

## Florida's Early Learning System

The Office of Early Learning serves as the lead in administering and supporting early learning and child care programs in Florida.

As the entity that oversees an approximate \$1 billion budget, the Office administers the state's early learning programs through grant awards for services with **31 local early learning coalitions** and oversees contracts with other organizations for the delivery of additional services and activities. Within state parameters set by the Office, coalitions are responsible for identifying local needs and applying appropriate solutions as local entities, the coalitions have discretion in their day-to-day operations. The federal government and state establishes guidelines, but it is the local coalitions (quasi-governmental community agencies incorporated as private, not-for-profit organizations) that **must develop and implement localized solutions**. Allowing local citizens to make the best decisions for the needs and priorities of local communities enables the coalitions to work more efficiently and maximize relationships with community partners **which results in the infusion of approximately \$22 million of match funding for the School Readiness program**. The coalitions work to develop quality initiatives based on a local needs assessment as part of the coalition plan. This allows coalitions to measure the level of achievement and impact their services have on their communities. Such quality initiatives have lead to **positive program outcomes for children**.

The following early learning programs are the responsibility of the Office:

### **Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)**

Established by Section 1002.77, F.S., the purpose of the advisory council is to submit recommendations on the early learning policy of the state to the Governor's office through the Office of Early Learning, The members of the council are made up of the chair that is appointed and serves at the pleasure of the Governor, the chair of each early learning coalition, a member who serves at the pleasure of the President of the Senate, and a member who serves at the pleasure of the Speaker of the House. This council is representative of the strength of public private partnerships that leverage the **unique business perspectives to maximize funds from the state, and to ensure that our youngest children are prepared to enter school**.

### **School Readiness**

The School Readiness program provides financial resources to pay for quality child care for eligible families so that parents can work or prepare for work. The program helps pay for full-day, year-round early learning and child care for children ages birth to five and after school care for

older children. These services help families to become **financially self-sufficient** and prepare children for success in life by providing **developmentally appropriate educational experiences** (s. 411.01, F.S.).

### **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)**

The CCR&R program is the **front door for all families** in Florida seeking information to help them find **affordable, quality child care** and other community resources. Florida's Child Care Resource and Referral Network is dedicated to helping families find answers to their child care needs. This free service helps all parents identify quality child care and early education programs, and locate child care providers and other resources. The network also offers technical assistance to child care providers to improve the quality, availability, and affordability of the services they offer (s. 411.0101, F.S.).

### **Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK)**

In response to the constitutional mandate voted on by Florida's citizens, Florida has provided a free, high quality prekindergarten program for all four year old children since 2005. This program was designed to **prepare them for kindergarten** and build the foundation for their educational success. The Office is responsible for the administration of the operational requirements of the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education program at the state level and is responsible for adopting procedures for the VPK program for early learning coalitions and school districts (s. 1002.51-1002.79, F.S.).

## **Early Learning System Facts**

- The **School Readiness** program serves approximately **240,000** children annually in **11,600** provider settings allowing families to work.
- The **Child Care Resource and Referral Network** receives nearly **400,000** inquiries annually that assist parents in locating high quality child care settings.
- The **Voluntary Prekindergarten Education** program served **71.3%** of Florida's 4- year-olds last year making it the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest prekindergarten program in the nation.

## ***Florida's Office of Early Learning***

- Since the VPK program started there has been **a 46% increase in the number of providers offering services.**
- **73% of all VPK providers also provide School Readiness services.**
- To date **74% of 4-year-olds in School Readiness are also currently enrolled in the VPK program.**
- Child care businesses in Florida make significant contributions to local economies: **\$1.1 billion in wages and \$1.8 billion for industries that support the child care industry.**

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