

Annual Report 2010-2011



Message from the Board Chair

I believe the Early Learning Coalition is one of the most valuable resources within Polk County. It is our goal to make sure that children ages birth to five and beyond, have access to quality early education experiences to cultivate their natural eagerness for learning.

Together, through collaboration with community organizations, business leaders, the child care industry, and public schools, we are building a solid foundation for the county. We are investing in our greatest assets, the children and families of Polk County, to create children who enter school ready to learn, progress through their educational years, and then produce a strong work force which will benefit our entire community for many years to come.

This past year, the Coalition went through another time of expansion and transition. Child care services including eligibility, provider payments, and Child Care Resource and Referral would have gone out to bid in early 2011. However, in the fall of 2010, the Executive Committee began discussing the possibility of bringing all services under the direct control of the Coalition. Arrangements were made and all remaining services transferred to the Coalition on April 1, 2011. This meant growth for the Coalition in doubling the number of staff directly on the Coalition's payroll and also an increase in office space to better serve the Winter Haven area. Customer service has always been a high priority for the Coalition. It was important to me to improve the way parents and children are served on a daily basis when dealing with the Coalition. Having all services under our direct control also allows the Coalition to operate more timely and efficiently while staff and the Board are highly accountable to themselves and their funders.

In my second year as the governor appointed chair of the Coalition and my many years as a board member, I can say we have continued to move forward with impressing upon the community about the importance of quality care in provider sites contracted with the Coalition. Staff offers assistance and resources to providers to aid those willing to work with them to improve their status. Our Quality Counts—Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) is aligned with other coalitions across the state to help parents recognize the quality of a child care site by the number of stars it has attained.

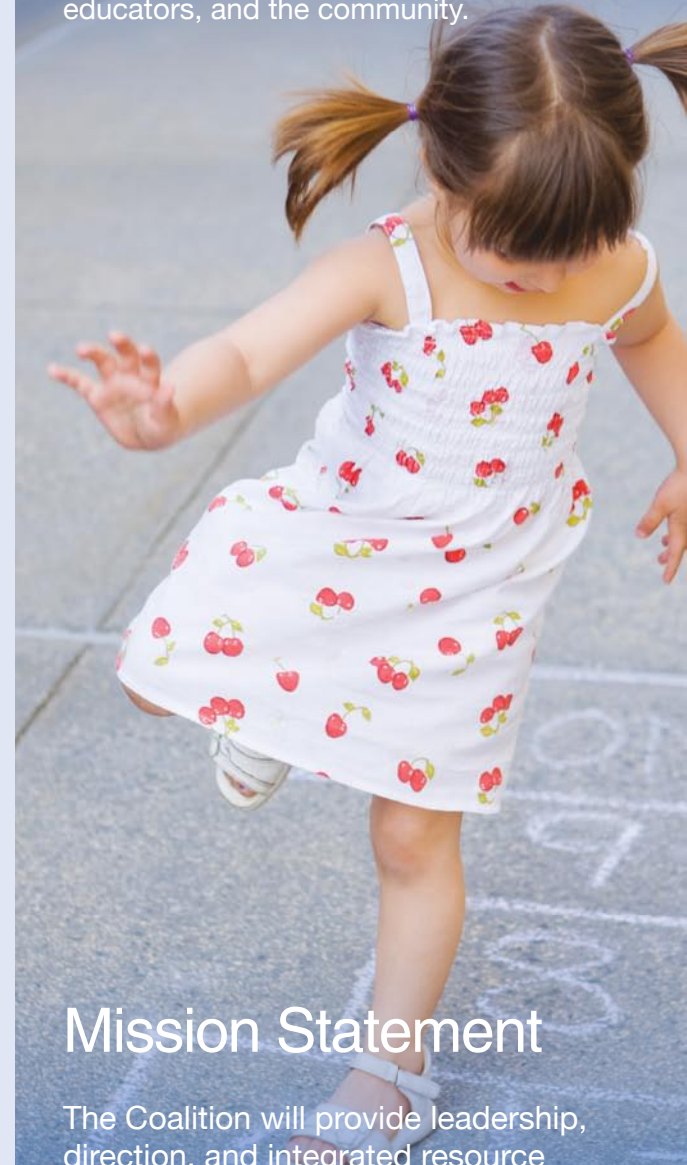
Speaking on behalf of the Board members, we believe that ALL children should have a quality early learning experience that is essential in building a successful future for them and we will do our best to make that happen.



