



# Quality Early Learning

Florida's United Ways urge the 2020 Florida Legislature to increase support for high quality early learning opportunities so all children are ready for kindergarten and prepared for school and life.

## BACKGROUND

- 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.
- \$1 invested in programs for low-income children can yield a \$4 - \$9 in returns to society.
- The subsidy provided for School Readiness participants helps families become financially self-sufficient and helps their young children to be more successful in school.
- There are approx. 1.1 million children younger than age 6 in FL and 62% are in a SR program.
- Florida's School Readiness Program served more than 200,000 children in FY 2017-2018.
- The average annual School Readiness payment is \$5,000 while private rates are close to \$10,000.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

- Language development is a strong predictor of children's later success. Quality early learning programs reduce the "language gap" to support kindergarten readiness and later school success.
  - By 18 months of age, toddlers from low-income families are already several months behind more advantaged children in language proficiency.
  - By age three, children from higher-income families have heard 30 million more words than children from low-income families.
- Early detection and treatment of childhood developmental and behavioral challenges are essential to successful outcomes for children.

## THE PROBLEM

- Chronic underfunding and low payment rates have undermined efforts to improve program quality.
- Low compensation results in high teacher turnover at school readiness programs, negatively impacting child development.
  - 63% of child care worker families are in the Medicaid, SNAP, and/or TANF programs.

## THE SOLUTIONS

- Implement quality and keep building on HB 1091 through second grade.
- Support professional development through Early Childhood Educator INCENTIVE\$ Florida and T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps), which reduce teacher turnover and result in higher quality care for our youngest children.
- Expand family support system by fully funding Help Me Grow, which links families to local resources and programs that can address parents' concerns about their young children's healthy development.

## UNITED WAY'S REQUEST:

Florida United Ways urge the 2020 Florida Legislature to:

- **SUPPORT** quality and accountability provisions of HB 1091.
- **IMPLEMENT** a coordinated child assessment system for VPK and kindergarten.
- **EXPAND** Early Childhood Educator INCENTIVE\$ Florida statewide at \$750,000.
- **MAINTAIN** T.E.A.C.H. funding at \$10 million.
- **EXPAND** Help Me Grow statewide by increasing its budget to \$4.5 million.