

# BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION for our FUTURE



2012-2013  
Annual Report





# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Reflecting upon this past year, the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County takes pride in the advances that have been made toward improving the quality and effectiveness of early education and care throughout our community. However, our success is not our own, and we thank each and every partner who has joined with us in our mission to serve the children of Polk County as well as advocate for the children of the great State of Florida.

After many years of faithful service to children and families, the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County, along with coalitions from other counties across the state, dedicated themselves to the education of government officials regarding the dire need of quality early education in the lives of our children. Particular emphasis was placed on how an investment in the earliest stages of a child's developmental years can yield a far greater reward in the future as these children become better prepared to succeed in school and go on to be the productive, self-sufficient, and positive citizens of the next generation. In turn, educating the leaders of our State paved the way for the Early Education House Bill 7165, which serves to streamline education efforts and support the work that has been ongoing since the inception of the coalitions in 1999. With this bill being signed into law in July of 2013, the collaborative efforts have made a significant impact. However, this successful effort did not cause us to lose sight of what we are most passionate about, the children of Polk County.

As it always has been, our focus remains the education of our children from birth to age five preparing them to be adequately equipped mentally, physically, and socially for a successful and positive path toward education. Additionally, we have seen how a solid foundation established through quality early education and care provides a child with the tools needed to become economically and socially responsible citizens as adults. We also serve school age children up to age 13 by supporting and reinforcing what they learn in school. These children are generally low income and at risk of school failure, and the reinforcement which the Coalition provides often leads to retention and subsequent future success.

While the Coalition has had its share of challenges throughout the year, we are proud to say that we have overcome every obstacle allowing for the families most in need to continue receiving the support they need to become financially self-reliant. We have received numerous letters and emails from families throughout our community whose lives have been impacted in an incredibly positive way, and we want to see that impact grow in the years to come as the work we do today for the families in need creates the educated, confident, and self-sufficient community of tomorrow.

Speaking on behalf of the Board members, we realize the necessity of creating a safe, nurturing, and learning environment in which our children can best develop the essential skills that their early years of life entail. To this end, it is our goal as a Coalition to further our efforts and continue to invest in the single greatest asset we have, the children and families of Polk County.

James H. Rhodes, II, Board Chair



## VISION statement

The Coalition's vision is to assure that all children enter school healthy, ready, and eager for lifelong 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

Originally established in 1999, by Florida Statute 411.01, The Polk County School Readiness Coalition, Inc. doing business as The Early Learning Coalition of Polk County is recognized as a leader in the community with early education and care initiatives serving as many as 9,000 children a month in the programs funded by federal, state, and local dollars. In 2005, the Voluntary PreKindergarten Program (VPK) was added to the Coalition's responsibilities under Florida Statute 1002.51. The Coalition has built upon this responsibility providing VPK services to 4,849 children across the county.

Throughout the last few years, the Coalition, along with its many partners across the state, has been educating the local delegates on the importance of high quality early education and care and its significantly positive outcomes. This fiscal year has brought great progress toward the goal of unifying state efforts to better serve the children and families with the most need. In July of 2013, the new education bill was signed into law bringing with it numerous changes to the programs that are offered by the Coalition, all designed to streamline services and more efficiently assist the families and children across the state and right here in Polk County.

In recent years the number of children and families needing services has increased due to hard economic times, yet even with this increase, the Coalition has made considerable progress in minimizing the number of children who are on the wait list and continue to serve those in need. While the road to economic stability is long, the Coalition knows that empowering children today with the

chance to develop the skills they need to become educated adults will greatly affect the economy of the future. Therefore, the Coalition continues to develop its programs to better serve these children.

The Coalition's programs have been refined over time by assisting providers to improve the quality of their sites and make efforts to keep children safe. Most providers understand the accountability the Board requires, and they know that the Coalition is available with Quality Specialists who are in the field to help them raise the quality of their sites and programs using technical assistance and training with a wide range of early education and care techniques and teaching.

Polk County's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), Quality Counts, has grown to 69 child care centers participating during the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The Coalition has also increased marketing to promote quality programs and educate the community on the benefits of the Quality Counts Program. Each year providers are anxious to achieve their star rating so that they can share that achievement with their staff and the children's parents.

As the Coalition continues to serve the children and families of Polk County, the next generation is given the opportunity to develop the skills they will need to be successful in their future. This is the aspiration which has motivated the Coalition since its inception because when children are successful, everyone wins.

