

DEEPER DIVE: EARLY LEARNING AND KINDERGARTEN READINESS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS DEEPER DIVE:

- Students attending Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) scored considerably better in kindergarten readiness across all Tampa Bay counties.
- Despite the importance of early learning education, early learning educators typically earn less than a living wage and significantly below the pay of elementary school teachers.
- For every dollar invested in preschool children today, savings range from \$2.50 to \$17 in the years ahead.

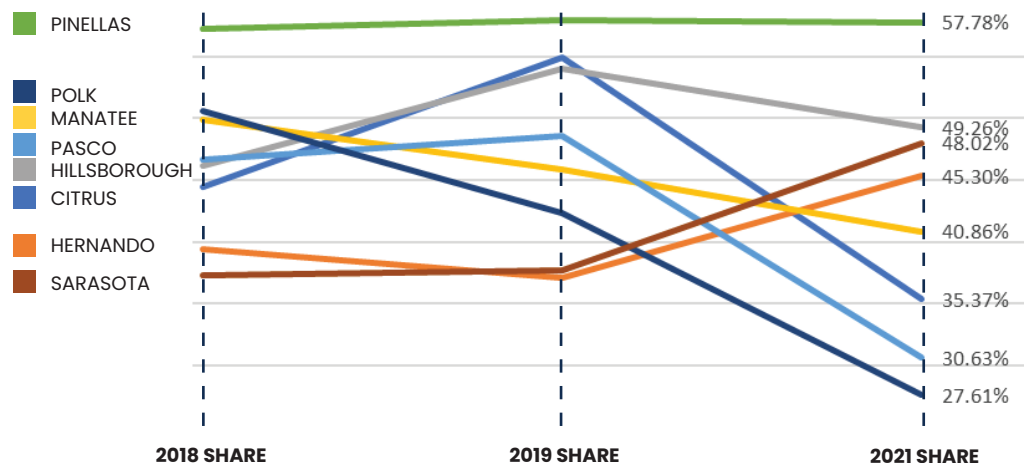
There is a strong correlation between preschool attendance and kindergarten readiness. When a child is ready for kindergarten, they are more likely to graduate from high school, earn a higher income, be healthier as an adult, and stay out of the criminal justice system. Every public dollar spent on preschool returns \$7 through increased productivity and savings on public assistance and criminal justice.

Low pay and burnout are linked to high turnover and a shortage of preschool teachers. Average annual wages of preschool teachers in the Tampa Bay region are \$32,218.

