as they explore an interest or develop a skill and also provides opportunities to work cooperatively with other children. Clearly defined areas with enough age appropriate materials labeled and available give children opportunities to make decisions, plan their time and activities, interact with other children, and assist in cleanup.

Following are some very general guidelines. Other suggestions are included with the lists of materials.

- **Post and follow a daily schedule that has both words and pictures, so children can understand the daily routine**
- **Allow enough time every day for outside play**
- **Establish clear traffic patterns**
- **Separate noisy and quiet areas**
- **Have a meeting/circle area**
- **Set up clearly defined learning centers**
- **Have a wide variety of age appropriate materials**
- **Label materials and areas with both words and pictures**
- **Display appropriate charts at children's eye level**
- **Display children's work, and update displays often**
- **Include soft spaces**