



**Early Learning
Coalition**
of Polk County

2013-2014 ANNUAL REPORT



LEARN EARLY . . . LEARN FOR LIFE!



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

The Coalition has made a significant impact this year in the lives of the children and families of our community, and this is a direct result of the many partnerships that have been formed and grown in this time. We are very grateful to all of those who have seen the need for high quality early education and care in our county and made the effort to do something about it. From the friends and neighbors of the Coalition to the leaders of our great county, we say thank you for the support and partnerships that carried us to this point of great success.

This year we saw a decrease in the number of children on the waitlist for services, and this is due to the generous donation of local businesses, community leaders, and concerned citizens who know that early learning matters. We applaud your action and appreciate your assistance in attaining all our goals this year. It is because of you that the children of today will have the chance to be the educated citizens of tomorrow.

As we enter a new year of service to the community, we eagerly anticipate the strengthening of our partnerships with each and every one of you, and the Coalition believes that our mission will be best served through a community of dedicated and like-minded individuals who realize the importance of preparing our children for the future.

Gilbert Rincon, Chief Executive Officer

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

As I look back on the many accomplishments of the Coalition over the last year, I am filled with pride, and I am absolutely astonished at all the successes that have been achieved. From the streamlining of services brought about by the new legislature to the ever improving quality initiatives, the Coalition has been steadily increasing its efforts to provide the best possible service to the children and families of Polk County.

I also know that much of the success and achievement that is attributed to the Coalition is in part due to its collaboration with a variety of incredible and valuable partners throughout the community who believe and support the work that Coalition staff members do every day. These partners are the driving force behind the positive change in our communities, and we thank each and every one of you for your service to the children and families of Polk County.

The Coalition's 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, and we strive to build a solid foundation established through quality early education and care to help children become economically and socially responsible citizens as adults.

Speaking on behalf of the Board members, we recognize the need for the development and sustainability of high quality early education providers that can offer 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.

William H. Dorman, 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

Mandated by Florida Statute 411.01, the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County is recognized as a leader in the community with early education and care initiatives serving an average of 9,000 children each month in the programs funded with 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 nearly 5,000 children across the county each year.

Throughout the last few years, the Coalition, along with its many partners across the state, has been educating the lawmakers, leaders, and the community on the importance of high quality early education and care and its significance in the development of a stronger more educated workforce and citizenship for the future. This fiscal year has brought great progress toward the goal of unifying 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 assist the families and children across the state and right here in Polk County. And now the legislature works to provide more unified regulations for health and safety.

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.



BOARD MEMBERS

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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.

SPONSORSHIP PARTNERS



COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS



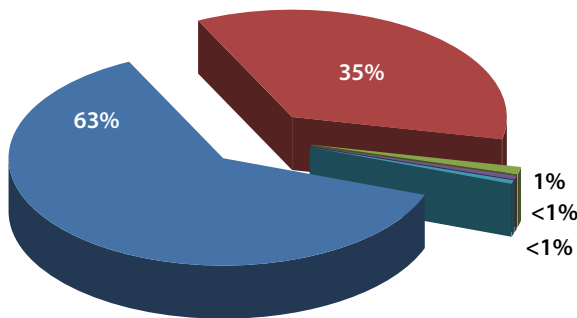
12,822 children served by ELC Polk this year



OVERVIEW

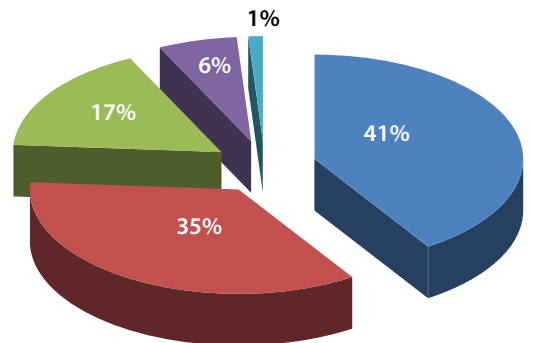
Throughout the year a total of 12,822 children were served in either a School Readiness or a Voluntary PreKindergarten Program. This number includes 886 children who were receiving both the School Readiness and VPK programs during the year.