James H. Rhodes, II, Chair

Vision Statement

All children enter school healthy, ready and eager for life long learning with the collaborative support of parents, families, educators, and the community.



Mission Statement

The Coalition will provide leadership, direction, and integrated resource management for quality services that support our vision of success for children.

Coalition History

The Polk County School Readiness Coalition, Inc. d/b/a the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County was established by Florida Statute 411.01 in 1999. In 2005, the Voluntary PreKindergarten Program (VPK) under Florida Statute 1002.51 was added to the Coalition's responsibilities.

In 2007, the Coalition began direct control of program services to all of Polk County. Since June 30, 2011, all services for both School Readiness and VPK related to providers (including payments), child eligibility, and Child Care Resource and Referral are provided directly by the Coalition.

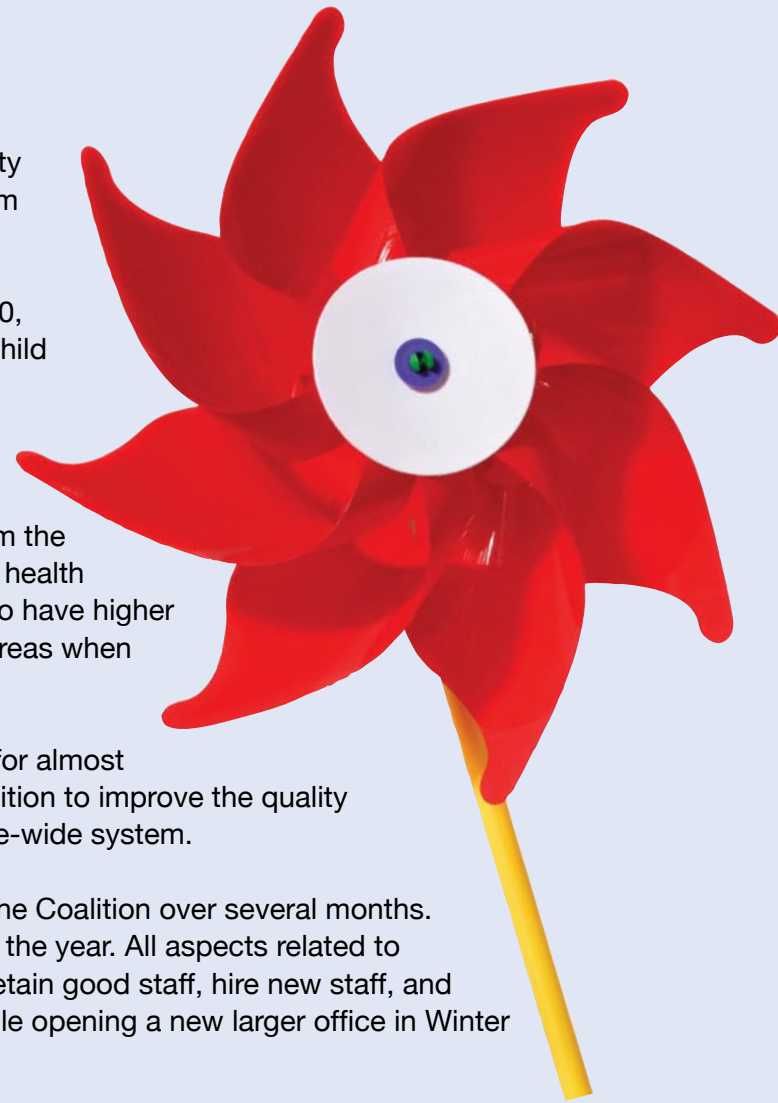
Over the years, the Coalition has continued to refine the Provider Agreement which is signed by approximately 350 child care centers and family child care homes. This agreement is designed to hold child care providers accountable for the services they provide and the funds they receive from the Coalition. The agreement contains a wide range of requirements including the governing statutes, health and safety requirements, and insurance limits. Coalition staff is diligent in assisting the providers to have higher quality sites by monitoring them and giving technical assistance and training in various program areas when necessary or requested.

The Coalition's Quality Counts/Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) has been in existence for almost five years and works with a special group of providers who voluntarily agree to work with the Coalition to improve the quality of their sites. The local QRIS is based on a collaborative of coalitions working to implement a state-wide system.

