

Florida's Early Childhood System Policy Report

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# Policy Matters

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Results of Stakeholder Planning and Prioritizing  
September 2007

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## Introduction

National Education Goal One: *By the Year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.*

Long before the President and the nation's governors established "readiness to learn" as the first of six national education goals in 1989, the importance of healthy development in the early years was known. The inclusion of the goal, however, marked a turning point at which knowledge gained currency as a policy issue. Informing this policy issue has been a rapidly growing body of knowledge about the science of early childhood and early brain development. Through the work of the nation's leading neuroscientists, developmental psychologists, pediatricians and economists, there is now consensus about what we know about development in the early years.<sup>1</sup>

"Thus, the time has come to close the gap between what we know (from systematic scientific inquiry across a broad range of disciplines) and what we do (through both public and private sector policies and practices) to promote the healthy development of all young children."<sup>2</sup>

Significant work is being done to close the gap. Most notable is Policy Matters, a project designed to develop and make available coherent, comprehensive information regarding the strength and adequacy of state policies affecting children, families, and communities. Policy Matters endeavors to establish consensus among policy experts and state leaders regarding the mix of policies shown to offer the best opportunity for improving child and family well-being through an integrated system.<sup>3</sup>

Policy Matters builds on national early childhood system efforts, including *Quality 2000* (understanding the need for systems thinking), *Not by Chance* (identifying the elements of the system), *Financing Project* (determining the costs of a system) and the *Policy Matters Report* by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (conceptualizing state policy benchmarks).

In 2006, Florida became the sixth state to engage in the Policy Matters project. Working with Lynn Kagan, Ed.D, and Kristie Kauerz, M.A., of the National Center for Children and Families, Teacher's College, Columbia University, a variety of stakeholders throughout Florida set out to determine how well the state's policies support an early childhood system of services. Policy Matters is strategic policy planning, not short-term, limited advocacy. Beginning in June 2006 and continuing today, it looks at what constitutes an early childhood system in Florida and how policies can affect that system, and implements a long-term, coordinated effort to improve the system.

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## The Florida Project

The Florida Policy Matters project consisted of three phases, all of which were designed to assess Florida's current early childhood policies, set policy goals and priorities, discern the state's potential for policy change, and develop a strategic policy agenda and the tools to move that agenda.

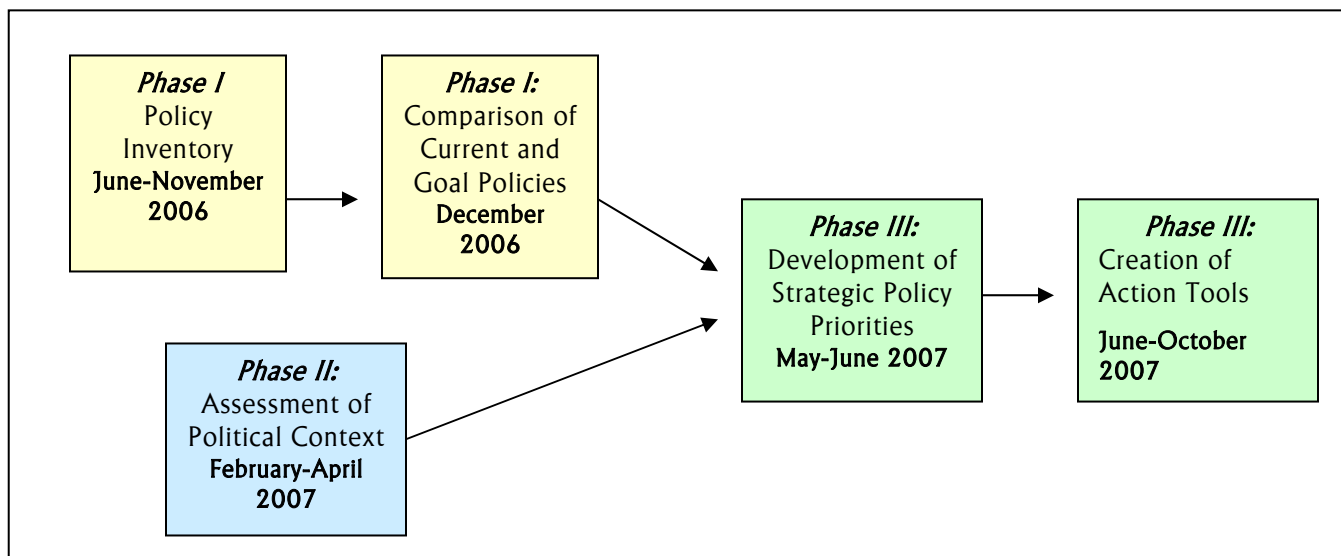
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<sup>1</sup> National Scientific Council, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007