FY 2013-2014 Income



- SR - \$18,642,333 - 63%
- VPK - \$10,712,742 - 35%
- United Way - \$336,964 - 1%
- CCEP - \$156,845 - <1%
- Private Donors - \$121,464 - <1%

FY 2013-2014 Percentages Served by Funding



- VPK - 41%
- Working Poor - 35%
- TANF/TCC - 17%
- At Risk - 6%
- CCPP - 1%

SCHOOL READINESS

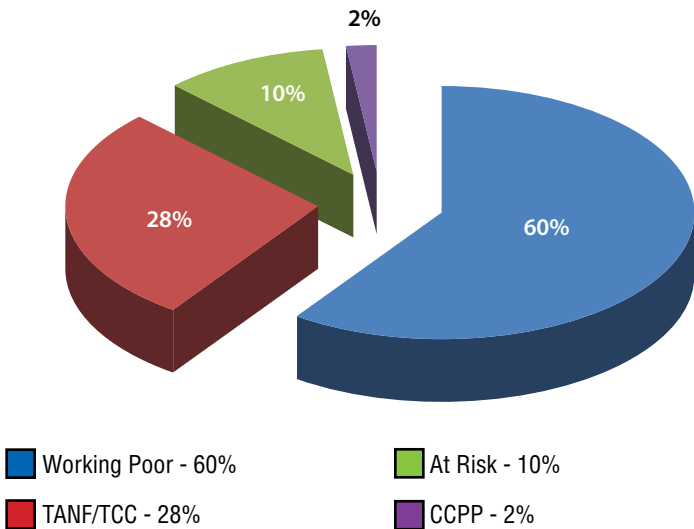
The School Readiness program provides early care and education services to low income families who cannot afford the high cost of reliable, high quality child care. Coalition staff is available at 3 locations throughout the county to provide easy access for eligible families needing financial assistance for School Readiness services. This past fiscal year 2013-2014 the Coalition served 7,858 children from birth through age 12.

7,858 children served in the School Readiness Program

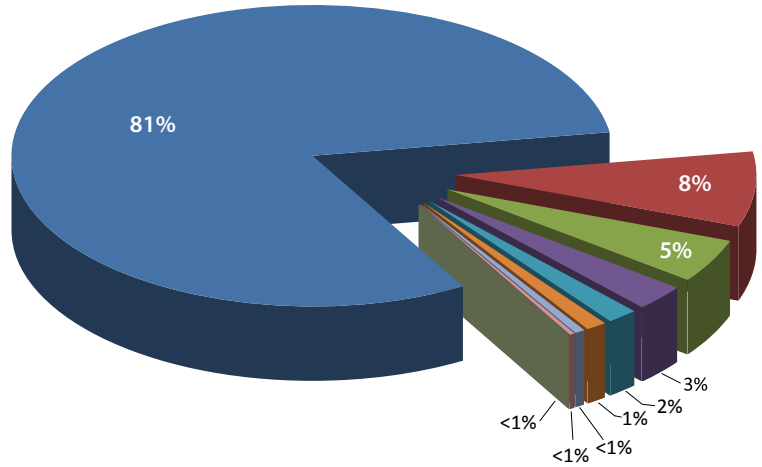
Priority for the School Readiness program is given to parents that are receiving temporary cash assistance and to children that are determined to be at-risk of abuse or neglect. The remaining funds are used to serve parents whose income is between 0-150% of the federal poverty level employed or engaged in eligible work or education activities for a combined total of at least 40 hours per week. Over this past fiscal year the Coalition continued to enroll children from its wait list over 80% of the year scheduling 4,809 appointments and enrolling 1,315 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.

However, enrolling from the wait list has been challenging as family circumstances 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, 2013, there were 2,438 children on the waitlist. Although the Coalition has enrolled most of the 2013-2014 year, as of June 30, 2014, the waitlist has 2,034 children due to the increasing need for child care.