Fiscal Year 2010-2011 was one of continual change and transition as services were brought into the Coalition over several months. The number of staff directly on the Coalition's payroll went from about 24 to over 50 by the end of the year. All aspects related to services and employees needed to be reviewed for efficiency and cost savings while desiring to retain good staff, hire new staff, and improve customer service. Office space was reviewed with the closure of one office in Bartow while opening a new larger office in Winter Haven to better serve the growing number of clients in that area of the county.

Even with all the expenses of transitioning and office changes, the Coalition was able to enroll for a significant portion of the year. This meant that along with remaining federal stimulus American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds of over one million dollars, many additional children were served.

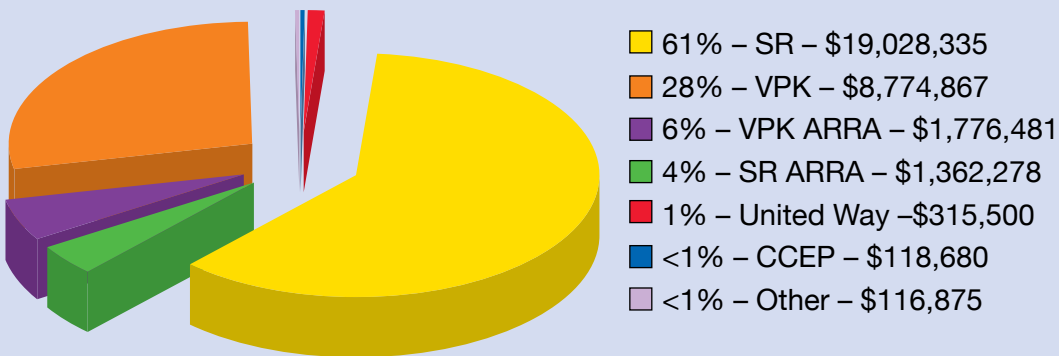
The Board of Directors of the Coalition is designed in Florida statute to have gubernatorial appointments, mandated members, and business community members. It is made up of the major agencies in Polk County that work with children including the Department of Children and Families, Polk County Schools, Polk Works, the Polk County Health Department, Polk State College, Head Start, an appointee from the Board of County Commissioners, a representative from the private child care providers, a representative from the faith-based child care providers, a representative for children with disabilities, and members of the private business sector. The Board believed strongly from the beginning to hold themselves highly accountable for the federal, state, and local funds that flow through the Coalition. They want these funds to be for sites that have a priority on the health and safety of the children as they are being prepared for school while their parents continue in their employment.



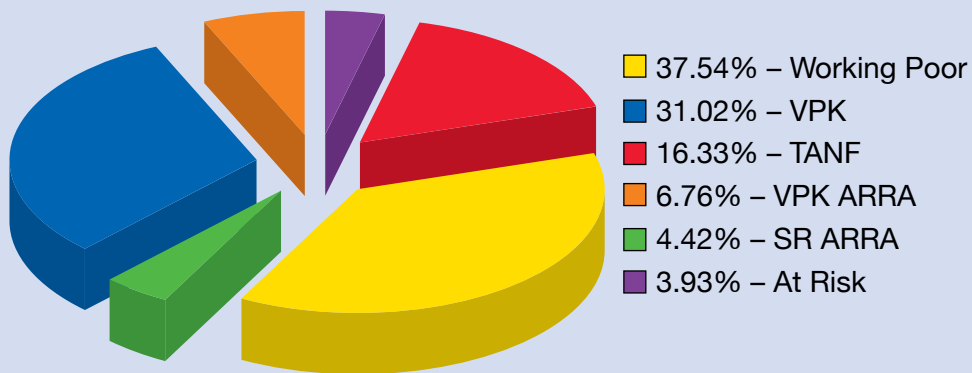
Overview of Programs

A total of 12,348 children were served in either a School Readiness or a Voluntary PreKindergarten Program in fiscal year 2010-2011. This number includes 757 children who were receiving both School Readiness and VPK programs during the year.