<sup>2</sup> National Scientific Council, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007

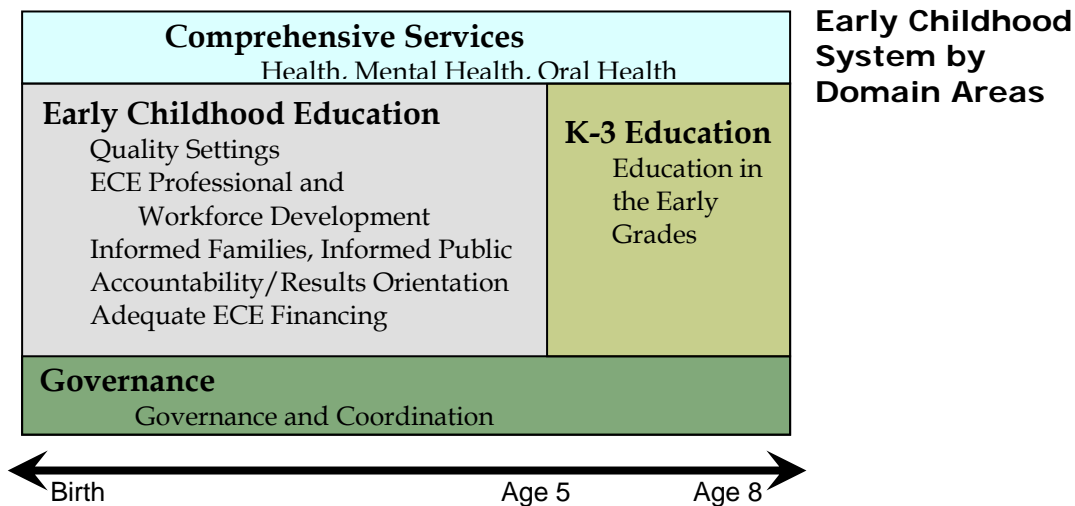
<sup>3</sup> Kagan & Rigby, 2003

## Phases of Florida's Policy Matters Project



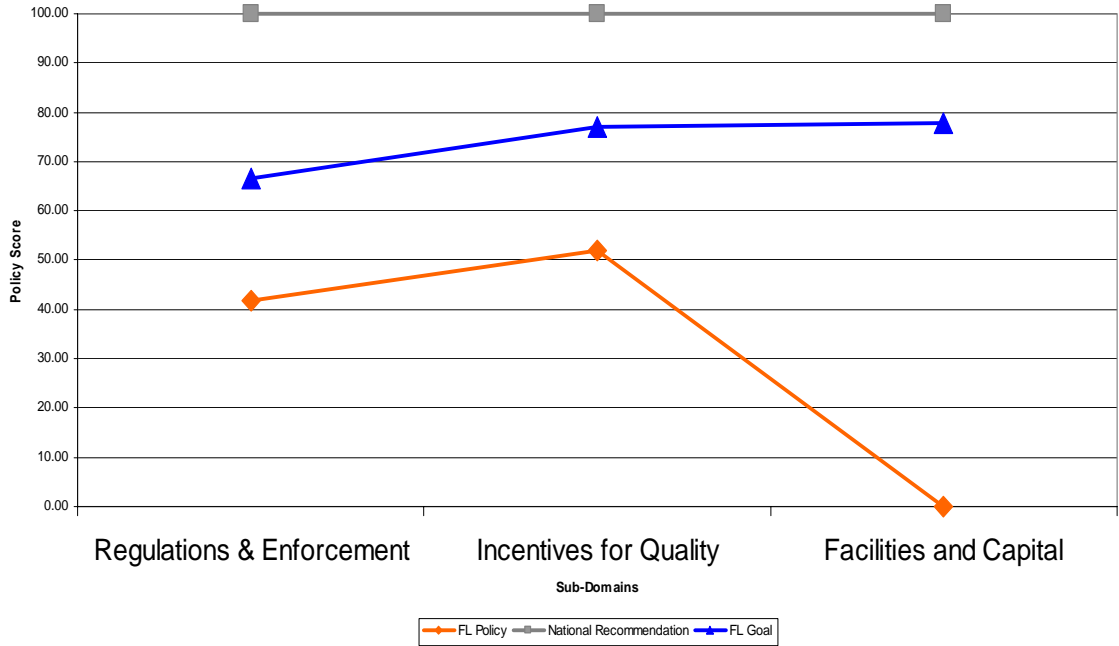
Participants in Phase 1 included AWI Office of Early Learning, Department of Education Department of Health, Early Steps, Department of Children and Families, Children's Services Councils, private foundations, school districts, medical professionals, individuals, nonprofit organizations, state and private universities, The Children's Campaign, The Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers and Healthy Babies, Healthy Families, Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, Florida Head Start, child care providers, Early Learning Coalitions, the United Way of Florida and The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children.

