

**An Analysis of the
Florida's System of Early Care and Education
Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program Position Paper
Representative of Early Childhood Stakeholders
Led by the Florida Children's Forum, January 2003
Using the Core Criteria of Integrated Service Delivery
Developed by The Policy Group**

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The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children is an independent, non-partisan organization composed of local and state leaders who are working together to enhance the well-being of Florida's families and children. The vision of The Policy Group is to ensure a generation of young people ready, willing, and able to contribute to self, to family, and to their community. To this end, the organization seeks to facilitate improvements and/or change across local, state, and federal systems. Extensive study of optimal environments for children and families has convinced The Policy Group of the importance of providing supports that complement natural supports (i.e., family, friends, and neighbors) through an integrated service framework. Additional research has resulted in the identification of nine core criteria of service integration. These criteria are:

- * **Local Community Decision-making** — Improves opportunities for community support and program sustainability due to the ability of communities to identify service needs and for providers to be responsive to those needs.
- * **Prevention Orientation** — Focuses proactively on front-end capacity-building, natural supports, and risk assessments that enable families, and ultimately the service system to reduce the need for preventable, long-term and costly interventions.
- * **Holistic Service Delivery** — Views the family as the client and considers the broader ecological contexts in which families grow and develop.
- * **Evidence-based Practice and Programs** — Builds on logic models and theories of change that are research supported and evidence based.
- * **Supported Front-line Staff and Highly Skilled Staff at all Levels** — Ensures that highly skilled staff are supported in operating as system managers, bringing together the appropriate array of needs-based resources and services.
- * **Flexible Fiscal Policies that Promote Integration and Quality** — Ensures adequate and stable funding to meet quality standards and provides the flexibility to align funding streams in order to provide better and tailored needs-based services.
- * **Family Supportive Policies** — Facilitates ways home, school and community partnerships can balance the needs for stability and change for children and families; enabling families to shape and choose appropriate activities and services for their children and themselves.
- * **Continuity and Ease of Transitions** — Ensures that families have consistent service providers within an organization and that services provided by one entity complement services provided now and at later points in development with other service providers.
- * **Accountability** — Provides the evidence to determine the efficacy of decisions and their impacts for Florida's families and children.

The passage of a constitutional amendment in the November 2002 election to provide free, voluntary prekindergarten services for all four-year-old children in the state prompted the convening of a statewide meeting on November 15th by Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas. State leaders and advocates developed recommendations for the Governor and Legislature regarding implementation of the ballot initiative. Implementation of these recommendations will impact school readiness services and other service delivery systems in the state.

The vision of The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children is that, together, we will ensure a generation of young people who grow up to be responsible adults — ready, willing and able to contribute to self, to family and to their communities.

In light of the impending changes, The Policy Group provides the following comparison of the recommendations and the core criteria of service integration. The intent of this analysis is to spark further discussions regarding the universal prekindergarten initiative and to foster serious consideration of innovative and evidence-based methods of service integration.

Core Criteria	Components of the Criteria Included in the Universal Prekindergarten Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Local Community Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recommendation to retain local school readiness coalitions as advisory councils -Commitment to widespread input from all stakeholders during planning & implementation -Focus on parent awareness regarding services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus on combining & utilizing existing local planning councils for meaningful decision-making -Responsibility to seek on-going community input in planning & implementation -Dedication to engaging & increasing community participation
Prevention Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prekindergarten is a prevention service -Commitment to a system that addresses children birth to age 5 -Recommendation for public awareness & education for families regarding early care & education choices -Focus on comprehensive services that include screening, assessment, & referral to additional services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to asset mapping & needs assessment to determine community service needs -Dedication to public awareness & education efforts coordinated with other family and child support services & needs -Assurance that all families have access to early screening & assessment -Provision for incentives to create linkages between primary & specialized services through inter-agency agreements, cross-training, & inter-agency decision-making bodies -Responsibility to provide adequate funding for high quality services
Holistic Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus on comprehensive services -Commitment to coordination & collaboration among multiple early care & education service entities -Recommendation to develop implementation plans & processes through collaboration between multiple stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provision for comprehensive services that include coordination across the range of family & child services & supports -Assurance of access to family assessments & service delivery for multiple services -Commitment to family input in the planning, implementation, & evaluation processes -Provision for incentives for inter-agency agreements that extend beyond prekindergarten services -Provision for expertise & support to ensure development of clearly articulated implementation plans & processes
Evidence-based Practice & Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to developing & using performance standards & outcome measures -Recommendation to develop guidelines prior to implementation -Focus on utilizing high quality, research-based practice standards -Commitment to measurements that are useful to teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to develop logic models to guide implementation & service delivery -Dedication to developing evaluation plans & outcome measures that address different levels of service provision – child, family, service provider, community, & state -Commitment to third-party evaluations & on-going research & evaluation
Supported Front-line Staff & Highly Skilled Staff at All Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to high quality standards -Focus on credentialed teachers -Recommendation to implement career pathways -Commitment to technical assistance for all service providers -Focus on family involvement strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creation of clearly defined front-line practice model -Responsibility to ensure access to certification programs -Provision for coordinated training opportunities that include other family & child service providers -Facilitation of memberships in professional organizations -Promotion of mentoring programs -Assurance of adequate funding for technical assistance
Flexible Fiscal Policies that Promote Integration & Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to flexible funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assurance of dollars to follow the family rather than the program or provider -Provision for fiscal incentives for integration of services & fund pooling & coordination -Commitment to securing stable funding levels sufficient to meet quality standards -Focus on funding continuity for the family through the service continuum

Core Criteria	Components of the Criteria Included in the Universal Prekindergarten Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Family Supportive Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to family involvement -Focus on quality early care & education -Commitment to parent choice of settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assurance of funding sufficient to provide quality services -Focus on coordinating efforts with other family & child services -Promotion of linkages that advocate for & support quality health care (including dental & mental health), livable wages, parental leave policies, & flexible work-family policies -Commitment to neighborhood settings & neighborhood safety & cohesion
Continuity & Ease of Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commitment to multiple providers & settings -Commitment to children birth to age 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promotion of a no “wrong door” philosophy – parents can access services from multiple community sites -Assurance that records travel with the child & family -Focus on incentives for inter-agency communication, coordination, & collaboration -Commitment to service provision policies that value & ensure careful consideration of prior history & records
Holistic Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus on comprehensive services -Commitment to coordination & collaboration among multiple early care & education service entities -Recommendation to develop implementation plans & processes through collaboration between multiple stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provision for comprehensive services that include coordination across the range of family & child services & supports -Assurance of access to family assessments & service delivery for multiple services -Commitment to family input in the planning, implementation, & evaluation processes -Provision for incentives for inter-agency agreements that extend beyond prekindergarten services -Provision for expertise & support to ensure development of clearly articulated implementation plans & processes

Conclusion

As UPK is being designed, The Policy Group for Florida’s Families and Children urges policymakers to seize the opportunity to build upon the strengths of current programs and current program recommendations for children and families and ensure that missing components are added. This policy brief compares the recommendations offered by the early childhood stakeholders and the core criteria of integrated service delivery identified by The Policy Group. The intent of this analysis is to spark further discussions regarding the universal prekindergarten initiative and to foster serious consideration of innovative and evidence-based methods of service integration.

Reference

Florida Children’s Forum. (2003). *Florida’s System of Early Care and Education Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program Position Paper Representative of Early Childhood Stakeholders*. Tallahassee, FL: author.



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