FY 2010-2011- INCOME



FY 2010-2011- PERCENTAGES PAID BY FUNDING CATEGORY



VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK)

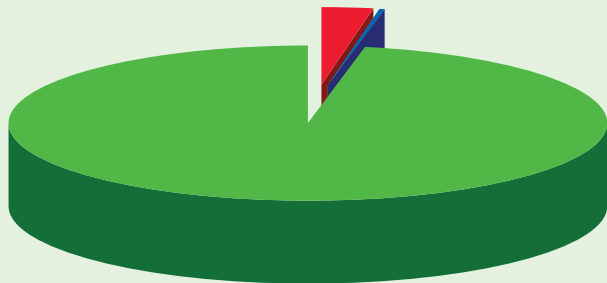
The VPK program continues to increase in the number of children served and the number of providers willing to be a part of the program. The number of VPK providers was up almost 10% in FY 2010-2011 with a total of 141 private and faith-based providers along with 46 public school sites and 22 Head Start sites providing the program. The total number of VPK children served rose over 16% to 4,437 children. The school year program remains the program of choice for VPK with 4,171 children enrolled in that program. Only about 266 children enrolled in the summer program.

When kindergarten begins, each child is screened to provide a snapshot of the child's readiness for kindergarten and progress in achieving the VPK performance standards. The tool used to assess children's readiness to enter school remained the same for two years. The tool

is called the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) and uses the Early Childhood Observation System (ECHOS) and the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading – Kindergarten (FAIR-K). The ECHOS score is based on the teacher's observation of the child's performance on a maximum of 19 benchmarks across 7 developmental areas. The FAIR-K uses a Broad Screen/Progress Monitoring Tool and a Broad Diagnostic Inventory. The Broad Screen/Progress Monitoring Tool utilizes letter naming and phonemic awareness, while the Broad Diagnostic Inventory utilizes tasks related to listening comprehension and vocabulary. Scores in Polk County continue to show children in Polk are comparable to the overall state scores on both the ECHOS and the FAIR-K.

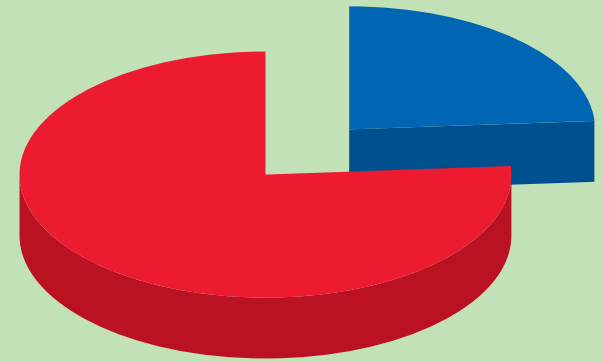
Each VPK provider receives a readiness rate related to the assessment of the children they served in their program(s). The State Board of Education sets the rate and up to 15% of the providers statewide can be deemed Low Performing Providers (LPP) annually. In FY 2010-2011, Polk County had 14 providers that were determined to be low performing with their program, none of which were consistently an LPP for two years. These providers will now be put on a type of probation and must adhere to certain Department of Education requirements. If a provider would consistently be an LPP, they would ultimately no longer be allowed by DOE to provide the VPK program.

FY 2010-2011 VPK EXPENSES



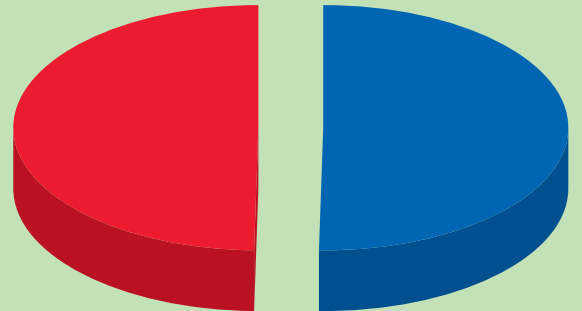
- 97% – Direct Services (VPK Slots) – \$9,877,060
- 3% – Admin. Including Enrollment & Monitoring – \$273,860
- <1% – Outreach & Awareness – \$26,965

VPK BY ETHNICITY



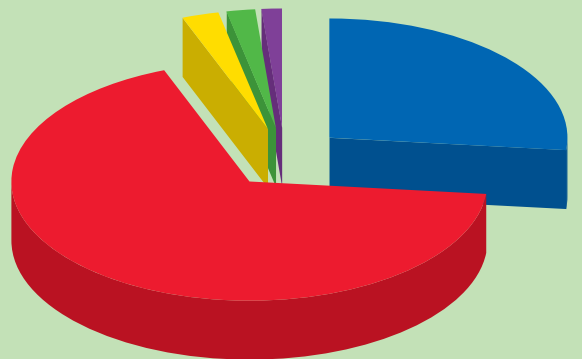
- 69% – Non-Hispanic – 3,382
- 31% – Hispanic – 1,055

