



EDUCATION

Florida's United Ways urge the 2016 Florida Legislature to provide access to high quality early learning programs for all children

BACKGROUND

Last year, Florida's United Ways released a report documenting the true scope of financial hardship for Florida's ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families. The following policy recommendations for the 2016 Florida Legislative Session are drawn from the ALICE Report and from the work of nonprofit, business, and government leaders.

The foundation for communication, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork - skills that employers cite as critical to workplace success - is developed by age five. Early language abilities, measured at age three, are directly related to later reading abilities, and children in low-income families are at greatest risk. Quality early learning, early detection and treatment of childhood developmental and behavioral challenges are essential to successful outcomes for children. And affordable childcare is essential for low-income working parents to maintain employment and become financially self-sufficient, increasing state tax collections and economic productivity.

School Readiness: Nearly 10,000 small and large private businesses provide affordable childcare to Florida's low-income working families through the School Readiness program, which serves more than 225,000 children. Thousands more eligible Florida families don't get these services due to insufficient state resources. Inadequate or non-existent statewide standards and low reimbursement rates mean many School Readiness programs are of low quality, further contributing to the achievement gap.

Voluntary Prekindergarten: Florida's prekindergarten (VPK) program is available to all 4-year olds and VPK access is among the highest in the country. However, the program meets only 3 of 10 national quality standards. Current per-child funding of \$2,437 is less than it was five years ago.

Help Me Grow: 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 call center (2-1-1) with local resources and programs to quickly and effectively address parents' concerns about their young children's health, development, behavior and learning.

PROPOSED CHANGES

LINK school readiness provider payments to early learning quality standards and the actual cost of providing quality care.

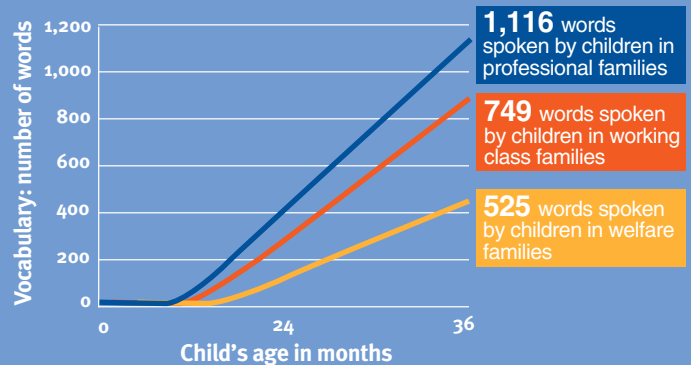
INCREASE funding for the School Readiness program by \$30 million

RESTORE funding for Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program to the pre-recession (2007) level of \$2,677 per student.

EXPAND access to early detection and treatment of developmental delays and disabilities by appropriating \$4 million to Help Me Grow.

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP STARTS EARLY

Children in low income families speak and hear far fewer words than children in affluent families.



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