

## **Section VII**

### **The Future: Anticipated Outcomes of *The Florida Policy Agenda***

The future of Florida's children and families depends on developing and implementing evidence-based policies and practices that support families and communities in their efforts to raise healthy and successful children. To identify and promote such policies and practices, a group of concerned advocates, researchers, and policy analysts from throughout Florida has come together to form *The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children*.

As described in the first six sections of this publication, The Policy Group has conducted searches within Florida, across the country and internationally to identify promising policies and practices. These studies have produced practical, easy to understand reports that can serve a broad public education function. The Policy Group has been objective in researching and responding to issues and serves as a resource to state and local government and the private sector by responding to specific requests for assistance that are consistent with its mission.

This is a time of rapid change and opportunity for Florida's families and children. Policies are being developed, revisited and revised in such crucial areas as school readiness, child welfare, and health care. In addition, the relationship between the federal, state, local government, and communities is being re-examined, as is the relationship between the public and the private sector. The Policy Group recognizes that Florida, because of its size, the racial and ethnic diversity of its population, and the age demographics of its population, is experiencing many issues and needs before they arise in other states. This makes Florida a type of "learning laboratory" for the country and creates a special opportunity and responsibility to be of increased service to the country. The Policy Group intends for Florida to serve as a model for the rest of the country in enhancing the well-being of children.

#### **Our Vision**

*The vision of The Policy Group is that through our collective efforts, working on behalf of families and children of all ages, we will ensure a generation of young people who become responsible 18 year olds, ready, willing and able to contribute to self, to family, and to their community.*

The Policy Group believes that to realize this vision we must focus our thinking on identifying and promoting evidence-based policies and practices that produce healthy births, healthy child growth and development, educational success, family stability and safe and supportive communities.

## Our Guiding Principles

- ❖ We promote efforts that will enable Florida's families and children to have a sense of connectedness to one another.
- ❖ We promote efforts that will provide Florida's families and children with hope and optimism toward the future.
- ❖ We promote efforts that will provide Florida's families the opportunity and capacity to raise children that are healthy, safe and ready to learn.
- ❖ We promote efforts that ensure adequately trained staff is available to deliver services and supports to families, children and communities.
- ❖ We promote efforts that build upon and use the strengths, assets and resources that already exist in communities when developing goals, objectives and strategies for Florida's future.

## Our Priority Policies: The Agenda of The Policy Group

The Policy Group believes that the well-being of children and families is the highest priority in Florida and public policies will be established to be consistent in their support of this priority. The key indicators of well-being are:

- ❖ All of Florida's children are healthy, safe and ready to learn at every age.
- ❖ All of Florida's families are stable, nurturing and economically self-sufficient.
- ❖ All of Florida's communities are supportive of families raising children.

The key evidence-based policies and practices that are required to achieve well-being are:

- ❖ All children and families have access to affordable, quality:
  - ❖ Health care;
  - ❖ Parenting support (e.g., home-visiting) services;
  - ❖ Early care and education; and
  - ❖ Integrated health, economic, and family support services.
- ❖ All communities, in partnership with the public and private sectors, have the capacity to provide a comprehensive, integrated continuum of natural, primary, and specialized supports.
- ❖ All public and private employers in Florida promote family-friendly employment practices and a livable wage.

All children and their families are important to the Fellows of The Policy Group. For its initial endeavors, The Policy Group is focusing on children from conception through age five. The following outcome measures have been developed for each of the key indicators of well-being recognizing that they are inter-dependent and that achievements in one area will impact other areas. Because of this, some overlap in indicators is to be expected.

## Healthy Children

The benefits of beginning and living a healthy life are enormous and long lasting. The consequences of beginning life unhealthy can be lifelong and costly. To safeguard our health, we need accessible and affordable health care. Particularly important is a healthy start prenatally and from birth. Children should have the supports and services necessary to live full, healthy and productive lives. It is our desire that **all children are healthy** as measured by:

- ❖ Increase in the percentage of pregnancies that are intended.
- ❖ Reduction in the number and percentage of subsequent pregnancies that occur within two years of the birth of the last baby.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of pregnant mothers with access to and use of comprehensive health care in the first trimester.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of babies born healthy (i.e., full-term babies weighing 5.5 pounds or more, born to mothers who did not smoke, drink alcohol or use illegal drugs during pregnancy).
- ❖ Reduction in the number and rate of substance exposed newborns (e.g., fetal alcohol and other drugs).
- ❖ Reduction in the neonatal and postnatal mortality rates.
- ❖ Reduction in the incidence rate of untreated or unresolved maternal depression.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children screened and receiving supports necessary for identified developmental delays and special health and developmental needs.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children appropriately immunized by the age of five.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children with vision and hearing problems detected and corrected by the time of entry into kindergarten.
- ❖ Reduction in the child morbidity rate.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children and families with access to appropriate health care and who can get needed medical care.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children and families with health coverage.
- ❖ Reduction in the rate of obesity.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children with acceptable BMI (i.e., Body Mass Index) scores.
- ❖ Increase in the percent of children and parents whose behavioral mental health needs are met.