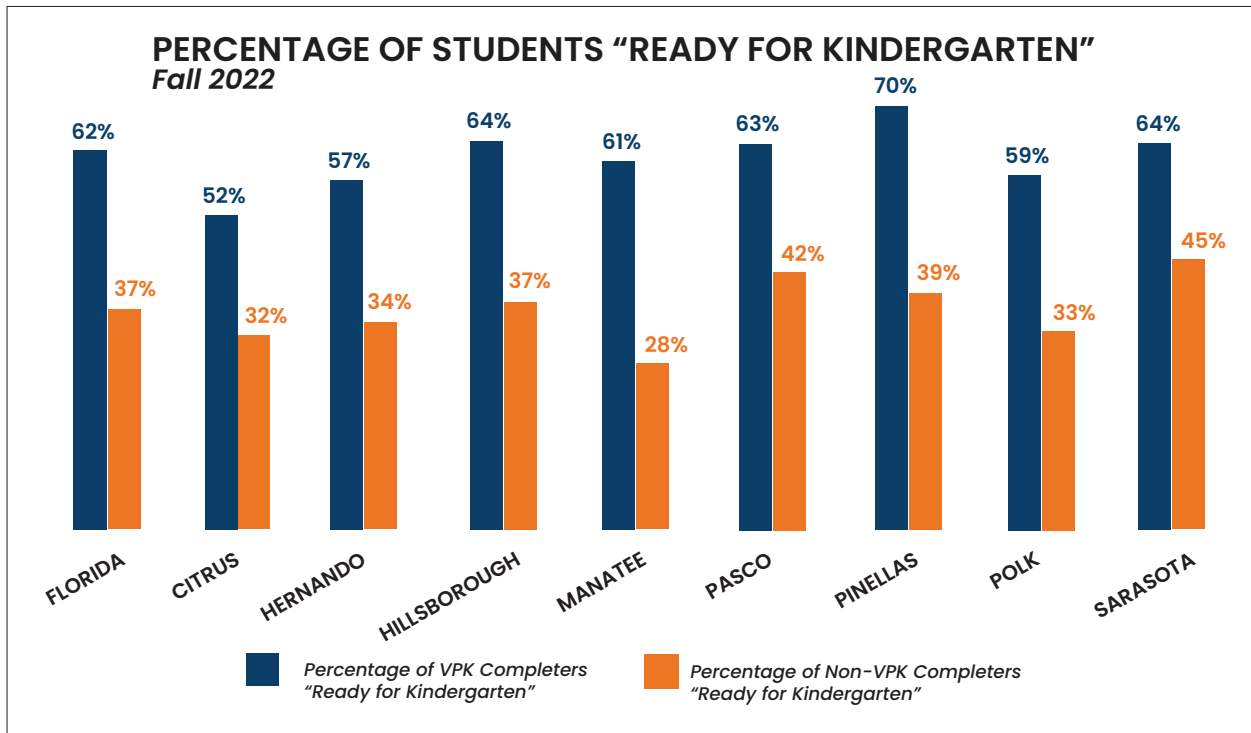
1.

Early learning programs are essential for brain development, yet except for Pinellas County, all Tampa Bay counties have less than 50% of their 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in school. Furthermore, the share of 3- & 4-year-olds enrolled in school has fallen from 2018 to 2021 except in Pinellas, Sarasota, Hernando, and Hillsborough counties. Florida offers a voluntary half-day prekindergarten (VPK) option for 4-year-olds, with 74% of all Florida 4-year-olds participating.

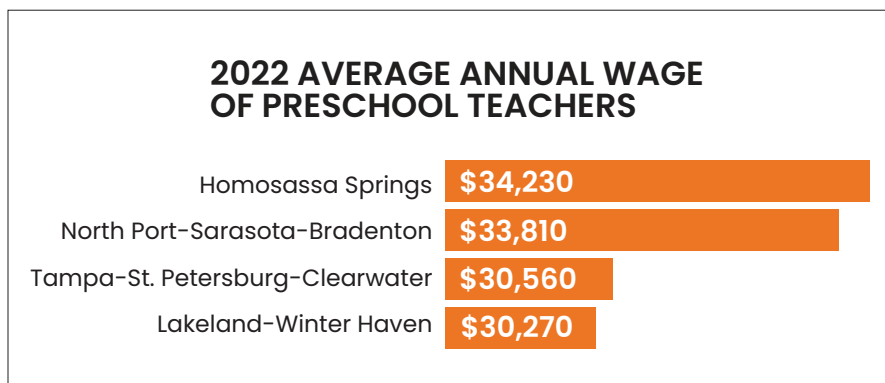
SHARE OF 3 & 4 YEAR OLDS ENROLLED BY COUNTY OVER TIME



- 2.** Nearly 90% of child brain development happens before age 5. Students attending VPK scored considerably better in kindergarten readiness across all Tampa Bay counties, with several counties showing a gain of 30% or higher.



- 3.** Despite the importance of early learning education, early learning educators typically earn less than a living wage and significantly below the pay of elementary school teachers. In the greater Tampa Bay region, preschool teachers earned, on average, \$32,218 in 2022.



In Florida, VPK teachers in school year programs must hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, or a Florida Childcare Professional Certification (FCCPC) plus 480 contact hours with children ages birth to eight. Given the annual average pay of preschool teachers in the Tampa Bay region, higher education costs are not offset by higher earnings in the labor market upon graduation.