VPK BY GENDER



- 50% – Male – 2,210
- 50% – Female – 2,227

VPK BY RACE



- 27% – Black – 1,187
- 2% – Indian/Alaskan – 88
- 68% – White – 2,996
- 2% – Asian – 100
- 1% – Hawaiian/Pacific – 66

SCHOOL READINESS

As of June 30, 2010, 7,911 income eligible children age 0-12 received School Readiness funding in Polk County. This number includes 216 children that sometime during the year received services through the Child Care Executive Partnership program. On that same date, there were 202 licensed child care centers providing services to groups of children through agreements with the Coalition, 141 family child care homes providing in-home care for children from more than one family, 1 informal child care provider serving the children of one family, 44 school-based sites, and 28 license-exempt centers which are primarily faith-based facilities.

All families must be working or going to school and must be income eligible to participate in the School Readiness program. Children can receive services through three different avenues. First, the Coalition is mandated to serve parent(s) who have a referral through Polk Works/Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) while they are striving to become self sufficient. Parent(s) with a referral from the Department of Children and Families or their contracted agency (Heartland for Children) as a Protective Services' client are also mandated to be served. Remaining funds are used to serve parents who complete a self referral to get on the wait list as a working poor family. When it is feasible to have enrollment, the Coalition makes appointments with these families for a detailed check of eligibility and

then if they are eligible, enrolls according to the Board's established priorities. Referrals from DCF/Heartland remained stable, but the referrals from Polk Works increased about 20% due to the economic climate and high unemployment rates. The Coalition was able to enroll working poor families during the year, but in order not to disenroll children, several hundred children were also put in this category when the stimulus funds were exhausted.

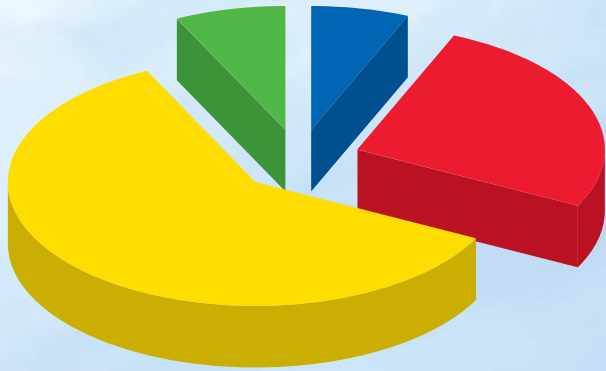
School Readiness enrollment was at 4,625 beginning July 1, 2010, and remained fairly steady most of the year even though there continued to be a high monthly attrition rate due primarily to loss of employment or families moving out of county. However, with rising Polk Works' referrals, the retention of the children no longer funded by stimulus funds, and new enrollments, the year ended on June 30, 2011 with 4,717 children enrolled in School Readiness funds.

The wait list for School Readiness began with 1,436 children in July 2010 and ended June 2011 with 3,019. This growth in the wait list was due to the non recurring stimulus funds, the large amount of funds used for Polk Works' referrals, and also the overall need for services.



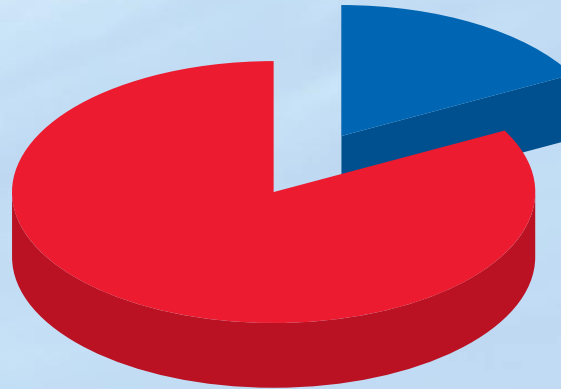
SCHOOL READINESS PERCENTAGES

PAID BY CATEGORY



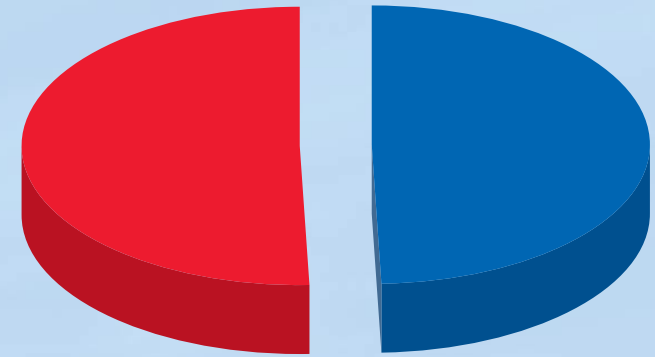
- 60.33% – Working Poor
- 26.24% – TANF
- 7.11% – ARRA
- 6.32% – At Risk

