

ABOUT EARLY LEARNING COALITIONS IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Introduction

In 1999, the Florida Legislature enacted Florida Statute 411.01, the *School Readiness Act* (Act) which created Coalitions statewide. The intent of this legislation was to provide an avenue for each county to adopt and maintain a coordinated system of School Readiness programs to help ensure that every child is school ready upon entrance into kindergarten. The Act was amended in 2005 to modify the current structure of statewide Coalitions.

Each Coalition is legislatively responsible for developing a comprehensive service delivery plan for administering the School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten Programs. Early Learning Coalitions are not-for-profit corporations, designed to fulfill the intent of this legislation at the local level. The governing boards consist of 18 to 35 members of the local community. Coalitions are legislatively charged to provide unified leadership, support, and guidance to ensure that the children in their service area have the opportunity to reap the benefits of developmentally appropriate and research-based early education and care programs; help parents achieve and/or maintain self sufficiency; involve parents as their child's first teacher; emphasize success in school through prevention/intervention; enhance children's educational readiness, support family education, and include health screenings and referrals.

The unified goal of the Early Learning Coalitions is to increase the quality and availability of early education opportunities for every child in their service area while maximizing efficiency, accountability and effectiveness.

How Coalitions Impact Child Outcomes

Florida's thirty-one Early Learning Coalitions have engaged in creative, responsive and exciting programs designed to offer and expand high-quality services for Florida's youngest children and their families, as well as services for early education and care providers.

Research has shown that not all early education and care programs are equally successful in promoting positive learning and development experiences for young children. This success is dependent upon several quality factors which include:

- .. Learning Environment
- .. Staff Qualifications/ Professional Development
- .. Ratios/ Group Size
- .. Curriculum
- .. Program (*Family Engagement/Administration*)

Coalitions are dedicated to improving the quality of early education and care programs and ensuring that all children are equipped with the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Provider Recruitment

Coalitions are at the forefront in increasing the number of quality early education programs in their respective areas. They are available to answer questions and provide assistance to prospective providers interested in offering school readiness and/or VPK services and are also there to assist providers in the licensing and/or accreditation process. If you are interested in becoming an early education and care provider or are already a provider seeking assistance with licensing and/or the accreditation process, please contact your Early Learning Coalition today!

Services to Early Education and Care Providers

Early Learning Coalitions recognize that many components impact the quality of early education and care programs and whether or not a child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. Each Coalition has designed a comprehensive plan for their community that addresses the specific needs of families and children within that community. While these plans vary from Coalition to Coalition and/or from county to county, each one addresses the following components to strengthen quality in early education and care programs:

Professional Development

Early Learning Coalitions recognize that one component crucial for quality early education and care programs is the availability of qualified teachers and staff in classrooms/infant toddler settings. To support the ongoing improvement of teacher and staff skills, Coalitions offer a variety of staff development and training opportunities. These opportunities may include workshops and/or training series on a wide variety of early education topics, early educator's conferences, curricula training, one-on-one and/or group technical assistance, and additional topics based on provider requests and needs.

All focus on enhancing the quality of early education and care programs throughout Florida. Specific training topics may be as diverse as:

- Birth-Three Performance Standards
- Three-Five Performance Standards
- Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Performance Standards
- Program Legislative Requirements
- Child Development
- Quality Learning Environments
- Health and Safety
- Curriculum Implementation
- Other topics, as identified

Coalitions throughout Florida also provide modeling and mentoring and/or offer technical assistance from trained and quality specialists on behavioral development/issues, inclusion/special needs, infant/toddler development/issues and other specialized areas of interest to early educators in centers, exempt, school and home based settings. Several

Coalitions participate in statewide professional development initiatives, such as the [Florida PERKS \(Partners in Education and Research for Kindergarten Success\)](#) Project which provides professional development for VPK teachers on scientifically-valid preschool curricula through college coursework and onsite technical assistance in order to promote the school readiness of children in the areas of language and cognitive development and early reading and literacy skills.

Salary Supplements/Stipends for Early Educators

To encourage teacher stability and increase the educational credentials of early educators, many Coalitions offer a salary supplement to qualified participants through the [Florida WAGES Program](#) or a similar program that is locally designed. Through these initiatives, teachers receive salary supplements as long as they remain at their early education and care setting and pursue higher educational credentials.

