

**An Analysis of the Universal Prekindergarten Implementation Proposal
Developed by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents
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.

With the support of numerous organizations, associations, and state leaders, a constitutional amendment to provide free, voluntary prekindergarten (UPK) services for all four-year-old children in the state passed during the 2002 November election. The implementation of the amendment is now being considered and designed. The Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) has developed a white paper with recommendations for the Governor and Legislature regarding implementation of the ballot initiative.

FADSS provides the unique perspective of district school superintendents who must routinely balance competing education demands and requirements and their support of quality prekindergarten for young children, particularly children at risk, as a sound educational foundation for future school success. As such there are components of the proposal that do partially provide for the criteria for successful systems. Our analysis of these recommendations enables policy makers and program designers the benefit of seeing where additional components will be needed to fully implement UPK successfully for all children in Florida.

Criterion 1: Local Community Decision-Making

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.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Local planning councils	District school boards would be designated as local administering bodies & are recognized as elected bodies accountable to local communities	District school boards may limit broad-based citizen input and decision-making; districts may have limited decision-making authority as to how UPK is implemented
Regular opportunities for community input	District school board meetings are public meetings & offer opportunities for public comment; School Advisory Councils at individual schools provide additional opportunities for parental input	There is great variability among districts as to their success in engaging broad community input
Efforts to engage broad community participation	District school boards will have the option to contract with local coalitions to monitor UPK contracts with private early care and education providers; the proposal does not directly address community participation in the process	There is great variability among districts as to their success in engaging broad community participation

Criterion 2: Prevention Orientation

A 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.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Community asset mapping & needs assessment	The proposal recognizes district school boards as elected bodies that are accountable to local communities	The proposal offers no specific guidelines or recommendations for community needs assessment
Public awareness & education	The proposal notes the importance of reporting a summary of kindergarten readiness scores for UPK providers to the public	Widespread public awareness & education regarding UPK and early care and education is not addressed; there are no incentives for partners at the state or local level to work collaboratively to increase public awareness & education
Focus on early identification through screening	The proposal recognizes the expertise of district school boards in screening children and providing services in exceptional student education; children at-risk due to a number of factors would be targeted for services early during the phase-in process	The proposal is limited to 4-year-old children and does not address screening and early identification of children younger than age 4
Funding priorities include prevention services	UPK is a prevention service; district school boards have a history of providing high quality early intervention and prevention services	The proposal is limited to serving 4-year-old children
Linkages between primary & specialized service providers (e.g., inter-agency agreements, cross-training, meetings)	District school boards provide guidance, exceptional student education, and access to psychologists; UPK will include a parent involvement/education component; district school boards may contract with local coalitions to monitor UPK contracts with private early care and education providers	The proposal focuses on UPK services and does not address health, family support, or other community services; there is no requirement to link the parenting component with existing community parent skill-building services; there are no apparent incentives for the development of interagency agreements and coordination other than those with local coalitions for contract monitoring

Criterion 3: Holistic Service Delivery

Holistic service delivery views the family as the client and considers the broader ecological contexts in which families grow and develop.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Family input	The proposal includes a provision to give parents a choice of school-based or contracted sites	Opportunities for family input in program design, implementation, and evaluation are not specifically addressed
Family assessment & services appropriate to family needs	The proposal includes a parent involvement/education component	Proposed services are directed at the child; family assessment and services are not addressed
Inter-agency agreements	District school boards will have the option of contracting with local coalitions to monitor UPK contracts with private early care and education providers	References to contracts and coordination efforts are limited to early care and education services; there are no incentives for collaboration with parent skill-building, family support, or health service agencies
Clearly articulated implementation plans & processes	The proposal designates the Florida Department of Education (DOE) as the governing entity to establish implementation plans & guidelines; the proposal also outlines a phase-in process	Specifics regarding implementation, the decision-making role of local district school boards, and coordination plans with private early care and education providers is not provided
Family satisfaction surveys	The proposal includes a program evaluation component	The outline for program evaluation does not address family input
Multiple integrated service provision	The proposal argues that UPK efforts should focus on implementation of the services addressed in the amendment and should not attempt to broaden the scope to include younger or older children or family services; the plan calls for a comprehensive program	The proposal does not address services to families beyond the provision of UPK