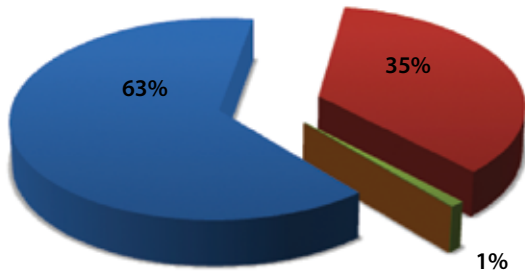


# OVERVIEW



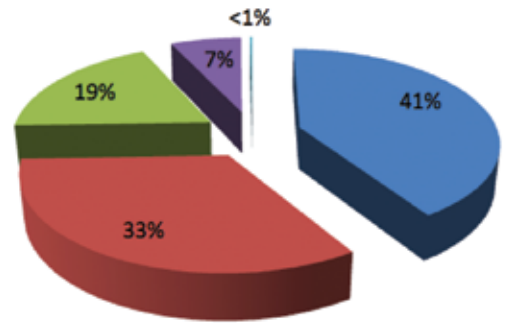
Throughout the year a total of 12,632 children were served in either a School Readiness or a Voluntary PreKindergarten Program. This number includes 921 children who were receiving both the School Readiness and VPK programs during the year.

## FY 2012-2013 Income



- SR - \$18,421,224 - 63%
- VPK - \$10,451,885 - 35%
- United Way - \$290,413 - 1%
- Other - \$43,586 - <1%
- CCEP - \$96,867 - <1%
- VPK OAMI - \$30,795 - <1%

## FY 2012-2013 Percentages Paid by Funding



- VPK - 41%
- Working Poor - 33%
- TANF/TCC - 19%
- At Risk - 7%
- CCPP - <1%

# VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK)

During the fiscal year 2012-2013, the VPK program had a total of 150 private and faith-based providers as well as 37 public school sites and 23 Head Start sites. The number of providers continues to increase every year; therefore, the Coalition is able to serve more children. The fiscal year 2012-2013 saw an increase in children enrolled for the 540 hour school year program (August-June) for a total of 4,624 children being served. The 2012-2013 summer program (May-August) actually saw a decrease in children from the previous year for a total of 225 children served. There were 21 private providers and five public school sites offering the 300 hour summer program. The 540 hour school year program continues to be the program of choice for most families.

Each VPK program, regardless of whether it is a school year or summer program, private or public site, is charged with preparing children for kindergarten. Throughout the year, children are taught according to the performance standards which are presented to providers in a training entitled Standards for Four Year Olds. The standards are based upon five domains which are: (1) Physical Development, (2) Social and Emotional Development, (3) Approaches to Learning, (4) Language, Communication, and Emergent Literacy, and (5) Cognitive Development and General Knowledge.

Beginning in the 2012-2013 program year, providers were mandated to screen each VPK child using the VPK Assessment Tool Kit. Although this tool kit had been published in 2010, this was the first year that all providers were required to use the assessment and post the data on the Bright Beginnings website. The assessment tool covers Print Knowledge, Phonological Awareness, Mathematics, and Oral Language/Vocabulary. This assessment tool enabled each provider to acquire a sense of how each child was progressing towards the goal of being "ready for kindergarten". This screening has three time periods, AP1, AP2, and AP3 which will help to provide a snapshot of each child's growth. The results of each screening aids the VPK

instructor in writing lesson plans to guide instruction in areas which may need more emphasis as evidenced by the assessment tool.

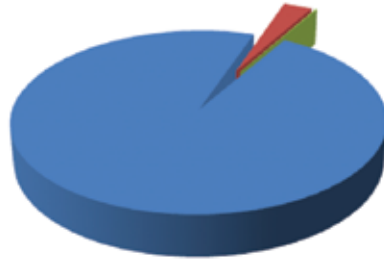
Accountability for the VPK program is measured through the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) screening tool. This tool is administered to kindergarten students within the first 30 days of school. The score that each student receives reflects directly upon the VPK program the child attended. VPK providers must have at least 70% of their children score ready for kindergarten on both measures of FLKRS. The two measures of the FLKRS are The Early Childhood Observation System (ECHOS) and the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR). If a provider scores less than 70%, they are deemed to be a Provider on Probation (POP). In order for a child's score to be counted in the readiness rate, they must have been screened on both measures and have attended 70% of their VPK program. Additionally, a program is only given a rate if the provider had at least four children attend for 70% of the program.

