



# EDUCATION

## High quality early learning opportunities

### BACKGROUND

The foundation for communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork - skills that employers cite as critical to workplace success - is largely developed by age five. High quality early learning opportunities, as well as early detection and treatment of childhood developmental and behavioral challenges, are essential for children's development and later success in school and in life. By age three, there is a 30 million word gap between children in poverty and those in higher income families. By the time children from low-income families enter kindergarten they are 12-14 months below national norms in language and pre-reading skills, a persistent achievement gap. Investments in quality early learning result in savings in later years (e.g., reductions in grade retention and special education referrals, and an increase in high school graduates who are college and career ready). However, only 4 percent of Florida's education budget is spent on programs that benefit children in the early years.

**School Readiness Program:** Nearly 10,000 small and large private businesses provide affordable childcare through the School Readiness (SR) program, which serves almost 225,000 children of Florida's low-income working families.

Current funding for SR is approximately \$32 million below 2005-2006 levels and many SR programs are of low quality due to inadequate or non-existent statewide standards and low provider reimbursement rates. Early learning providers cannot afford to implement industry-accepted benchmarks of quality when serving children. Revising Gold Seal accreditation and linking reimbursement to provider performance and accountability will improve childcare quality and reduce the achievement gap.

**Family Supports:** Early childhood is the optimal time for detection and treatment of children with developmental or behavioral concerns. Help Me Grow

links families through a centralized 2-1-1 call center so that local resources and programs can quickly and effectively address parents' concerns about their young children's health, development, behavior and learning.

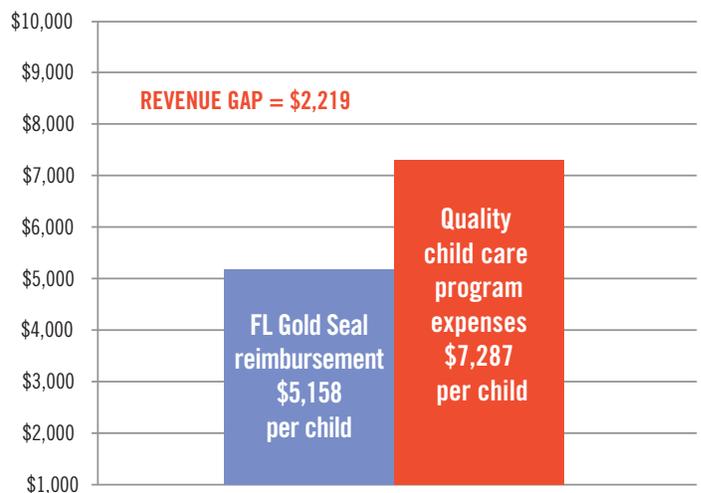
### PROPOSED CHANGES

**INCREASE School Readiness funding by \$85 million**, and support Performance Funding legislation linking provider payment rates to benchmarks and quality standards based on the actual cost of providing quality care, to expand quality early childhood education opportunities for Florida's youngest children.

**REVISE Gold Seal** requirements for accrediting agencies. **Develop coordinated assessment and accountability** measures for School Readiness, VPK and Kindergarten readiness.

**INCREASE Help Me Grow funding by \$2 million** to expand parents' access to appropriate community supports including information and referrals for developmental screenings.

### FLORIDA GOLD SEAL REIMBURSEMENT vs COST OF QUALITY CHILDCARE



The cost of implementing quality accreditation standards (NAEYC/APPLE) exceeds Gold Seal reimbursement by \$2,129/child

Source: Watson Policy Solutions (2016)