Criterion 4: Evidence-based Practice and Programs

Evidence-based practice and programs builds on logic models and theories of change that are research supported and evidence based.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Logic Models/Theories of Change	The proposal calls for implementation of a research-based literacy model and mathematics program	The proposal does not address the use of evidence-based theories of change to guide service delivery
Specified performance & outcome measures	The proposal calls for high quality UPK programs; establishment & monitoring of program quality standards; evaluation of children's achievement (pre and post program participation); using aggregate student school readiness achievement scores for program accountability purposes	Program performance standards have not been identified; system wide assessment and outcome measures have not been identified; there are concerns about extending testing to young children and holding programs accountable based on the performance of young children on a screening instrument
Use of research findings in practice & planning	The proposal calls for the use of research-based programs and curricula	Implementation of research-based programs and curricula will be dependent on funding levels and specific implementation plans
Evaluation plans	Children will be evaluated at entry and exit from UPK programs; programs will be evaluated based on program operations, activities, expenditures, number of children served, ratio of staff to children, staff qualifications, & individual student school readiness evaluation findings; program data will be collected and measured longitudinally	The proposal does not address system evaluation or a third party evaluation
Incentives for on-going research & evaluation	The proposal calls for on-going and longitudinal program evaluation	The proposal provides no incentives for on-going research or local/state level evaluation

Criterion 5: Supported Front-Line Staff and Highly Skilled Staff at all Levels

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.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Front-line practice model that emphasizes empathy, responsiveness, family involvement, & results	District school boards have a history of supporting high quality front-line practice models such as teacher certification programs & SACS accreditation	Implementation of the outlined staffing requirements, particularly in private contracted sites, will depend on funding levels and specific implementation plans
Certification programs	The public education system supports teacher certification, and the proposal outlines guidelines for certification and/or minimum staffing credentials	Implementation of the outlined staffing requirements, particularly in private contracted sites, will depend on funding levels and specific implementation plans
Cross-training programs		The proposal does not address cross-training programs; due to the focus of the proposal on services to 4-year-old children only, coordinated training plans that include other family service providers are unlikely
Professional organizations	The public education system has a history of supporting staff professionalism	Implementation of the outlined level of staff professionalism, particularly in private contracted sites, will depend on funding levels and specific implementation plans
Career pathways	The proposal outlines a career path from paraprofessional to certified teacher	The state has not implemented an early childhood career pathway proposal, Pathways to Professionalism, that includes articulation agreements between paraprofessional, community college, and university programs
Mentoring programs	The public education system has a history of encouraging mentoring relationships between new and experienced teachers	The proposal does not specifically address mentoring programs
Technical assistance	The public education system has a history of high quality continuing education & technical support programs	Technical assistance is not addressed in the proposal and will be particularly important for private contracted prekindergarten programs

Criterion 6: Flexible Fiscal Policies that Promote Integration and Quality

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.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Dollars appropriated to follow the family as distinct from programs or providers	Families will complete an application that includes preferences for service locations; an FTE funding structure will be initiated	There are no incentives to work collaboratively with other family support agencies to jointly fund & serve family needs
Fiscal incentives for integration	The proposal encourages maintenance of current school readiness funding for extended day & extended year services	There are no fiscal incentives for integrated funding
Stable funding levels sufficient to meet quality standards	The proposal calls for an FTE funding formula to match the district's FTE for a 6-hour day, 180-day school year; funding for capital outlays and salaries & benefits commensurate with other professionals and nonprofessionals in similar positions in local education agencies is proposed	Funding levels for public school programs are more likely to meet quality standards than current school readiness funding levels, however, the proposed funding may be insufficient to bring contracted private early care and education settings up to established quality standards
Continuity of funding through service continuum	The proposed funding covers a service continuum of one school year of UPK services	Early care and education services for children under age 4 and other services to families are not addressed; the proposal does not ensure that children will be able to remain in UPK settings beyond the 6-hour day, 180-day school year
Non-categorical funding streams	Florida DOE would administer the UPK funding stream	The level of funding flexibility that local district school boards will have is unclear
Fund pooling & coordination	The phase-in of the proposal calls for serving 4-year-old children currently in school readiness programs during the first year; the proposal encourages maintenance of current school readiness funding for extended day & extended year services	Fund pooling & coordination is not directly addressed; there are no incentives for fund pooling & coordination