If these positive outcomes can be achieved, when Florida's infants and young children become older we will impact spending and save taxpayer resources by:

- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of emergency room use and costs for primary care.
- ❖ Reducing the percentage growth rate in special education placements and costs.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of costs associated with specialized medical care for children.

## Children Safe in their Families and Communities

The quality of life in our communities depends upon feeling and being safe in our communities. Children are among our most vulnerable citizens. They require protection and nurturing to help them grow up to become responsible, law-abiding and nurturing adults. It is our desire that **all children are safe** as measured by:

- ❖ Reduction in the number of homeless children.
- ❖ Reduction in the number of abducted or missing children.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of children harmed or killed due to violent crime.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of children who have “some indication” or “verified” evidence of being abused or neglected.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of children who have “some indication” or “verified” evidence of being re-abused or neglected within two years of the first report.
- ❖ Reduction in the rate of domestic violence in homes with children and/or pregnant mothers.
- ❖ Increase in the rate of treatment for children exposed to domestic violence and child abuse.
- ❖ Reduction in the percent of children dying from injuries.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of illnesses and deaths due to poisoning from environmental hazards or toxins.

If these positive outcomes can be achieved, when Florida’s infants and young children become older we will impact spending and save taxpayer resources by:

- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of emergency room use and costs for injuries due to violence (e.g., murder, forcible sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, etc.) and non-violent crime (e.g., burglary, breaking and entering, larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft, etc.).
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate in use and costs of corrections and juvenile detention facilities and treatment programs.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of foster care homes and associated payments.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of adoptions subsidies.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of costs associated with child abuse/neglect investigations, protective supervision and court processing.

## Children Ready to Learn and Succeed in School

Quality early care and education beginning in the infancy period should be affordable and accessible for all children. It is the first and crucial step in creating a well-educated work force and citizenry to help build better lives for Florida's families and a prosperous economy for Florida as a whole. Our best investment is to capitalize on the capacity for young children to learn in the early years and to teach our children how to live and work in our rapidly growing and complex world. At the outset, all children should enter school ready to succeed and continue to succeed as they grow. It is our desire that **all children are ready to learn and to succeed in school** as measured by:

- ❖ Increase in the percentage of first-time mothers who have graduated from high school.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children who are read to by their parents and relative caregivers.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children participating in quality early care and education programs.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children screened and receiving supports necessary for identified developmental delays and special needs.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children who reach their developmental potential in physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, problem solving, language development and cognition and general knowledge based on a valid and appropriate school readiness screening tool.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of kindergarten students who attended quality preschool or childcare programs.
- ❖ Reduction in the percent of children who are placed into special education in elementary school.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of state investments in early care and education commensurate with K-college educational investments.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children served by quality early care and education programs (e.g., Gold Seal or other accreditation measures)
- ❖ Reduction in the turnover rate for early care and education workforce.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of early care and education workers with CDAs and other credentials.
- ❖ Increase in the percent of early care and education centers that provide for continuity of care.

If these positive outcomes can be achieved, when Florida's infants and young children become older we will impact spending and save taxpayer resources by:

- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of remedial education costs.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of costs associated with alternative subsidized schools.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate in costs of funding a fifth year of college for undergraduates.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of the number of children below poverty level with at least one parent or relative caregiver employed full-time.

## Stable and Nurturing Families

Florida reflects a society comprised of four generations — children, parents, grandparents and super-elder great-grandparents. For all Floridians to participate fully in society, families need to thrive — children need to be able to grow to full potential and elders need to feel secure and believe they are needed. It is our desire that **all families are stable and nurturing** as measured by:

- ❖ Increase in the percentage of stable new families (i.e., with the first birth to a mother who has completed high school and is age 20 or older and with the father's name recorded on the birth certificate.)
- ❖ Reduction in the number of subsequent pregnancies that occur within two years of the birth of the last baby.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of teenage mothers who have second or more children.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of intended pregnancies.
- ❖ Reduction in the rate of single women giving birth.
- ❖ Reduction in the separation and divorce rate.
- ❖ Reduction in the incidence of “some indication” or “verified” report of child abuse or neglect.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of children under the age of six in need of foster care services.
- ❖ Increase the percentage of children under age six in foster care who are placed in a permanent home within 12 months.
- ❖ Reduction in the average number of moves for children under age six within the child substitute care system (e.g., foster care).
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of families able to access and afford quality early care and education.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of children with vision and hearing problems corrected by the time of entry into kindergarten.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of parents and relative caregivers with parenting knowledge and skills to anticipate and meet the developmental and special needs of their children.
- ❖ Increase in the involvement of elders as contributing members of families.