According to the readiness rate for 2011-2012, which was released in early 2013, Polk had 46 programs that were low performing or Providers on Probation (POP's). Of these, 40 were school year programs, and six were summer programs. Eight of these programs closed and did not offer VPK again. Three other programs were POP's for three consecutive years. Legislation now requires a third year low performing provider to file for and be granted a Good Cause Exemption prior to offering another VPK program. None of the three received a Good Cause Exemption from the state and may not offer another VPK program for five years. In the future, the data derived from the VPK Assessment Tool Kit will be instrumental for providers filing for a Good Cause Exemption. The remaining 35 programs had to complete an improvement plan which consisted of either purchasing a Department of Education (DOE) approved curriculum or implementing a DOE approved staff development plan. This plan/curriculum choice is monitored throughout the year for compliance by VPK staff.



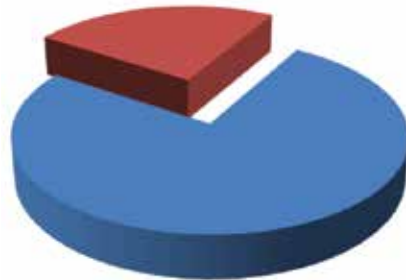
## VPK Expenses

- Direct Services- 97%
- Administrative – 3%
- Outreach & Awareness – <1%



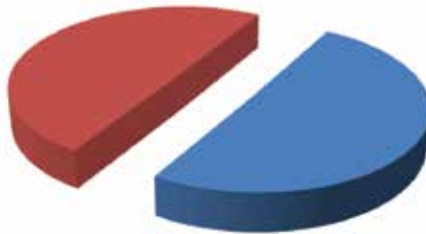
## VPK by Ethnicity

- Non-Hispanic – 3,682 – 76%
- Hispanic – 1,167 – 24%



## VPK by Gender

- Male – 2,444 – 50%
- Female – 2,405 – 50%



## VPK by Race

- White – 3,192 – 66%
- Black – 1,293 – 27%
- Indian/Alaskan – 146 – 3%
- Other – 111 – 2%
- Asian – 107 – 2%



## SCHOOL READINESS

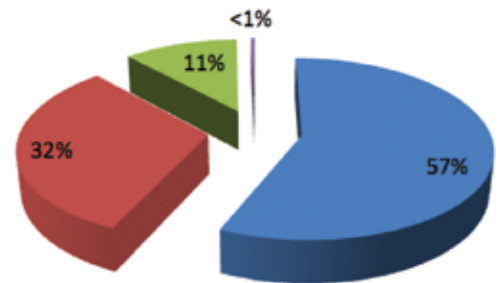
The School Readiness program provides early care and education services to low income families who cannot afford the high cost of reliable, high quality child care. Coalition staff members are available at three office locations throughout the county to provide easy access for eligible families needing financial assistance for School Readiness services. In 2012-2013, the Coalition served 7,783 children from birth to age 12.

Priority for the School Readiness program is given to parents that are receiving temporary cash assistance and to children that are determined to be at-risk of abuse or neglect. The remaining funds are used to serve parents whose income is up to 150% of the federal poverty level working a minimum of 20 hours per week or are a full-time student. The Coalition continued to enroll children from the wait list for over 75% of the year scheduling 4,431 appointments and enrolling 1,235 children. Financial assistance is essential for many families to be self-sufficient while knowing that their children are being cared for in a high quality educational program.

