



*Agency for Workforce Innovation*

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**Lt. Governor Kottkamp Joins AWI to Kickoff Statewide Happy Birthday VPK Parties  
and Salute of Florida's Early Learning Programs**

**TALLAHASSEE, FLA** – On Monday, August 27, 2007, Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp and Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) Director Monesia T. Brown joined to say “Happy 2<sup>nd</sup> Birthday” to the state’s Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program at the state Capitol. The event marked the official start of the statewide “Happy Birthday VPK” celebration and salute to Florida’s Early Learning programs.

“Early learning programs like our VPK program are vital to increasing Florida’s youngest citizens chances of achieving future educational success and becoming productive member of society,” said Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp.

“As we begin the new school year, and the third year of the VPK program, we are confident that the program will continue to grow and develop as a source of pride for our state,” said Director Brown. “As the state’s lead workforce agency, we understand that workforce issues can be addressed by providing quality early learning opportunities—and we are working every day to forward the governor’s vision to strengthen the linkage between education, economic development and workforce services to ensure a better economy for Florida’s future. As we move forward, we will continue to build upon the foundational successes of the VPK program.”

Also joining the celebration were Representative Lorraine Ausley; Shan Goff, Executive Director of the Department of Education’s Office of Early Learning; and Chris Jensen, Chairman of the Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend.

"Florida's families and communities all benefit when our children receive quality education and care early in life," said Department of Children and Families, Secretary Bob Butterworth. "Families are healthier and kids learn the tools they need to succeed later in life. We're proud to be a partner in VPK and we look forward to many more anniversary celebrations to come."

"VPK offers students an opportunity to build the foundation for a lifetime of learning, thanks to our outstanding preschool instructors and parents," said Commissioner of Education, Jeanine Blomberg. "Successful results from our first year indicate that this program makes a significant difference in preparing children for kindergarten."

This week, Early Learning Coalitions throughout the state and their providers will begin hosting their own events celebrating the progress students make through school readiness and early learning programs. Events will be held in Duval, Miami-Dade, Walton/Okaloosa, Flagler/Volusia, Lake, Marion, Osceola, Pinellas, St. Lucie, Ft. Myers and Sarasota counties.

In the first year of implementation more than 105,000 (approximately 48 percent) of Florida's four-year-olds enrolled in the VPK program — an impressive accomplishment compared to first-year statewide prekindergarten program implementations in other states. Last year, that number increased to more than 125,000 students (55 percent), and this year that number is likely to stay on course.

Research shows children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs tend to have greater language skills, are better prepared to enter elementary school and are more likely to pursue secondary education.

*The Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) is Florida's lead state workforce agency and directly administers the state's Labor Market Statistics program, Unemployment Compensation, Early Learning and Workforce Services programs. Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program is jointly administered by the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Department of Education (DOE), and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). AWI administers the day-to-day operations of the program, including policy development, financial management and oversight of the 31 Early Learning Coalitions; DOE oversees standards, curricula and professional development; and DCF provides oversight of child care licensing, regulation, Florida's Gold Seal Quality Care program and issues credentials for child care personnel.*

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