School Readiness Percentages Paid by Category

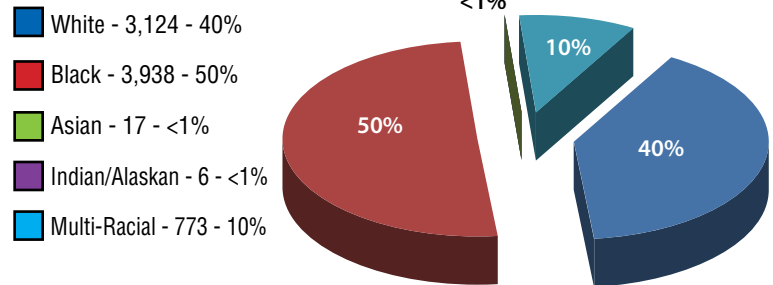


School Readiness Expenses

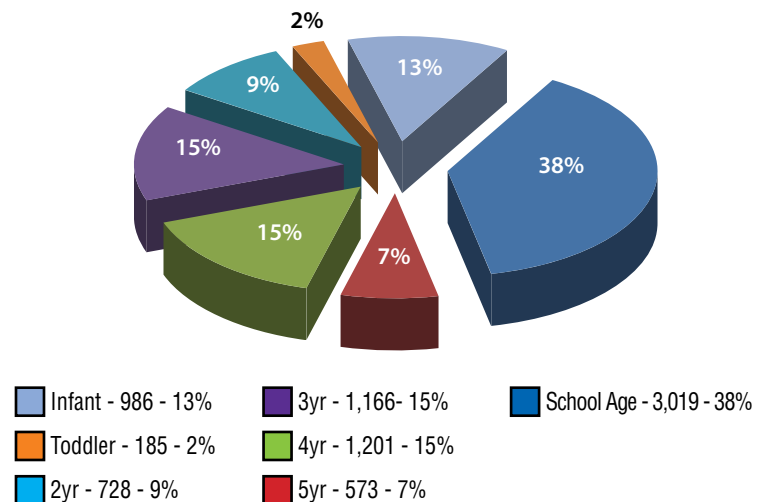


- Direct Services - 81%
- Quality Initiatives - 8%
- Eligibility Services - 5%
- Administration - 3%
- Non-Direct Services - 2%
- Infants & Toddlers - 1%
- Child Care Resource & Referral - <1%
- Inclusion - <1%
- Disney - <1%

School Readiness by Race



School Readiness by Age



VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK)

During the fiscal year 2013-2014, the VPK program served 4,964 children. There were a total of 165 private and faith based providers as well as 40 public school sites and 22 Head Start sites. The number of providers has increased steadily over the past 9 years. The FY 2013-2014 saw an increase in children enrolled for the 540 hour school year program (August-June) for a total of 4,804 children served.

The 2013-2014 summer program (May-August) continued to show a decrease in children from the previous year for a total of 163 children served. There were 13 private providers and 5 public school sites offering the 300 hour summer program.

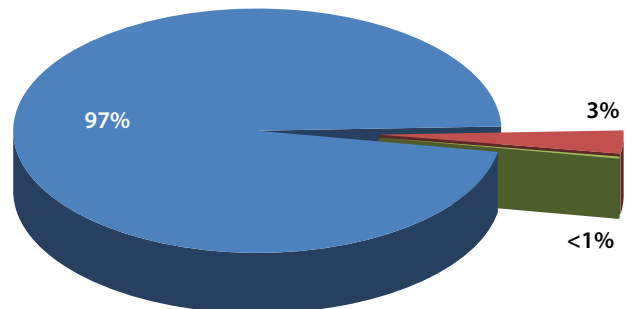
The 540 hour school year program continues to be the program of choice for most families. VPK is a high stakes program for both the providers as well as the children who attend these programs. Accountability for the VPK program is increasing. Each VPK program, regardless of whether it is a school year 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 entitled Standards for Four Year Olds. The standards are based upon 5 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.

The 2013-2014 program year was the second year of mandated VPK assessment screenings. The VPK assessment tool covers Print Knowledge, Phonological Awareness, Mathematics, and Oral Language/Vocabulary. This assessment tool enables each provider to acquire a sense of how each child is progressing towards the goal of being "ready for kindergarten." This screening has 3 assessment periods (AP1, AP2, and AP3) which 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 results of the screening. This system allows teachers to print out progress letters, complete with graphs, to indicate the progress of each child. Teachers have found this assessment tool invaluable when conducting parent/teacher conferences. Providers who have not conducted the screenings and/or input the data into the Bright Beginnings website as required may not be able to provide VPK in future years.