Curriculum Support

Coalitions recognize the importance of using a research-based curriculum in early education classrooms to improve program quality. Coalitions throughout Florida offer mini-grants and/or similar opportunities for early educators in provider settings to receive developmentally appropriate curriculum, as well as training on how to implement the curriculum within their classrooms. Most Coalitions have reviewed and approved a list of curricula and require that providers in their service area use curriculum from these approved lists. For those providers who wish to use a curriculum not on the approved curricula list, Coalitions have developed a process for providers to demonstrate how their curriculum meets the developmentally appropriate requirements and address the School Readiness and VPK standards. Areas considered may be, but are not limited to:

- Is the curriculum developmentally appropriate?
- Does the curriculum have a character development component?
- Does the curriculum promote learning among staff and children?
- Does the curriculum help children achieve physical, social, emotional, linguistic, motor and cognitive goals?
- Does the curriculum permit flexibility for children and teachers?
- Does the curriculum encourage active learning through play and frequently allows children to make meaningful choices?
- Does the curriculum foster children's exploration and inquiry, rather than focusing on "right" answers or "right" ways to complete a task?
- Does the curriculum facilitate concept learning and skills development in an integrated and natural way?
- Does the curriculum show evidence from research of being based on sound child development principles of how children grow and learn?
- Does the curriculum show respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and allows and appreciates individual differences?
- Does the curriculum meet all of the State of Florida School Readiness Performance Standards, including the following Domains: Physical Health,

- Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional, Language and Communication, Cognitive Development and General Knowledge; Motor Development and Emergent Literacy (3-5 year olds)?
- Does the program provide an age-appropriate active learning environment with activities and materials that encourage exploration in: Large Motor Play, Dramatic Play, Creative Expression, Language and Literacy, Discovery/Sensory/Water Play, Music and Movement, Outdoors and Gross Motor; and Manipulatives?
 - Does the curriculum have an assessment component so that evidence (from multiple sources) can be used to understand and improve learning by improving curriculum implementation and teaching?
 - Does the program contain a Family/Parent Involvement component that:
 - ✓ recognizes families/parents as the child's first teacher;
 - ✓ assists family/parents in becoming knowledgeable about program goals and assessments;
 - ✓ includes family/parent conferences to discuss the family's/parent's expectations for their children and answer any questions they may have about the curriculum;
 - ✓ welcomes family/parents as visitors to the program or classroom;
 - ✓ provides opportunities for parent participation; and
 - ✓ ensures that families/parents are provided with information about thematic units of study and each of the interest areas available in the program, detailing the benefit to the child?

Mini-Grants

Many Coalitions use some of their quality enhancement funding to award mini-grants for early education and care providers to purchase curriculum as well as provide enhancements to their early learning environments such as classroom furniture, equipment and manipulatives, as well as outdoor play areas such as outdoor play equipment, mulch and other resources as identified. While some Coalitions require that mini-grant dollars be used to enhance specific program components that have been identified as areas needing improvement during their program evaluation, other Coalitions provide flexibility to providers in determining materials that would be most helpful in strengthening their programs or becoming accredited. If you are an early education and care provider in Florida and you would like to find out more about the availability of mini-grant opportunities in your area, please contact your local Early Learning Coalition today!

Additional Quality Initiatives

The Early Learning Coalitions of Florida have each developed quality initiatives and services that go beyond those services required in legislation. While some quality initiatives may be similar from Coalition to Coalition, others are as diverse as the individual areas served, and have been designed to meet the specific needs of the local children, families and providers. Some Coalitions provide lending library services,

mobile resource van services, and training scholarships, as well as many other services. To learn more about services being offered in your area as well as around the State of Florida, click here [*The Power of Positive Practices: Highlights of the Accomplishments of Florida's Early Learning Coalitions*](#) or contact your local Coalition today!

Development of Community Partnerships

Coalitions recognize that providing quality early education and care programs cost money. For this reason, Coalitions throughout Florida have partnered with local Children's Services Councils, other governmental funding entities, not-for-profit organizations, civic groups and businesses to generate additional resources to enhance the quality of programs within their communities and/or to serve additional children. These resources may include donations of materials and services, financial support, volunteerism and more. To learn how you can become more involved in your area, please contact your Early Learning Coalition today!

Parent/Child Services

Research has shown that family is the primary influence on young children and that parent involvement is crucial to positive outcomes in growth and development. Coalitions recognize parents as their child's first teachers and are committed to promoting positive child outcomes through parent involvement.