SCHOOL READINESS BY ETHNICITY



- 82.9% – Non-Hispanic – 6,558
- 17.1% – Hispanic – 1,353

SCHOOL READINESS BY GENDER



- 51% – Male – 4,006
- 49% – Female – 3,905

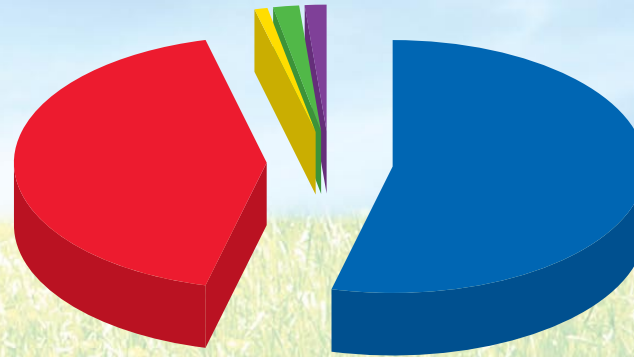
FY 2010-2011

SCHOOL READINESS EXPENSES



- 81% – Direct Services (Child Care Slots) – \$16,270,115
- 9% – Quality Initiatives – \$1,719,201
- 4% – Eligibility Services – \$906,043
- 3% – Administration – \$525,925
- 2% – Non Direct Services – \$309,234
- 1% – Infants & Toddlers – \$202,482
- <1% – Child Care Resource & Referral – \$93,743
- <1% – Helios – \$58,405
- <1% – Inclusion – \$39,397
- <1% – Disney – \$17,277

SCHOOL READINESS BY RACE



- 54% – Black – 4,265
- 42% – White – 3,339
- 2% – Indian/Alaskan – 134
- 1% – Asian – 64
- 1% – Hawaiian/Pacific – 109

SCHOOL READINESS BY AGE



- 36% – School Age – 2,820
- 12% – 5yr – 932
- 17% – 4yr – 1,357
- 14% – 3yr – 1,101
- 11% – 2yr – 896
- 8% – Toddler – 615
- 2% – Infant – 190

QUALITY INITIATIVES

One of the main goals of the Coalition continues to be to improve the quality of child care throughout Polk County. During the 2010-2011 fiscal year, there were over 3,500 technical assistance visits made at the 294 (as of June 30, 2011) contracted child care centers and family child care homes serving ages birth to five. All sites were visited on a regular basis and had a formal assessment completed on their program during the fiscal year. The Quality Specialist working with each site developed a “Plan of Action,” setting specific goals with timeframes for completing goals in targeted areas of the program. In addition to working on established goals, Quality Specialists provided technical assistance on a variety of different topics including, but not limited to: curriculum, health and safety, appropriate infant/toddler care, room arrangement, language and literacy, and child assessment.

A large number of formal trainings were also provided for child care providers throughout the 2010-2011 fiscal year. To accommodate the providers, Coalition staff offered several of these trainings on multiple dates and in different geographic areas of the county. Some training topics for the year included: “An Overview of the Wee Learn Curriculum” (139 total participants); “Creative Curriculum Continuum” (148 total participants); “Birth to Three Standards” (116 total participants); “Lesson Planning” (68 total participants); “Beyond Cribs & Rattles Curriculum” (22 participants); “Providing Quality Infant/Toddler Care” (65 participants), and VPK Standards (over 200 participants). The Coalition was also able to provide specialized training to help providers with better business practices. There were 5 different training sessions offered for this with a total of 155

participants from 20 different child care facilities attending.

The Coalition recognizes the importance of offering inclusion services to providers and families throughout Polk County. The Coalition’s Inclusion Coordinator worked with Quality staff to be able to provide observations, strategy development, on-site training, technical assistance, and information and referrals to support teachers and parents.

Coalition flyers regarding the inclusion warm line (863.733.9080) were given out to providers during initial provider visits and at provider meetings. Formal inclusion-related trainings were offered quarterly, and registration was open to all family child care homes and center-based providers throughout the county. Inclusion-related technical assistance was offered on over 175 occasions throughout the year, with the number one request for assistance continuing to be related to social/emotional development, more specifically “challenging behaviors.”