Together, Florida's Policy Matters participants assessed state policies across eight domains or policy areas critical to a coherent, quality, accessible and affordable early childhood system. For each of more than 100 policies represented within the eight policy areas, participants determined existing policy levels, then set goals for where they would like state policy to be. Results clearly demonstrated where improvement is needed and highlighted areas in which Florida is doing well by national standards.

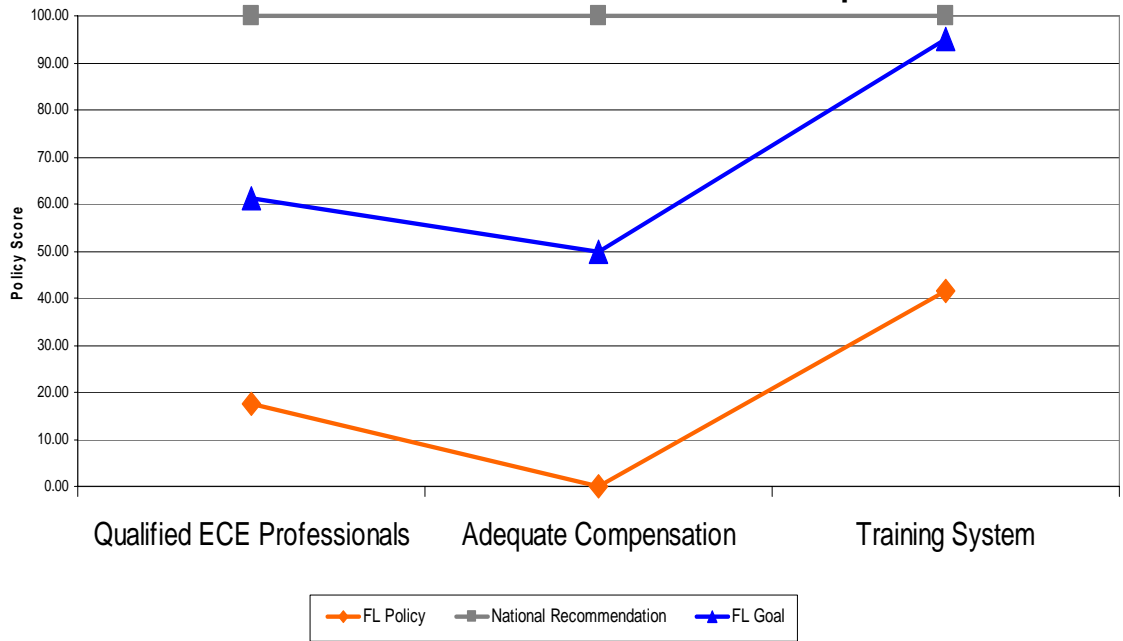


Complete results by policy domain/area follow. These findings demonstrate where improvements can be made that contribute to a sound early childhood system in Florida. The charts also show how Florida's stakeholders chose to set goals to achieve improvements.

