



VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK) EDUCATION PROGRAM

SUPPORT: Bolstering VPK Scholarships through Budget Process

BACKGROUND: The Church supports the right of parents to select the schools they deem best suited for their children. The Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program empowers parents to make such decisions under a provision voted into the Florida Constitution through a 2002 ballot amendment.

These scholarships are available – on a free, opt-in basis – for the Florida parents of a child who turns four by September 1 of a given school year. As of the 2013-2014 school year, 6,442 providers offered VPK to 170,265 students. This represents 77 percent of the eligible four-year olds in Florida.

At present, VPK serves 3,754 students in 118 participating Catholic schools. This figure represents 4.4 percent of the total Catholic school enrollment of 84,452 students from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade.

BUDGET REQUESTS:

Restore the per-pupil scholarships for the VPK Program to 2007-2008 school-year funding levels. The current amount for school-year students has been set at \$2,437 per child. A \$240 increase would raise the scholarship value to \$2,677 each. This would in turn restore the per-child scholarships to the “high-water” mark set for the 2007-2008 school year (i.e. just before the recession occurred).

RATIONALE: The VPK Program empowers parents to best meet their child’s needs at a crucial and foundational stage for academic development.

Despite its admirable mission, the VPK Program today is at risk of falling short of the intended mark. Lower funding levels make it extremely difficult for schools to offer adequate instruction.

Florida Governor Rick Scott has requested a \$46 per-child increase in VPK scholarships. The Governor’s request is a step in the right direction toward restoring scholarship funding.

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