Florida Children’s Council: Florida’s Early Learning System

FLORIDA PHILANTHROPIC NETWORK

EDUCATION AFFINITY GROUP- OCTOBER 10, 2019
### Florida’s Early Learning System

**School Readiness Act of 1999**
- Created Early Learning Coalitions
- Established Florida’s School Readiness Program (Subsidized Childcare)
- Focus on Birth-5 (eligible through age 12)
- Viewed as “workforce Support”, not education program
- Funded with combination of State and Federal funds (General Revenue, Child Care Development Fund (CCDF))

**School Readiness Eligibility**
- Families must be working or attending school full or part time
- Priority given to families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and families whose income is at a 150% or below the federal poverty level
- Determined eligible annually
- Parent choice
Florida’s OEL, in partnership with 30 local Early Learning Coalitions, administers annual budget of $1,047,533,314, including:

$570,827,228 in **School Readiness** Program:
- Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding and general revenue: child care subsidies, quality funds (4%), resource/referral for all families
- 206,380 children 0-13 served (including 144,717 children birth-age five)
- In Florida only 18% of eligible children receive child care subsidies
- Florida has the 6th lowest payment rates for infants and toddlers and 7th lowest payment rates for preschoolers in the nation
- Coalitions can pay up to 20% higher rates to programs that are nationally accredited by a DCF-approved organization: approximately $33 million annually invested in differential payments
- Parents must contribute a co-payment based on a sliding fee scale
School Readiness: Why it Matters

The achievement gap starts with a readiness gap:

| Children from low-income homes hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers | 61% of children from low-income backgrounds have no children’s books at home | Early language and engagement lags have been documented as early as 18 months | By age two, low-income children are already behind their peers in listening, counting and other skills essential to literacy |

Approximately 1 in 3 children arrive at kindergarten without the basic skills needed for success.
School Readiness: Why It Matters

Early gaps become growing, glaring differences in preschool:
- Words children understand and speak
- Listening and comprehension abilities
- Early counting

By age five: a typical middle-class child recognizes 22 letters, compared to 9 letters for a typical child from a low-income family

Amount and quality of early vocabulary words directly supports the development of basic reading proficiency and eventual mastery

Without a robust vocabulary, children may learn reading mechanics but not comprehend the meaning of the text

Focus on language development can improve teaching practices and responsive interactions that help build language skills
Most young children attend an early learning program
- ~40% of infants and over 80% of preschoolers receive care from someone other than parents regularly
- Most early learning programs find it difficult to maintain quality due to payment rates
- Industry very labor intensive; program revenue limited by tuition families can pay/limited public funding
- Efforts to improve program quality challenged by overall market
- Florida has an overabundance of supply: 41% vacancy rate
- Average cost of care in Florida is $8,000 annually for one child
The funding formula to allocate dollars to early learning coalitions is based on a historical funding formula that does not take into account Florida’s population trends by county.

The reimbursement rates to providers are not equitable across coalitions due to prior legislative language.

To fix inequities would cost $100’s of millions of dollars.

The School Readiness program is currently funded $33 million less than it was a decade ago.

Increases in funding needs to be allocated strategically in order to maximize impact.
Based on the vacancy rate and depressed market rates the child care provider community can only afford to provide basic services in accordance with child care licensing requirements.

Florida ranks 40th on the strength of its licensing requirements.

Child care providers who do not have at least 85% of enrolled capacity filled will have trouble sustaining a viable business model.

Florida’s depressed child care market makes it difficult to incentivize providing quality early learning environments to those that need them most.
Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

**Constitutionally approved entitlement program**

Available universally to Florida’s children who turn four on or before September 1st of the year preceding their enrollment into kindergarten
- One of three universal voluntary programs in nation

Launched in 2005: Three models: school year (540 hours), summer (300 hours), or specialized services (hours vary based on disability/services)

Parents choose the VPK provider and program type to best meet their needs

School year VPK instructors must have a CDA credential: Summer VPK instructors must have a BA degree

All instructors must have training on the VPK Educational Standards and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum aligned to the VPK educational standards
VPK providers must provide a pre assessment and post assessment of literacy and math skills to children in their VPK classrooms.

Each VPK provider receives a Readiness Rate based on their prior years’ students’ Kindergarten Readiness Rates at the beginning of kindergarten.

The Office of Early Learning is responsible for adopting the minimum kindergarten readiness rate.

Any provider who does not meet the minimum kindergarten readiness rate shall submit an improvement plan, placed on probation, and ultimately may be removed from the program.
$395,180,396 in Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) program funded through state general revenue

- Base student Allocation (BSA) for School Year: $2437 Summer: $2080
- When program was launched in 2005-2006 the BSA was $2677
- 168,788 four-year-olds (77%); 3rd nationally in terms of percentage of children served
- 78.3% of VPK is provided in private centers, 20% in public schools, 1.3% in private schools, and .4% in family child care homes
Quality in Early Learning Programs

To measure quality, you must look at the following:
- The interaction between the teacher and child;
- The educational environment;
- The developmental and academic outcomes of children.

There is a substantial cost to improve quality.

Research shows that low income children benefit the most from high quality early learning experiences.

Parents choose child care based on location and cost.

Therefore, most low-income children attend child care centers in low income communities who lack the resources to invest in quality.
Quality Investments

During the 2017-2018 legislative session, the Florida Legislature took positive steps towards increasing, and funding, quality in school readiness child care programs:

- Established CLASS assessment (Teacher/Child Interactions) as the assessment tool to be used to establish minimum requirements for contracting;
- Creates opportunities for increased payments based on assessment scores (Tiered Reimbursement);
- Creates opportunity for additional funding based on implementation of a child assessment;

While opportunities for increased performance-based funding is a positive, reimbursement rates in most areas remain low:

- The cost of implementing quality may still not be achievable, even with performance-based funding.
Investor Opportunities

Increased interest in “Targeted” funding vs. “Slot” funding:
◦ Investing in outcomes vs. outputs;
◦ Investing in targeted communities and populations vs. ;
◦ Multiple funders targeting same outcome;
◦ 2 Generational approach to issues;
◦ Funding in-direct supports/initiatives vs. direct (teacher scholarships, staff training, etc.)
FY 2020 Legislative/Policy Issues

“Year of the Child”

Early Learning
- Alignment of VPK assessment systems;
- Equitable funding for early learning coalitions;
- Increased standards and performance expectations for contracted providers

Child Welfare
- Increased focus and investment in prevention services;
- Increased access and availability for mental health services.
2 Generational Approach to Policy

◦ Review program income requirements for opportunities to reduce “fiscal cliff” for families;
◦ Encourage families to seek economic self-sufficiency without fear of losing essential supports.
QUESTIONS?

Matt Guse, CEO
mguse@floridacsc.org

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