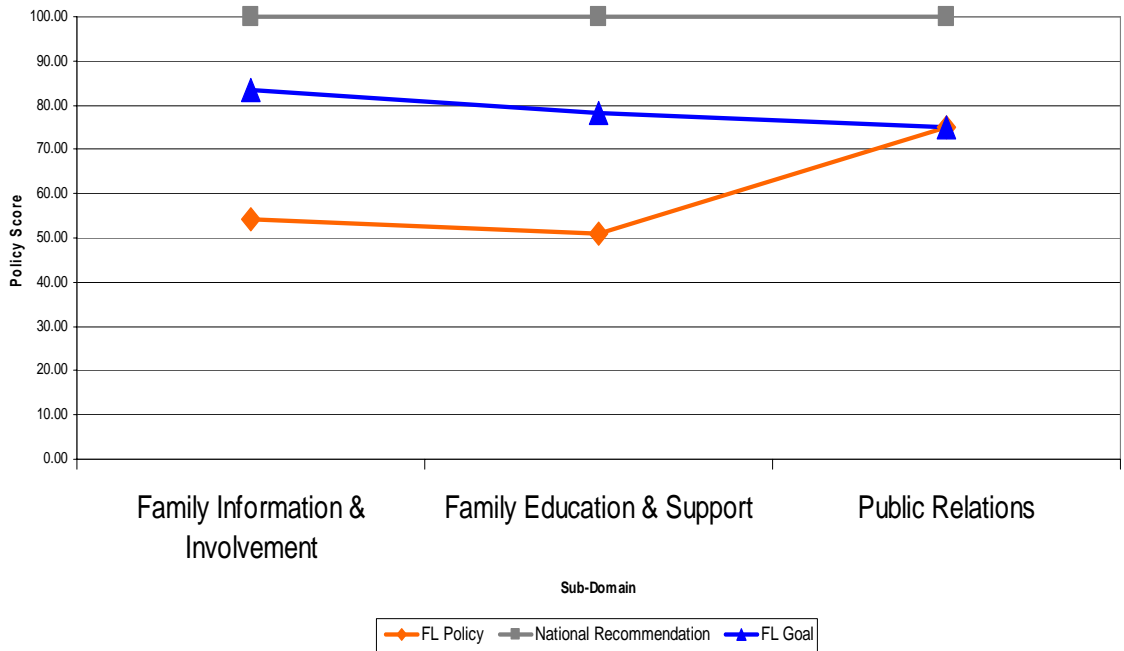
### Domain I: Quality Early Care and Education Settings



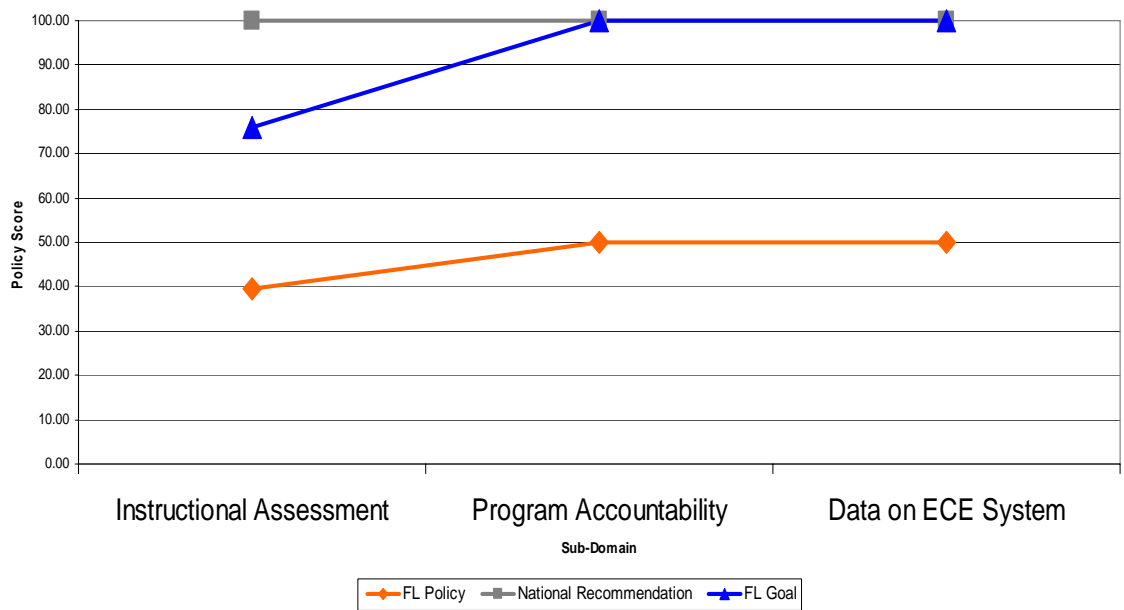
### Domain II: Professional and Workforce Development