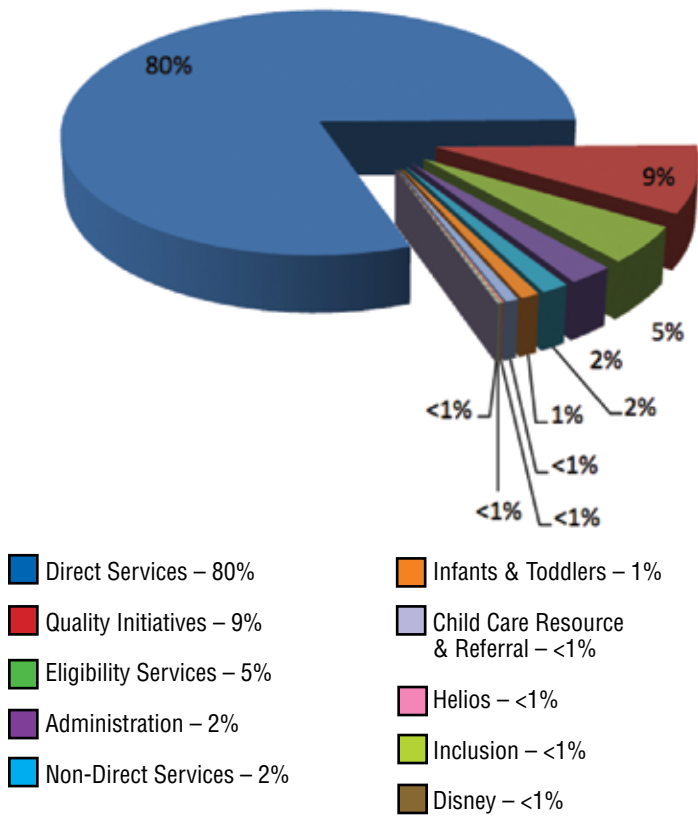
Enrolling from the wait list has been challenging as family circumstances often change from the time the parent calls for the assistance and is placed on the wait list until the time the funds are available to enroll. As Polk County continues to grow, the need for child care assistance is increasing. On June 30, 2012, there were 2,775 children on the wait list. Although the Coalition enrolled for most of the 2012-2013 year, as of June 30, 2013, the wait list still has 2,438 children due to the increasing need for child care.

## School Readiness Percentages Paid by Category

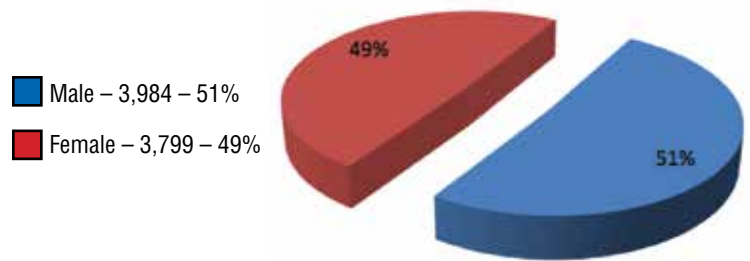
- Working Poor – 57%
- TANF/TCC – 32%
- At Risk – 11%
- CCPP – <1%