Criterion 7: Family Supportive Policies

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.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Degree of parent involvement in early care & education settings	The proposal includes a parent involvement/education component	Additional specificity will be needed to ensure a strong parent involvement component
Quality of early care & education	The proposal recommends the development of program standards by Florida DOE that ensure high quality services	Funding & implementation plans must be sufficient to provide assistance to school-based sites & contracted private early care and education programs to reach high quality standards
Quality of health care	The proposal calls for a comprehensive program & notes access to guidance, exceptional student education, and school psychologists in public school programs	The proposal seems unlikely to provide incentives for expanded health services (including dental and mental health) in early care & education settings; integration with family health care services is not addressed
Livable wages	The proposal argues that UPK efforts should focus on implementation of the services addressed in the amendment and should not attempt to broaden the scope to include a focus on the employment status of the parents	There are no requirements or incentives to coordinate with family support programs or to advocate for livable wages
Flexible work-family policies		There are no requirements or incentives to partner with other organizations to encourage flexible work-family policies
Parental leave policies		Parental leave is not addressed in the proposal
Access to neighborhood activity settings; neighborhood safety & cohesion	Families will complete an application that includes preferences for service locations	There are no incentives to coordinate UPK services with other neighborhood services

Criterion 8: Continuity and Ease of Transitions

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.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
No "wrong door" philosophy	The proposal calls for development of simplified point of entry into UPK for 4-year-olds	There are no incentives to link the UPK simplified point of entry with entry points to other family services
Records that travel with the child & family	The proposal outlines accountability mechanisms to track children's performance from entry into UPK to readiness for kindergarten and later performance on FCAT	The proposal does not address the exchange of information or records between UPK programs and other early childhood programs children attended prior to age 4
Degree of inter-agency communication, coordination, & collaboration	The proposal suggests contracting relationships with local coalitions and private early care & education providers	There are no requirements or incentives for local district school boards to develop inter-agency agreements, coordinate efforts with other family support agencies, or collaborate with other community leaders; there are no requirements for the Florida DOE to collaborate with other agencies & entities in the development of an implementation plan
Service provision policies that value & ensure careful consideration of prior history & records	Public education entities have mechanisms in place to share records with other public education entities & to share child performance records between teachers	The proposal does not address the exchange of information or records between UPK programs and other early childhood programs children attended prior to age 4 or with other family service providers

Criterion 9: Accountability

Accountability provides the evidence to determine the efficacy of decisions and their impacts for Florida's families and children.

Means of Assessing the Criterion	Components of the Criterion in FADSS Recommendations	Essential Components of the Criterion that should also be Included for Successful Implementation
Local & state level outcomes	The proposal calls for the development and local/state level reporting of program and child performance standards that are in line with existing DOE standards	Local & state level outcomes & benchmarks are yet to be developed
Continuous quality improvement	District school boards have a history of utilizing continuous quality improvement plans	UPK school-based and contracted private early care & education programs will need training & technical assistance regarding continuous quality improvement; funding must be sufficient to provide training & technical assistance
Results-based budgeting	The State of Florida requires all state entities to utilize results-based budgeting	The implementation plan will need to clearly address mechanisms for results-based budgeting for UPK
Evaluation plans on the individual, program, & system levels	The proposal calls for the evaluation of program and child performance, including longitudinal evaluation	The proposal does not address system level evaluation & family assessment; UPK funding & the implementation plan to be developed by Florida DOE will need to provide ample program monitoring & follow-up training & technical assistance

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 district school superintendents 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 Association of District School Superintendents (2003). *Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten Constitutional Amendment Implementation White Paper*. Tallahassee, FL: author.



This paper is a publication developed with the input and support of the Fellows of The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children

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