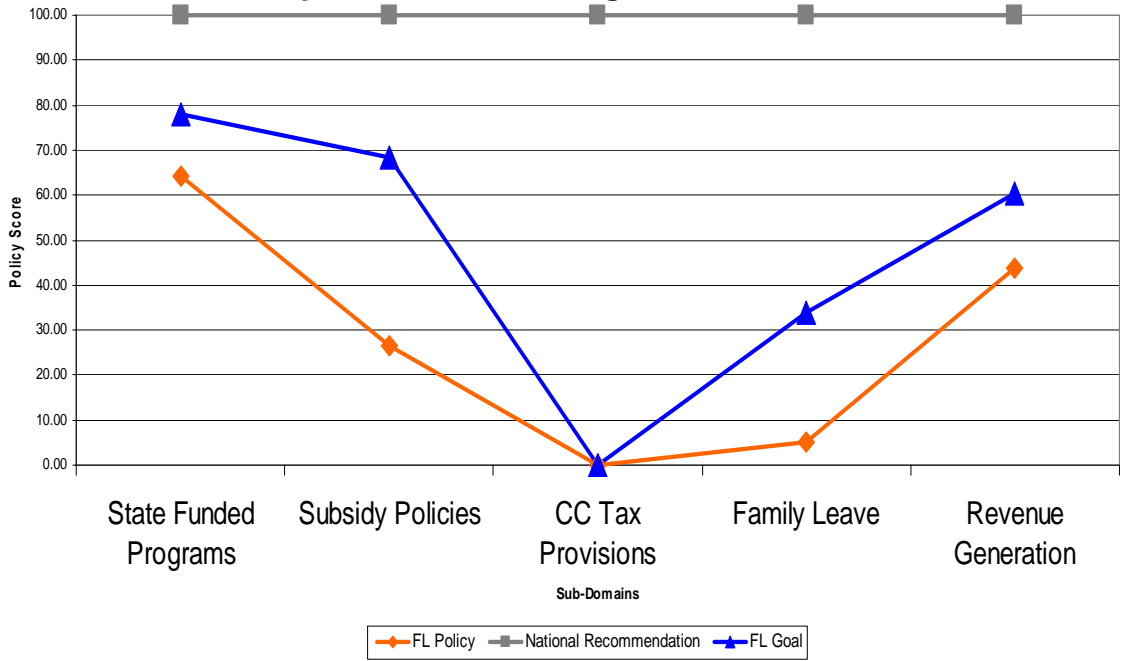
### Domain III: Informed Families, Informed Public