Another piece of the accountability factor in VPK is the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) screening tool. This tool is administered to kindergarten students within the first 30 days of kindergarten. 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." For students who attended VPK in 2013-2014, the score will be comprised of information obtained from the Work Sampling Systems tool, and the actual VPK Assessments that were conducted during the child's VPK program. The scores will be delayed this year due to the change in screening tools used to produce the readiness rate. Additionally, a program is only given a rate if the provider had at least 4 children attend for 70% of the program.

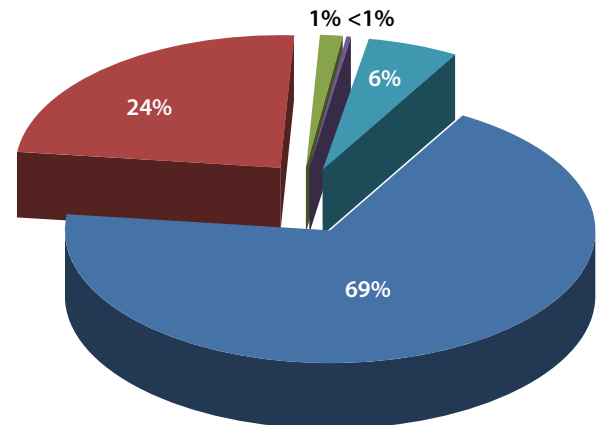


VPK Expenses



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

VPK by Race



■ White - 3,403 - 69%
 ■ Multi-Racial - 283 - 6%
 ■ Indian/Alaskan - 15 - <1%
■ Black - 1,192 - 24%
 ■ Asian - 71 - 1%



**5,134 families
served through
CCR&R**

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 data base.

This year the Coalition was able to assist approximately 5,134 families with CCR&R service add 33 new providers to participate in the School Readiness program with an additional 4 providers given packets, which included community resource information to help them better serve the families in their facilities.

The Coalition was also able to expand community awareness through the use of additional billboards and bus benches strategically placed throughout the county.

Provider Support & Partnerships

One of the main goals of the Coalition continues to be to improve the quality of child care throughout Polk County. During the 2013-2014 fiscal year, there were over 2,300 monitoring and technical assistance visits made at the 270 private contracted child care centers and family child care homes serving ages birth to five (as of June 30, 2014). In addition, 37 school-age only providers also held contracts with the Coalition for the 2013-2014 fiscal year. All sites were visited and provided technical assistance on a regular basis (every 4-6 weeks) and a formal program assessment was also completed at each site during the fiscal year. The Quality Specialist working with each site developed a "Plan of Action," which set specific goals, and a time frame 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,

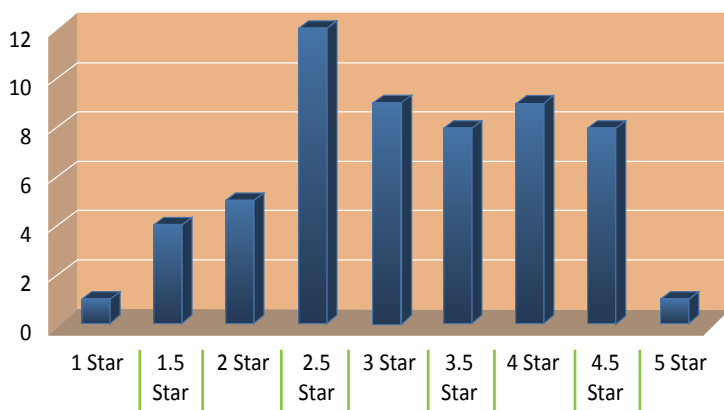
but not limited to: curriculum, health and safety, appropriate infant/toddler care, early learning standards, language and literacy, child assessment, teacher/child interactions, and more.