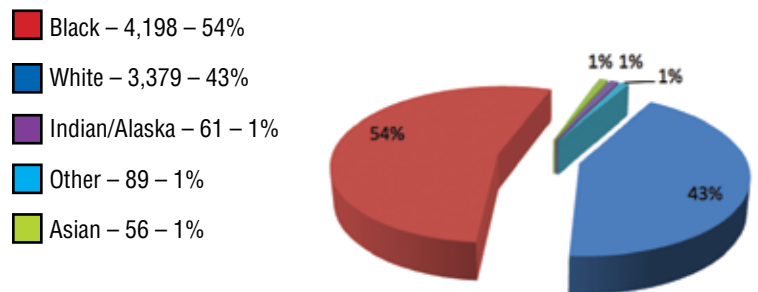
## School Readiness Expenses



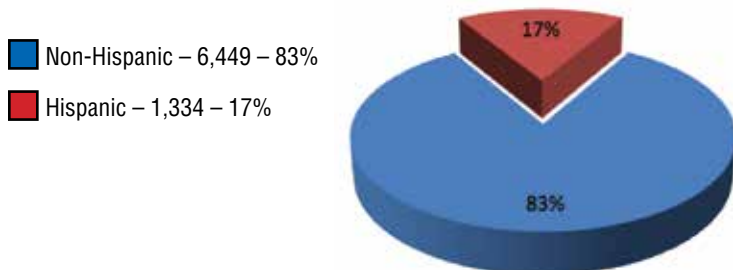
## School Readiness by Gender



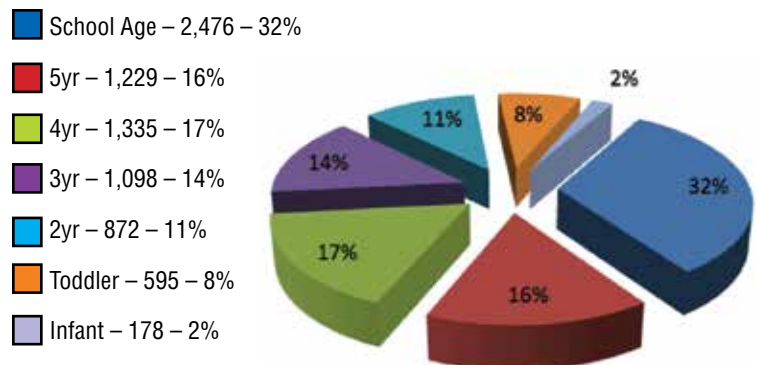
## School Readiness by Race



## School Readiness by Ethnicity



## School Readiness by Age



## QUALITY INITIATIVES

### Training And Technical Assistance

With a continued focus on improving the quality of child care throughout Polk County, Quality Specialists from the Coalition made over 2,900 technical assistance visits at the 270 (as of June 30, 2013) contracted child care centers and family child care homes serving children ages birth to five throughout the course of the 2012-2013 year. 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 time frames for completing goals in targeted areas of the program. Technical assistance offered was based on the individual needs of each provider, and topics included, but were not limited to: curriculum, health and safety, pre/

post assessment, room arrangement, appropriate infant/toddler care, and language/literacy.

Coalition staff conducted a variety of trainings throughout the 2012-2013 fiscal year. Over 670 early childhood practitioners were trained and over 150 in-service training hours were awarded on topics such as developmentally appropriate practices, professionalism, language and interactions, and program assessment (CLASS: Making the Most of Classroom Interactions and the Environment Rating Scales).

During the 2012-2013 year, Coalition staff also presented trainings on a variety of inclusion-related topics, such as overview trainings related to Positive Behavior Supports





(PBS Model), child screening (ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE), Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards, character development, and more. Approximately 950 practitioners attended these specific trainings throughout the year.

Coalition efforts continue to support family child care homes as the 21st Annual Florida Family Child Care Home Association's Conference took place from June 26-30, 2013. In addition to several Coalition staff having the opportunity to attend, the Coalition was fortunate to be able to provide scholarships to six local family child care home providers for the conference as well. A Quality Specialist from the Coalition also had the opportunity to present a session entitled, "Family Child Care and Profile Planner -- Taking Lesson Planning to the Next Level." This session, which focused on incorporating lesson plans into the family child care home by using a web based system, was very well attended and positive feedback was received from participants.

Additionally, the 2012 Polk Collaborative Partners Conference, entitled "Putting the Pieces Together," took place on September 29, 2012. The Coalition partnered with the Campus Kid Care Coalition of Polk County, Polk State College, Polk County Schools Preschool Programs, United Way/Success by Six, and Kaplan Early Learning to sponsor the event. A wide variety of workshop presentations were offered to nearly 200 attendees, including two presentations by Coalition staff. These presentations included "Mind in the Making," which focuses on infant/toddler brain development, and "Positive Behavior Support" which teaches strategies for dealing with difficult behaviors.

## Health & Safety

As part of the 2012-2013 School Readiness Provider Agreement, prior to signing a contract for School Readiness services, all providers who were not licensed by the Florida Department

of Children and Families agreed to a Health and Safety Inspection conducted by Coalition staff. There were 53 Health and Safety Inspections conducted during the 2012-2013 fiscal year, and re-inspections were conducted on an as needed basis.

The Polk County Health Department in collaboration with the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County provided vision and hearing screening services to over 3,500 three and four year old children at Coalition funded sites during the year. The vision and hearing screening program specifically targets Coalition funded children; however, vision and hearing screenings are performed on any age eligible child in a facility that is visited. The positive impact of this service has been well received by the parents and children of Coalition funded sites. Additional referrals were made for 178 children with hearing concerns and 97 children with vision concerns. In addition, a health related educational component was presented to children on health and safety. Topics such as water and seatbelt safety and the importance of hand washing were provided in age appropriate presentations. The screening team also provided over 108 health education presentations to the children on topics such as water safety, hand washing and car safety. Some of the CD presentations and/or storybooks shared with the children during these presentations were "Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim", "Those Mean Nasty Dirty Downright Disgusting but...Invisible Germs" and "Bucklebear". The Health Department reported several success stories related to the services provided. Several children who failed the hearing screening were referred for further follow up. The follow up indicated that the children needed PE tubes and/or tonsils/adenoids removed. Also, as a result of the vision screening service, a total of 29 children were prescribed eye glasses to correct their vision. This is just another example of a partnership that the Coalition has created in its mission and vision of preparing all children so that they enter school healthy, ready and eager to learn.