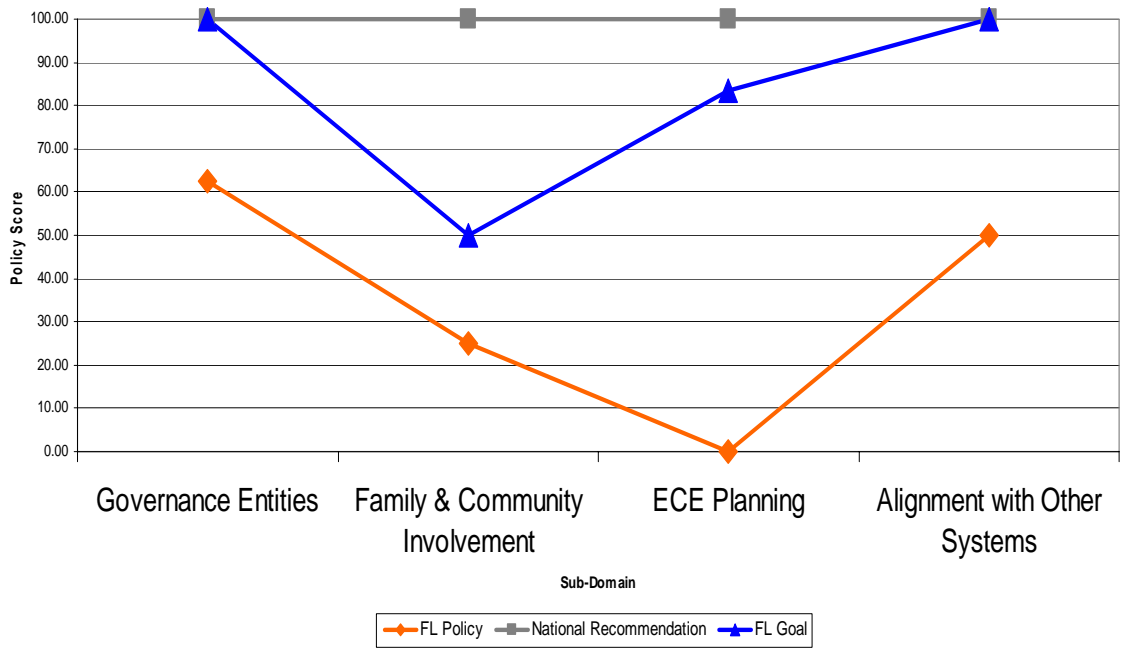
### Domain IV: Accountability and Results Orientation