If these positive outcomes can be achieved, when Florida's infants and young children become older we will impact spending and save taxpayer resources by:

- ❖ Reducing the need for and commensurate costs of teenage parent programs.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of cash supports for young people and parents who cannot compete in the labor market.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of foster care homes and associated payments.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of adoptions subsidies.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of the number of children below poverty level with at least one parent or relative caregiver employed full-time.

## Economically Self-sufficient Families

Low-income and/or single parent families, some with inadequate or unsafe housing, face extraordinary challenges in providing the basic necessities of life. Such families are vulnerable to an array of social and economic challenges: unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, lack of an adequate education and the need for public assistance. Eliminating poverty is an initiative likely to strengthen our communities in many ways, not just economically. It is our desire that **all families are economically self-sufficient** as measured by:

- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of children under age six living in poverty.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of families with children under the age of six living in poverty.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of welfare recipients leaving public assistance because of gainful employment or higher incomes.
- ❖ Reduction in the unemployment rate among parents with children under the age of six.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of employed parents, with children under the age of six, who earn a “living wage”.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of parents, with children under the age of six, who have advanced training beyond high school.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of families, with children under the age of six, able to access affordable and quality early care and education based on the family’s and child’s needs.
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of families, with children under the age of six, living in inadequate or no housing (e.g., homeless, overcrowded, lacking complete plumbing, lacking a complete kitchen, substandard, condemned).

If these positive outcomes can be achieved, when Florida’s infants and young children become older we will impact spending and save taxpayer resources by:

- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of foster care homes and associated payments.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of adoptions subsidies.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of cash subsidies to families who cannot earn a “living wage”.
- ❖ Increasing the growth rate of the tax base for Florida.
- ❖ Increasing the growth rate of Florida’s per capita income.
- ❖ Increasing the Gross State Product (due to higher earnings, increased expenditures, personal savings and investments) for Florida.

## Supportive Communities

For Florida's communities to thrive and for children to grow up to become contributing adults who take their personal and community responsibilities seriously, a stable neighborhood environment that nurtures and supports the four generations represented in our communities is essential. To maximize satisfaction, commitment and retention, employers need to provide high-quality jobs and supportive workplaces that support employees' personal and family well-being. It is our desire that **all communities are supportive of families raising children** as measured by:

- ❖ Increase in the percentage of communities providing access to affordable, high quality early care and education.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of people living in communities that provide activities and primary supports for young children (e.g., arts, recreation, resource centers) including those with special health care and developmental needs.
- ❖ Increase in affordable housing (e.g., less than 30 percent of income is spent on standard housing).
- ❖ Reduction in the percentage of people living in inadequate or no housing (e.g., homeless, overcrowded, housing lacking supports for individuals with needs for special physical accommodations, homes lacking complete plumbing and lacking a complete kitchen; substandard, condemned).
- ❖ Reduction in the rate of housing discrimination complaints.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of people who volunteer an average of one hour or more per week in their community.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of people making contributions to initiatives or charities in their communities through service contributions or through monetary or other donations.
- ❖ Increase in the voter participation rate.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of employers (i.e., public, private and non-profit) involved in identifying and developing quality early care and education options for their community.
- ❖ Increase in the percentage of employers (i.e., public, private and non-profit) providing work-family benefits (e.g., flex-time or part-time employment, paid sick days for parents to attend to children's illnesses, sick child care options, time off for parent-teacher conferences, time off for classroom volunteer opportunities).

If these positive outcomes can be achieved, when Florida's infants and young children become older we will impact spending and save taxpayer resources by:

- ❖ Reducing the growth rate in juvenile detention facility use and costs.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of expenditures associated with homeless services.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of costs associated with employee absenteeism and turnover.
- ❖ Increasing the tax base due to home ownership, stable employment and increased productivity.
- ❖ Reducing the growth rate of costs due to vandalism and juvenile crime.