The 2013-2014 fiscal year was also an eventful and productive training year for Coalition staff. In School Readiness alone, 168.5 in-service hours were offered by the Coalition through various trainings throughout the year, with over 576 local early childhood practitioners participating in many of these trainings. Early childhood practitioners were provided opportunities to attend trainings on various topics. Coalition staff are dedicated to providing in-service trainings to child care providers on a consistent basis. One of the methods the Coalition keeps providers informed of trainings is through the training calendar on the Coalition's website. Some training topics offered throughout the year included the following: Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards – Birth to Four (108 practitioners trained); "Beyond Centers and Circle Time" curriculum training (25 practitioners trained); Beyond Cribs and Rattles" curriculum training (18 practitioners trained); Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (34 practitioners trained); and "WEE Learn" curriculum training (31 practitioners trained).

"Quality Counts" – Polk's Quality Rating Improvement System

64 child care centers participated in Quality Counts, Polk's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. The Coalition Board approved to continue to fully support the system by providing program assessments (using the Environment Rating Scales - ERS), related training and technical assistance, as well as additional provider resources and grants with funds allocated by the Coalition. The Branagh System continued to be used to complete program assessments and corrective action plans. In order to help parents understand and recognize the importance of quality in early childhood programs, information related to the Quality Counts Program was available through Child Care Resource & Referral, and brochures/flyers were distributed at community events. A listing of child care centers participating in the program was also available on the Coalition's website. While the QRIS program is still voluntary and only open to child care centers, the Coalition has laid the foundation for family child care homes to participate starting next year.

QRIS Star Ratings



Providers participating in the Quality Counts program received incentive packages designed to enhance their classroom environments. Providers with a star rating of between 3 to 5 stars were able to choose from one of two materials packages which directly related to areas of needed improvement based on overall ERS scores for all providers. Providers with ratings of 1-3 stars received individualized packages, based specifically on the needs of their individual programs. In addition, QRIS providers continued to receive priority in regard to participation in other Coalition quality-funded programs, and all staff from QRIS providers were given the opportunity to attend related in-service trainings free-of-charge throughout the year.

Supporting Teacher-Child Interactions using CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)

Daily interactions that promote children's social and cognitive development are a cornerstone to learning. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observation tool that focuses on the effectiveness of classroom interactions among teachers and children. The Coalition was privileged to send several staff members to Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) trainings during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. Staff that attended the CLASS trainings had to go through an extensive process to be deemed reliable in conducting CLASS observations. Five (5) Coalition staff achieved reliability as observers in the use of the Toddler/Two CLASS tool and six (6) Coalition staff achieved reliability as observers in the use of the Pre-K CLASS observation tool. Eleven (11) child care centers volunteered to participate in a CLASS pilot project where Coalition staff observed and scored multiple classrooms using the CLASS observation tool. The pilot project group was eager to receive feedback from the outcome of the observations and immediately started implementing practices to strengthen the teacher-child interactions within their program(s).

To support practitioners in recognizing the importance of teacher-child interactions and how those interactions are the classroom experiences that matter most to children's social and academic development, early education providers were offered a unique hands-on training experience in the form of a 30 hour Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI) training. MMCI defines and identifies teacher-child interactions described by the CLASS observation tool. Practitioners engaged in hands-on group activities, observed teacher-child interactions through

several videos and were able to record specific notes on those interactions, conducted homework activities, and participated in a pre/post assessment of their interactions with children in their center classrooms. Practitioners were given a participant guide filled with information, a year's access to a video library with helpful hints and notes, and a Dimensions Guide to give them the tools to strengthen interactions with the children in their classrooms.

Pre/Post Child Assessment

Teaching Strategies GOLD®, a comprehensive, ongoing, observational child assessment system is used to assess School Readiness children throughout the year. The tool is based on 38 objectives that measure child growth and development. The research-based objectives are predictors of school success and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, Florida's early learning guidelines, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. 28 School Readiness providers participated in the program during the 2013-2014 year, completing assessments on nearly 1,200 children ages birth to five. The majority of the providers that participate in the Teaching Strategies GOLD® assessment system are involved in the QRIS program which helps them to enhance the quality of their programs and helps teachers guide, support, and inform planning and instruction. Quality staff from the Coalition assisted with 156 technical assistance requests throughout the year and provided formal trainings for providers as well.