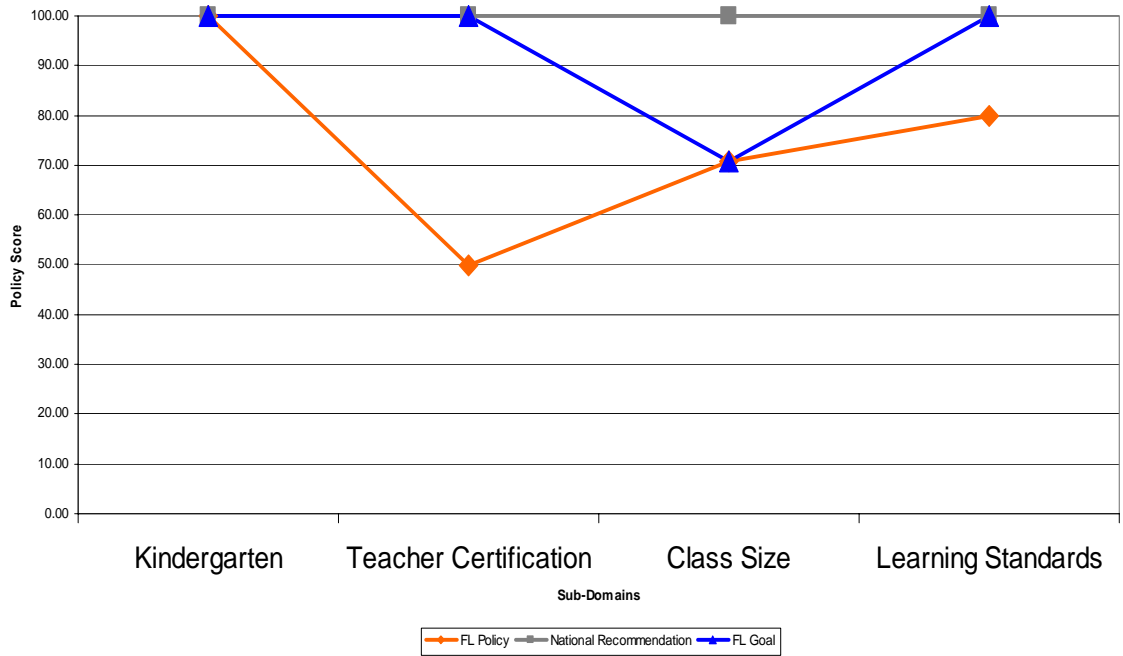
### Domain V: Adequate ECE Financing



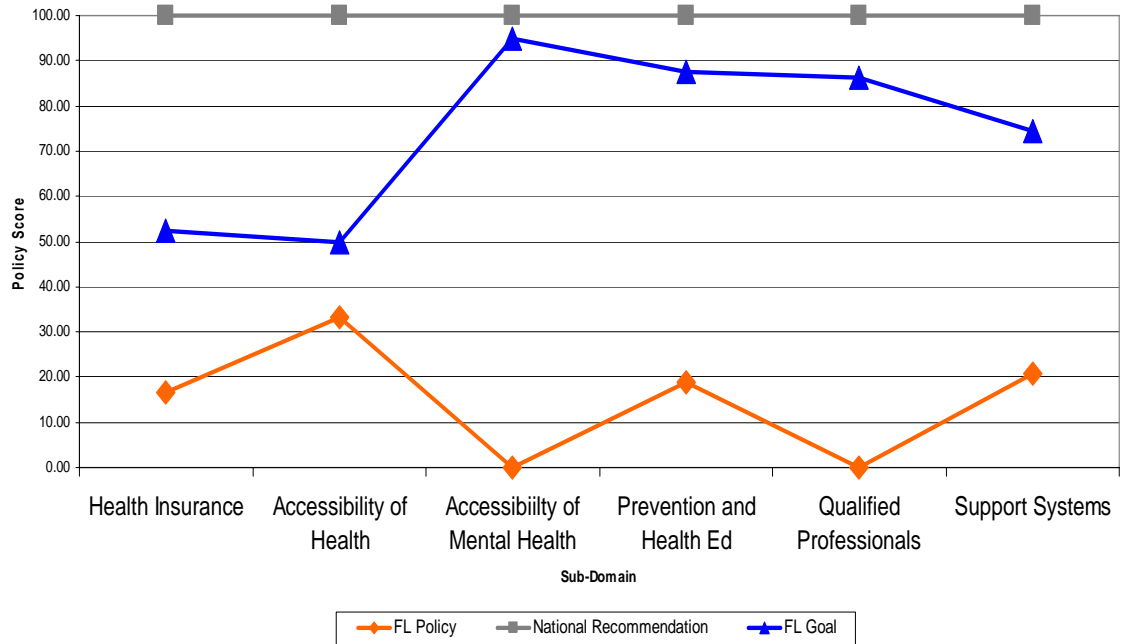
### Domain VI: Governance and Coordination



### Domain VII: Education in the Early Grades



### Domain VIII: Health, Oral Health and Mental Health



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## Analysis of Findings

Florida has some clear policy successes! The state meets national recommendations on 16 policy features. On six policy features, Florida shows promising progress, nearing national recommendations. **The areas in which Florida met national recommendations were:**

- Family Child Care Regulation
- Quality Improvement Supports
- Resource and Referral Capacity
- Public Information Reporting and Dissemination
- Monitoring School Readiness Trends
- Investment in ECE for 3- and 4-year olds
- Mixed-Delivery System for ECE
- Drawing Down Federal ECE Funds
- Sustainability in Funding
- Public Provision of Kindergarten
- Full-Day Kindergarten Funding Parity
- Funding for Kindergarten
- Grades 1-3 Learning Standards
- Kindergarten Instructional Assessment
- Grades 1-3 Instructional Assessment
- Primary Health Services Coverage

**The areas in which Florida nears national recommendations are:**

- Differential Reimbursement to ECE Programs
- Early Learning Standards
- Data Collection Infrastructure
- State-Level Governance Entity
- Local-Level Governance Entities
- Class size in Grades 1-3

Six of the 17 policy features that meet national recommendations and three of the four highest scored sub-domains are in the policy domain of Education in the Early Grades. The relatively higher rankings of these policies likely reflect the state's ongoing investment in the quality of K-3 education, class size reduction legislation and recent establishment of the voluntary prekindergarten program for 4-year-olds.