## Special Programs & Measurable Outcomes

In the fall of 2012, the Enhancements Committee approved a quality enhancement program, ProFile Planner, which would primarily support family child care providers with lesson planning. Profile Planner is a web based program that gives providers the ability to search and choose from over 10,000 developmentally appropriate activities to add to their daily lesson plans, connect with parents, add state standards, and journal about the children in their programs. While using this tool, family child care providers also have the ability to create their own activities and add them to their plans. A total of 65 family childcare homes committed to participating in the program, with the understanding that assigned Quality Specialists from the Coalition would be able to connect and view their lesson plan progress in the system. The program sparked the interest of several center-based programs throughout the county, and in May of 2013, the Coalition added seven centers to the Profile Planner program. The Coalition has received positive feedback from participating providers including comments like:

- I really like it, it's awesome! – Lewis Family Child Care Home (Lakeland, FL)
- I would encourage providers to use it because it's a lot of help. - Dempsey Family Child Care Home (Lakeland, FL)
- Profile Planner has provided me with lesson plans that have everything needed to complete each daily activity. - Boatwright Family Child Care Home (Lakeland, FL)

This year the Coalition also continued with the Nemours BrightStart! Program, which is an early literacy program that helps to identify and teach preschool aged children at risk for reading failure. Designed with the help of educators and early learning specialists, Nemours BrightStart! (NBS!) offers educators and child care professionals practical, science-based tools and training to address the real-life challenges of building reading readiness skills in young children. The Nemours BrightStart! Program has proven highly effective in building alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness skills that support future reading success. The Coalition initiated the use of the Nemours BrightStart! Curriculum with five private provider sites in 2011-2012. Due to the overwhelming success of the program, the Coalition was able to add 23 additional providers (for a total of 27 participants) during the 2012-2013 year. Data for the 2012-2013 was analyzed by Nemours, and outcomes showed that out of 441 children initially screened, 146 children at 27 centers in Polk County were identified as being at-risk for reading failure. These children received intensive educational instruction (20 lessons included in NBS!) and made substantial gains in their reading readiness skills over the course of the year. Based on these outcomes, and the supporting research of the program, the Coalition plans to double the amount of providers participating in the program in the coming year. Using the *Get Ready to Read - Revised (GRTR-R)*, the following outcomes were achieved:

Following NBS! instruction, the average GRTR-R raw score of children increased by 9.42 points or 99%. The average GRTR-R standard score increased by 20.80 points or 26%. By spring testing, the average standard score of children who received NBS! instruction went from 79.65, indicative of reading readiness skills in the at-risk range, to an average score of 100.45, indicative of reading readiness skills in the average range, or at a performance level commensurate with children the same age.

These results would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of the United Way Master Teacher Program working hand-in-hand with the Coalition to provide training, technical assistance, and related supports to providers participating in the NBS! Program. Based on this partnership and these outcomes, along with the supporting research of the program, the Coalition plans to double the amount of provider participating in the program in the coming year.

*Teaching Strategies GOLD®*, a comprehensive child assessment system, was piloted by the Coalition in 2012-2013. This ongoing, observational assessment is based on 38 objectives that measure a child's growth and development. These research-based objectives are predictors of school success, and they are aligned with the *Common Core State Standards*, state early learning guidelines, and the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework*. The online system includes user-friendly features to create child portfolios, evaluate children's level of progress, and generate state-of-the-art reports. Twenty-two QRIS providers, with a three star or higher rating, participated in the program in 2012-2013, assessing 450 children from birth to age five. Child outcomes based on this system are shared with the state, upon request, and are also shared locally with United Way in order to meet pre/post child outcome requirements.

## Community Programs & Best Practices

The Coalition was the recipient of Disney's "Helping Kids Shine" grant in fiscal year 2012-2013 which spotlighted 12 centers with 23 total classrooms and approximately 300 children during the 2012-2013 year. The goal of this program is to build communication between teacher/child and child/parent. Providers were introduced to the program through an initial training called "Building Communication." This training stressed the importance of enhanced communication and focuses on how this communication supports later reading and writing success, builds conversational range, helps children learn to solve problems, teaches valuable language skills, builds vocabulary, and helps set the stage for success later in life. Parents received a monthly newsletter and calendar, at-home activities, and books to read with their child(ren). They were also given a Family Guide, to give them ideas for "conversation starters." A designated Quality Specialist from the Coalition provided on-site coaching, mentoring, and training, all focused on communication. Providers also received monthly resources as well as in-service training hours. In addition, individual classroom teachers were





given resources during site visits to help spark additional ideas related to activities, props, and/or materials which would help build language and communication in the classroom.