**1,200 children
ages birth to five assessed**

Infant/Toddler Assistance

In addition to over 400 infant/toddler-related technical assistance needs, addressed throughout the 2013-2014 year, practitioners in Polk County that work with our youngest children were offered opportunities to attend formal trainings specifically designed to enhance the quality of care for this specific age group. Practitioners were provided with resources to assist them in strengthening the language and literacy skills of the infants, toddlers, and two year olds in their programs. They were also engaged in centered discussions and brainstorming activities that focused on how to create and solidify connections with the infants, toddlers, and two year olds they serve. Also, 37 practitioners participated in specific infant/toddler language and literacy trainings offered in October 2013.





Inclusion

The Coalition recognizes the importance of offering Inclusion services to providers and families throughout the county. Although the majority of Inclusion-related requests were received directly by Coalition staff, the Coalition's Inclusion Warm Line Service continued to be available to early education providers, parents/guardians, or other community members who may have had questions or concerns related to children with unique or special needs during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. Additional inclusion referrals were received by the Inclusion Coordinator from the Coalition's Quality Specialists and other staff who provided regular visits to all School Readiness providers throughout the year. A total of 204 referrals/technical assistance requests were received and completed during the 2013-2014 year. The Inclusion Coordinator worked closely with other Coalition staff to ensure all concerns were addressed. Again this year, a large percentage of inclusion-related referrals were linked to children's social/emotional health and well being. To assist providers with concerns, the Coalition's Inclusion Coordinator offered formal trainings based on the Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) Model. Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is an approach that helps practitioners develop an understanding of why children engage in problem behavior, and it provides strategies which help prevent the occurrence of problem behavior while teaching children new skills. 68 practitioners attended the formal PBS trainings throughout the year. Referrals also related to developmental delays, speech and/or language delays, or general quality improvement (including classroom scheduling, interactions, or curriculum adaptation).

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION

Health & Safety Education

Throughout the 2013-2014 year, practitioners were provided opportunities to attend large and small group trainings related to health and safety practices. They were able to engage in group activities that addressed different supervision and ratio scenarios. In September of 2013, the Coalition partnered with the local Department of Children & Families (DCF) Child Care Regulation Office to host a training on transportation and supervision. There were 47 providers in attendance. Participants were also able to view a video on appropriate ways to install car seats. A representative from DCF's Child Protective Investigations was also present to discuss abuse reporting procedures and the importance of being aware of the well-being of each child within the child care setting.

Nutrition Education

As part of their initial visits to all School Readiness provider sites during the months of August and September 2013, the Coalition's Quality staff delivered nutrition information and related resources. Resources included a magnetic healthy foods game (to be used by preschool children), a nutrition and motor skills teacher resource book, and information related to the "Choose My Plate" initiative from the USDA's website. Technical assistance was provided in regard to the use of the information and materials within the classroom setting.

In addition, the Coalition partnered with Campus Kid Care of Polk County, Polk State College, Polk County Schools Preschool Programs, United Way/Success by Six, and Florida's Department of Children and Families to sponsor the 2013 Polk Collaborative Partners Annual Conference in October. The conference was entitled "The Whole Plate: From Language & Literacy to Health & Nutrition" and, in addition to other topics, a variety of workshops were offered related to health and nutrition for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school age children. There were over 275 attendees who also had the opportunity to attend a keynote session presented by Alina Soto (Child Care Quality Liaison for DCF) entitled "What's on Your Plate Polk?"



MEASUREABLE OUTCOMES

Developmental Screenings

In 2013-2014, a total of 2,288 ASQ-3 Questionnaires were completed by new families who qualified for School Readiness services. The Coalition's Screening Specialists reviewed the initial screenings and conducted follow-up screenings (also referred to as Level II screenings) as needed. A total of 349 Level II screenings were completed, and 75 parents/families received referrals with information related to outside agencies (Early Steps or FDLRS Child Find) due to potential concerns being identified. To ensure annual screenings were completed on each School Readiness child, the Coalition worked closely with all contracted child care providers requiring them to complete annual screenings based on a child's date of birth. A total of 3,219 screenings were completed throughout the year. In addition, the Coalition's Screening Specialists worked closely with new providers to provide training on the use of the Ages & Stages Questionnaire: 3rd Edition as well as the Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social/Emotional and encouraged providers to submit additional screenings as needed.