Initial developmental screenings are completed by parents during a child’s enrollment. Coalition staff received reports of initial findings and completed follow-up screenings as needed. During the year, parent resources were given with information about outside agencies such as Early Steps or FDLRS Child Find, where parents could seek further information when needed. Quality Specialists work with providers to help them understand the importance of a child’s development and dealing with any developmental needs that might become apparent with a child.





Over 3,800 three- and four-year-old children were screened for vision and hearing at Coalition-funded sites during the year through a contract with the Polk County Health Department. Additional referrals were then made for 228 children with hearing concerns and 105 children with vision concerns. The screening team also provided presentations directly to the children in the classrooms during their visits on topics such as “Those Mean Nasty Dirty Downright Disgusting but...Invisible Germs” for appropriate hand washing, “Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim” for water safety, and “Bucklebear” for car safety.

The Coalition partnered with Polk State College, Polk County Schools Preschool Programs, Campus Kid Care Coalition of Polk County, Success by 6, and Florida KidCare in October 2010 to sponsor the Polk Collaborative Partners Annual Conference. The conference offered a variety of workshops to choose from, relating to all age groups, infants through school age. Coalition staff members had the opportunity to present and/or facilitate during the event, and approximately 200 providers and agency staff were in attendance.

SPECIAL GRANTS

The Coalition was fortunate enough to receive some additional special grants in fiscal year 2010-2011. Those grants included funds from the Helios Education Foundation for professional development. The grant is in conjunction with the early learning coalitions of Sarasota and Manatee and enables the Coalition to work specifically with family child care home providers to enhance literacy skills for the children and families in their care.

Disney Helping Kids Shine Program also gave the Coalition funds and those funds are used for the Building Blocks for a Healthy Future series in child care centers. This exciting program focuses on strengthening the whole child as they develop, especially in the area of communication. This program aims at determining the quality of the conversations that take place on a daily basis and at turning those conversations into meaningful, cognitively challenging conversations and discussion. Disney also donated 800 Baby Einstein DVDs that were given to parents when they visited one of the Coalition’s offices to enroll in a program.

Through the IBM KidsSmart Early Learning Grant Program, the Coalition was able to award six not-for-profit child care centers a computer housed in brightly colored, child friendly Little Tikes™ furniture. Each computer was equipped with award winning, educational software in both English and Spanish to help children ages 3-7 learn and explore concepts in math, science, and language.

Other companies that have supported the Coalition with either resources or funding are The Reading Warehouse, Kaplan Early Learning Company, and Becker’s School Supplies. Bright House Networks also gave the Coalition an airtime grant for a commercial running the entire month of February 2011 to promote the VPK program.

The Coalition is required to have a local match of 6% on state/federal funding for working poor families. In FY 2010-2011, the Coalition was able to obtain match funds from several sources. United Way of Central Florida gives the majority of the match, but funding from Publix Super Markets Charities and local Walmarts also supported this effort.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INITIATIVES

According to the Child Care Development Funds plan, the Coalition must inspect any informal family child care home or religious-exempt child care facility. These sites are generally inspected before signing a contract with the Coalition and one other time during the year. In addition, these sites may also be inspected again at anytime throughout the year as deemed necessary by the Coalition. As of June 30, 2011, there were approximately 36 sites that required inspections.

BEST PRACTICES

In 2010-2011, the Enhancements Committee continued to support Quality Counts, the Polk County Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). In its fourth year, the QRIS program continued with 44 participating child care facilities (as of June 30, 2011). The focus for the year was on infants and toddlers and helping providers to improve the quality of their infant/toddler classrooms. The Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) was introduced to providers for the first time, and all sites participating in the program received related books and information. A formal training on the ITERS tool, followed by training on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) tool, was presented by Matt Moore from the Office of Early Learning in September 2010, and all participating Quality Counts QRIS sites were invited to attend. In addition to child care center teachers and directors, staff members from surrounding coalitions, as well as other local community agencies participated in this event.

The Environment Rating Scales (ITERS and ECERS) are used as the program assessment tools at all provider sites participating in the Quality Counts QRIS. Quality Specialists from the Coalition offer training and technical assistance related to these assessment tools throughout the year at each participating site. At different times, contracted Program Assessors make unannounced visits to these sites to conduct assessments, and then once the assessments are

complete, Quality Specialists deliver results and create a “Plan of Action” based on the results. The on-going goal of the Quality Team is to provide assistance and training to develop and maintain quality learning environments for the children of Polk County.