In 2012-2013, the Coalition continued its collaborative partnership with the Citrus Center Kiwanis in the Power of Words program, which began in the summer of 2011. This past fiscal year, Citrus Center Kiwanis members logged 42 hours reading to Polk County's youngest readers. Five of our provider sites have been adopted by individual Kiwanis members, meaning that the same Kiwanis member has taken on the responsibility of reading at this adopted site at least one time per month. More than 650 children from two to four years old have been included in these readings and received a copy of the book to take home and share with their families; furthermore, a copy of the book was left in the children's classroom for future use.

In April of 2013, Children's Week was officially celebrated in Tallahassee and across the state. As part of the local celebration, child care providers submitted artwork made by the children that displayed the children's handprints which were displayed at the Board of County Commissioners meeting in Bartow when the Commission made a proclamation celebrating Children's Day right here in Polk County. Additional proclamations were made by the City of Lakeland, Winter Haven, and Lake Wales. The artwork was then sent to Tallahassee for the official "Hanging of the Hands" at the Capitol Rotunda.

Developmental screenings continued to be provided to all School Readiness children throughout the 2012-2013 year. All providers holding a School Readiness Agreement with

the Coalition received training on the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, 3rd Edition (ASQ:3), as well as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Social/Emotional Edition (ASQ:SE) throughout the year. During the trainings, each provider received an ASQ:3 and ASQ:SE kit, provided by Florida's Office of Early Learning. Initial screenings were completed by parents at the time of enrollment into the School Readiness Program, and follow-up screenings were completed by providers (or Coalition staff) on an as-needed basis. In preparation for the changes reflected in HB7165, which would require all School Readiness children ages birth to five to be screened on an annual basis as of July 1, 2013, the Coalition hired a second Screening Specialist in the spring of 2013 to assist with this task.

This year the Coalition also joined Facebook in an effort to reach out to our service population in a way that was most relevant, and for the providers and partners, a newsletter with pertinent updates is electronically delivered monthly to keep everyone abreast of the news and events that occur both locally and around the state. However, the marketing and outreach did not stop there as the Coalition continued to raise awareness in the community through attending various events for children and families, posting information on billboards and bus benches throughout the county, and visiting local venues attended by families to distribute flyers and other information about the services that are offered.



## GRANTS

The Coalition greatly appreciates the organizations that have partnered in the mission to support the success of children. These collaborative efforts are invaluable in providing the funds needed to serve our population in need. One of the program grants which was received in 2012-2013 was Disney's "Helping Kids Shine," which continued to support the programs from the year before.

Additionally, funds are always needed for the mandated 6% match on the federal dollars for working poor families. The United Way of Central Florida has been, and continues to be, the main contributor for these funds. The Coalition also received additional grants for the match from local Wal-Mart's in Lakeland and Winter Haven, The Teacher's Exchange, and individual donors.

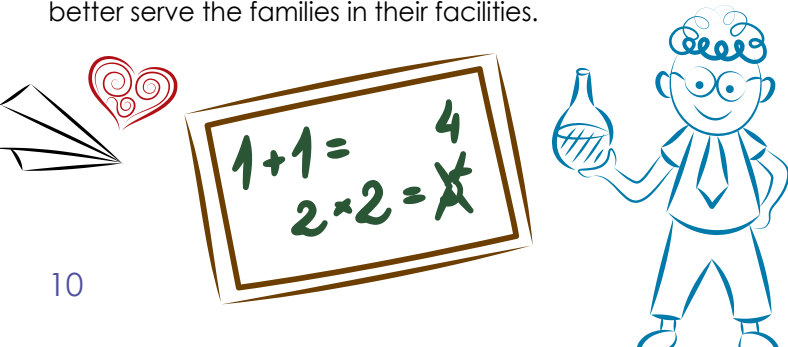
The Polk County Board of County Commissioners has been a supporter of the Coalition in the Child Care Executive Partnership program for many years and they continue to grant funds to see this program grow. These funds provide services for families who may not otherwise be eligible for services, but are still in need of help with their children in order to continue to work.

Other donations received throughout the year came from Kaplan Early Learning, Lakeshore Learning, Disney, Citrus Center Kiwanis Club, Downtown Kiwanis Club, First Book, Winn Dixie, and Nemours.

## SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY AND CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL

Child Care Resource and Referral is designed to provide parents with a wealth of information about choosing quality child care as well as information on other services in the community. All families, regardless of their income, are eligible to contact the agency by phone, email, walk-in, or appointment. Parent Counselors will help parents become educated consumers, and work with them to make informed child care choices. This service also assists providers in listing their programs in a state-wide database.

This year the Coalition was able to assist approximately 5,291 families with CCR&R services. Thirty-four new providers were given information related to the School Readiness Program, and an additional 10 providers were given packets which included community resource information to help them better serve the families in their facilities.



## FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Coalition continues to look for opportunities that allow for operations to be more efficient and help more children in our community. These continuous improvements are evident in the results from the 2012-2013 fiscal year. With a School Readiness budget of \$18.5 million, the Coalition was able to allocate \$15.2 million of that budget towards direct services. This is an increase of more than \$400,000 over last year and equates to 80% of the budget going directly to the children enrolled in the School Readiness Program when the state only mandates that 72% of the budget be allocated to direct services. The Coalition also reduced the amount spent on administrative costs to 2% of the budget compared to 3% last year. This has been an overall effort from everyone at the Coalition and leaves the administrative costs significantly lower than the 5% allowed by the state for the School Readiness grant.

The Coalition made a significant impact in the community with its Voluntary PreKindergarten Program. The Coalition expended 97% of the \$10.5 million VPK budget on direct services, which is also an improvement over last year. Additionally, there was continued investment in the VPK Outreach and Awareness Monitoring Initiative which is being supported with a grant from Florida's Office of Early Learning.

The Child Care Executive Partnership (CCEP), which allows the Coalition to increase the funds received by the state for the School Readiness grant, continues to grow. The Coalition receives a dollar-for-dollar match from the state for every dollar that the Partnership generates. This program benefits providers and their employees with children in the program that might not be otherwise eligible for School Readiness benefits. This program generated an additional \$97,000 for direct services to the children of Polk County.



# SUMMARY

This past year was full of challenges for the Coalition, the greatest of which was the education of state officials on the importance of quality early education in the life of a child and its impact on the community and society as a whole. With the help of partners and other coalitions across the state, the proposed changes to early education were signed into law in July of 2013, and with them came a myriad of strategic modifications to better the education of young children in Florida. As the Coalition works to refine its operations to gain the most efficient and compliant delivery of services based on the new education law, the effects are already beginning to show. Also, elements of customer services have been analyzed and advantageously revised to positively transform the way that the Coalition assists clients, and the process has received incredibly positive feedback.

In addition to the challenges for this past year, the Coalition continued to provide numerous programs to enhance children's development and educate parents to support what their children learn. This was accomplished through additional grant funds and donations from partners who believe in the importance of preparing children for school while their parents can work or go to school to support the family and better themselves creating self-sufficiency. These grant funds and gracious contributions were used to serve more children in special projects and, as always, to purchase books to improve family literacy by providing books to be read to children and taken home to encourage literacy at home as well. Also, programs like Nemours proved how much of a difference a little intervention can make in the education of a young child facing serious learning deficits as learning gaps were significantly narrowed and children were given the chance they would need to succeed. A wide variety of training sessions were also presented which helped support the providers who gave incredibly positive feedback praising the efforts that are being made. However, the Coalition's successes did not stop there as staff from all departments worked very diligently to decrease the number of children on the wait list for services effectively cutting the total number nearly in half. Furthermore, the Coalition Board of Directors continued to support the vision of the Coalition in every way and always looked to identify new methods of increasing the quality of early education and care within the programs that are offered, such as the Quality Counts program or QRIS; the purpose of which remains to help child care providers take the necessary steps to improve the quality of early education and care for their sites with the support of Coalition Quality staff.

The Early Learning Coalition of Polk County is excited about the year that lies ahead and the new partnerships that it will bring allowing the services that are offered to grow and expand to reach more of the children and families in the community that are in need. It is the Coalition's goal to make sure that children of this community enter school ready and eager to learn. Therefore, the benefits of early education will continue to be cultivated through the lives of every child given the chance to succeed as long as we keep believing in the children of Polk County, the future of our community.





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Florida Statute 411.01 mandates certain agencies must be represented on the Coalition Board.  
A minimum of 1/3 of the members of the Coalition Board must be from the business sector.



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