A total of 3,219 developmental screenings were completed throughout the year

Health Department Vision and Hearing Screenings

In order to give every child a chance to succeed and be ready for learning, vision and hearing screenings are done on all children in order to identify any needs such as glasses. In 2013-2014, over 3,600 screenings were performed on children who were three or four years of age. 170 referrals were issued due to hearing concerns; some of them resulted in children needing tubes and/or tonsils and/or adenoids removed. There were also 105 vision referrals.

Over 3,600 Health Department screenings were performed on children who were 3 or 4 years of age

Kids First! Keys to Communication Sponsored by Disney

This program is designed to build communication between teachers, parents and children. In 2013-2014, the Coalition had approximately 300 children participating from 20 classrooms at 13 provider sites. On site coaching, mentoring and training is provided by a Coalition Quality Specialist through hands-on activities, book readings, conversations, newsletters, and disbursement of at home activity resources, etc.

300 children in 20 classrooms at 13 provider sites sponsored by Disney

Profile Planner

With approval from the Board's Enhancements Committee, the Coalition was pleased to continue to partner with Kaplan Early Learning and iActive Learning, LLC to offer family child care home providers the opportunity to participate in a state-of-the-art online lesson planning program for practitioners and administrators. This year, over 40 family child care home providers participated in Profile Planner. Using the system, they were able to create online lesson plans, link early learning standards to their plans, search for activities, connect with families and Coalition staff, journal about children, and much, much more. For the second year, the Coalition received very positive feedback from providers who utilized this exciting system.

Nemours BrightStart!

During the 2013-2014 school year, 54 child care providers participated in the Nemours BrightStart! (NBS!) early literacy program. The purpose of this program is to provide early literacy screenings and intensive early literacy instruction to assist children who are at risk for reading failure. The Nemours BrightStart! Program has proven highly effective in building alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness skills that support future reading success.

This year, 785 children (ages four and five years old) were screened in the fall by their teachers using the Get Ready to Read-Revised assessment tool. Of the 785 children screened, 302 children qualified (38%) for NBS! instruction, which was delivered by their classroom teachers over a 20-week timeframe.

By the end of the 20-week NBS! program, the spring Get Ready To Read-Revised assessment scores reflected children scoring an average of 80.24 in the fall (indicative of at-risk reading readiness skills), increased to an average score of 101.79 (indicative of an average range for reading readiness skills). The average Get Ready To Read-Revised score of the 302 qualified NBS! children increased by 10.05 points or 108%. This performance level is commensurate with children of the same age, and these children are now better prepared for foundational reading and kindergarten expectations.

**785 Children Screened
302 Qualified for NBS! Instruction
108% Average Increase in Reading Score
after 20 Week Instruction**

Power of Words

In an effort to promote a lifelong love of reading and early literacy, beginning in a child's early years, the Coalition has partnered with the local Kiwanis club to provide reading opportunities within preschool classrooms.

In 2013-2014, 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 70 hours reading to Polk County's youngest readers. Six 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 1,550 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.

70 hours of reading time to more than 1,550 children



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

Part of the Coalition's mission is to educate the community on the importance of high quality early education and care and that it cannot be done alone. The State requires the Coalition to raise matched funds. The Coalition gives a great big, special thank you to the United Way of Central Florida who has been, and continues to be, the main contributor for these funds. They truly understand that when a community shares the responsibility of starting a child's educational path right, the financial goals are achievable. The Coalition also received additional grants and funds from organizations and individual donors listed on page 4.

In addition, the Coalition participated in a number of community and family events focused on raising awareness and funds for early learning in Polk County. We partnered with Family Fundamentals and Success by 6 for the "Ready, Set...Learn" event, and the Lakeland Flying Tigers hosted the "Taste of Summer Festival."

The Coalition has also seen a drastic increase in its involvement in social media leading to a quicker and more direct link to many of our clients, partners, and collaborators. We are very excited to see this continue to grow as the community comes together to support and spread the word about the importance of high quality early education and care.

MOVING FORWARD

As we move forward into a new year, the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County is excited about the new partnerships that will come 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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