Providers participating in the Quality Counts QRIS received incentive packages directly related to improving areas in the QRIS, and more specifically this year, improving their infant/toddler care. Providers were able to choose from one of two packages which directly related to areas of improvement needed, based on initial ITERS scores for all providers for the year.

The Coalition believes strongly in getting books out to children and families to have in their homes. Almost 17,000 books were given in FY 2010-2011 to families through events and at the Coalition offices. Events included activities with Family Fundamentals, Exploration V, Inner Act Alliance, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, and the Children’s Movement of Florida. Books were also taken several times during the year to provider sites contracted with the Coalition.

SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY AND RESOURCE & REFERRAL

A single point of entry is used for all Coalition services. This also includes a Unified Wait List. The wait list began with 1,436 children July 1, 2010, but with the increased need for services and loss of stimulus funds ended the year on June 30, 2011, with 3,019 children.

Child Care Resource and Referral services are provided to parents. These services include helping parents find quality child care that best suits their family’s needs. A database of child care providers is kept to supply families with unbiased, computer generated referrals.

Summary

Fiscal Year 2010-2011 was a year that kept the Coalition “on its toes” with the transition to have all services performed completely in house, making sure all American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds were expended timely, maximizing funding to enroll as many School Readiness children as possible, administering an expanded VPK program, and opening new offices for improved customer service.

An infrastructure is being developed that will support the customer service and accountability that the Coalition Board has always wanted. The Coalition now has over 50 employees with three full-service offices in Lakeland, Winter Haven, and Bartow, and one part-time office in Lake Wales. In the last quarter of the fiscal year, all client services and provider payment services were brought in house. The successful absorption of these services and payment to providers was the cornerstone of the transition. During that same period, services were expanded in the Winter Haven area. The Coalition office was relocated and staff was increased to meet the needs of the community and our clients.

As we continue to develop a customer service driven infrastructure and continue to be sensitive to the demands of our programs, an internal needs assessment will continue to identify training opportunities for staff and the proper assignments of job duties and responsibilities. At the same time, the Coalition has identified the need to update some processes and technology to maintain effectiveness and efficiencies. A new accounting program and updated technology is being implemented to improve the overall operations of the Coalition. The Coalition redesigned their website to better assist child care providers and families find the services they need. With the redesign, the use of the website went up dramatically with an average of 3,286 hits daily and 99,926 hits monthly.

In these difficult economic times, the Coalition has tried to provide as many services as possible for families and providers. Many

providers had to close their sites due to parents losing their jobs and not needing child care and their ability to sustain their business. Additional grants were secured to help with special projects, distribution of books, and to serve more children.

The Quality Counts Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) is now an established program for the Coalition. Research shows that a high quality childcare site can have a tremendous impact in a child’s young life and their school success. The QRIS helps providers improve the quality in their sites and also gives a parent an easy way using a star rating to identify how well a child care site is performing. The Coalition continues to work with other coalitions across the state to have consistency in this quality rating system.

The Coalition looks forward to increasing the number of providers in the QRIS, continued improvement of services, and expansion of employee resources to better serve the needs of our community.



Board of Directors 2010-2011

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Vice Chair
Howard Kay

Secretary
Barbara Erickson

Gubernatorial Appointees
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Department of Children & Families	Liesta Sykes, designee
District Superintendent of Schools	Matti Friedt, designee
Workforce Development, Executive Director.	Stacy Campbell-Domineck
County Health Department Director	Michele Ford, designee
Head Start Director	Sylvia Holmes
President of Polk State College.	Karen Greeson, designee
Board of County Commissioners	L. Gay Ratcliff, appointee
Private Provider Representative	Diane DeSena
Faith-Based Provider Representative	Vacant
Representative for Children w/ Disabilities	Paula Sullivan

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Retired	Malcolm Scott
Lanier Upshaw, Inc.	Bill Dorman
Jewels by Park Lane	Barbara Erickson
Clark, Campbell, Mawhinney & Lancaster	Sam Houghton
Retired	Deming Cowles
Lilly, O'Toole, and Brown.	Howard Kay
SBI (Staff Builders)	Edith Tiencken
Wachovia Bank	Katrina Lunsford



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