Child Care Resource and Referral Services:

Through Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services, Coalitions serve as their community's early care and education experts. They provide information, materials and related assistance on the following:

- .. Early care and education options
- .. How to select a quality early care and education program
- .. Assessing financial and community assistance
- .. Individualized, non-biased referrals to early care and education programs

Coalitions maintain comprehensive databases of all legally operating early education and care providers and all requests for referrals and related information. They also maintain a resource file or database of community services and resources to assist families. To learn more about providers who are licensed and health and safety infractions please go to: www.myflorida.com/childcare/

School Readiness Program (Child Care Subsidy)

Coalitions offer financial assistance to income eligible families throughout the state to assist in payments to early education and care programs. For additional information, please [click here for the SPE](#) Parent Portal or contact the local Early Learning Coalition in your area.

Voluntary PreKindergarten

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is a State of Florida legislatively mandated program designed to prepare every four-year-old in Florida for kindergarten and build the foundation for their future educational success.

All eligible four year olds are entitled to participate in one of the VPK-certified early learning programs in their community. Children must turn four on or before September 1 of the school year in which they will attend VPK. The program offers developmentally appropriate instruction and activities designed to give each child an opportunity to perform better in school and throughout life. For additional information, please click here for English (SPE), here for Spanish (SPE), here for Creole or contact the local Early Learning Coalition in your area. To learn more about VPK program requirements click here in:

- English: <http://www.floridajobs.org/VPK/media/VPK-ProviderBrochureEng.pdf>
- Spanish: <http://www.elcmdm.org/downloads/VPK-ProviderBrochureSp.pdf>
- Creole: <http://www.thechildrensforum.com/downloads/vpk/VPK-ProviderBrochure-Creole.pdf>

To learn how providers are preparing children in the State of Florida, go to: www.vpk.fl DOE.org

Child Developmental and Health Screenings

Coalitions are responsible for providing a system of developmental and health screening for children involved in the early learning programs. Comprehensive screening tools are used to help professionals identify possible developmental delays or hearing/vision impairment in infants and young children. The screens are used to show parents and providers whether or not the child is on track or if a more in-depth assessment is required to meet the child's needs through referral to specialized services.

Research shows that the earlier delays or impairments are identified and children begin to receive help, the odds of making substantial developmental progress are greatly increased. Unfortunately, more than 70% of children with developmental delays or hearing/vision impairment are not identified until after they have started school. Coalitions are committed to ensuring that these children are identified and have access to appropriate intervention services as early as possible.

Child Assessments

Coalitions work with early education and care providers and families to conduct child assessments for the purpose of measuring child progress at pivotal checkpoints throughout the year. Assessments generally include evaluations of the following developmental domains such as: Social/Emotional, Cognitive, Language and Literacy, and Physical Health. Child profiles are then analyzed by the provider for use in program

planning and are also used in providing recommendations to help parents plan at-home learning experiences for their child.

Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS)

Many Coalitions have joined together with a common goal of supporting the implementation of a state-wide Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). Approved by the Early Learning Advisory Council, made up of Coalition Chairs statewide, this QRIS is the newest quality initiative that the Association of Early Learning Coalitions is championing for full implementation.

QRIS goals include:

- enhancing program quality throughout the State of Florida;
- improving child well being throughout the State of Florida;
- educating and supporting parents in choosing a quality early education and care setting for their child; and
- providing a consistent measurement of program quality throughout the State of Florida that all Florida families/parents would recognize and depend on while making their selection of an early education setting.

These goals will be met by:

- establishing incremental benchmarks leading to higher quality;
- evaluating activities in which children spend their time;
- assessing the learning environment using research based tools; and
- delivering support services designed to enhance overall quality.

For more information about QRIS, click on [QRIS for ELAC](#) and [QRIS Multi-Coalition Proposal](#)

Helpful Resources/Documents

To find out more about how Early Learning Coalitions are funded and/or the number of children served in your area in a particular program, please click on the documents below:

[2007-08 Budget Allocations of the School Readiness Program by Coalition](#)
[2007-08 Budget Allocations of the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program by Coalition](#)
[Average Total of School Readiness Enrollments by Coalition \(based on 2006-07 figures\)](#)
[Average Total of Voluntary Prekindergarten Enrollments by Coalition \(based on 2006-07 figures\)](#)