**The sub-domains on which Florida ranked the highest overall were (from highest to lowest):**

- Kindergarten (already at national recommendations)
- K-3 Learning Standards
- Public Relations
- K-3 Class Size
- State-Funded ECE Programs
- Governance Entities

**The lowest rankings were in the areas of:**

Facilities and Capital  
Adequate Compensation  
Child Care Tax Provisions  
ECE Planning  
Accessibility of Mental Health  
Qualified Health Professionals

Looking at results overall, current policy scores varied widely across the sub-domains. This variation likely means that some sub-domains have been easier to address (due to federal or state priorities, available funding, stakeholder interest, etc.) The variation also means that it will be difficult to work toward uniform policy change across the entire system.

The analysis of current policies and stakeholder-defined goal levels revealed that seven sub-domains had the largest gaps between current and desired policy levels. These domains will require big steps to reach the state-selected policy level:

Availability of Mental Health Services  
Qualified Health Professionals  
ECE Planning  
Facilities and Capital  
Prevention and Health Education  
Health System Supports  
Training System

Seven other sub-domains had the smallest gaps between current and desired policy levels, and will require only small steps to reach the state-selected policy level:

State-funded Programs  
Revenue Generation  
Accessibility of Primary Health Care  
K-3 Learning Standards  
Regulations and Enforcement  
Incentives for Quality  
Family and Community Involvement in Governance

In comparing state policy levels to goal levels established by state stakeholders, three areas were widely disparate, requiring a more radical approach to change:

Quality ECE Settings  
Governance and Coordination  
Health, Oral Health, Mental Health

In three other areas, current policies and goal levels sometimes intersect, requiring a more targeted approach to change:

Informed Families, Informed Public  
Adequate ECE Financing  
Education in the Early Grades

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## Understanding Florida's Political Context

The next step in the Florida Policy Matters process was to understand the political landscape in which policy change occurs. To successfully move issues into the public agenda requires an understanding of how policymakers, opinion leaders and the public think and act on issues related to early childhood care and education. The Columbia University Policy Matters team conducted an assessment focused on leadership, institutional structures and the political culture of policy making in Florida; a state-specific "map" of current initiatives, efforts, and organizations operating in this policy arena; and identification of promising political strategies and capacity for action. The team synthesized results of a web-based survey completed by Florida stakeholders and the institutional perspective provided by an analysis of secondary sources relevant to political institutions and processes in Florida.

In terms of population demographics, several indicators are key to understanding the political system. Florida is growing twice as fast as the nation overall (11.3% vs. 5.3% between 2000 and 2005). Florida has the highest percentage of residents age 65 and older (16.6% vs. 12.1% in nation in 2005). And Florida has a lower percentage of residents under age 5 than the nation overall (6.4% vs. 7.0% in 2005). In 2005-2006, Florida spent \$2,163 per child enrolled in Pre-K, and \$9,739 per child enrolled in K-12.

One out of four Florida residents (age 5+) speaks a language other than English at home (25.4% vs. 19.4% in nation). The median household income is below the national median (\$42,433 vs. \$46,242 in nation). Homeownership rates are high (70.1% vs. 66.2% in the nation), and the poverty rate is lower than the nation overall (12.8% vs. 13.3%).

In reviewing state sources of revenue, the Columbia University Policy Matters team reported that per capital revenue (2004) is collected from:

Corporate income tax = \$83 (ranks 28th)  
Property tax = \$1,064 (ranks 20th)  
State and local general sales tax = \$1,035 (ranks 9th)  
Florida has no personal income tax.

It is important to note that since this data was collected, the Florida Legislature passed property tax reform legislation, designed to dramatically lower property tax payments for most Florida homeowners and businesses. The impact of property tax reform overall, let alone on funding for early childhood, has not yet been fully realized. In late July 2007, Senate President Ken Pruitt and House Speaker Marco Rubio jointly announced that the Florida Legislature will convene for a Special Session on the state budget deficit (nearly \$1-billion), beginning Sept. 18, 2007 and possibly lasting until early October 2007.

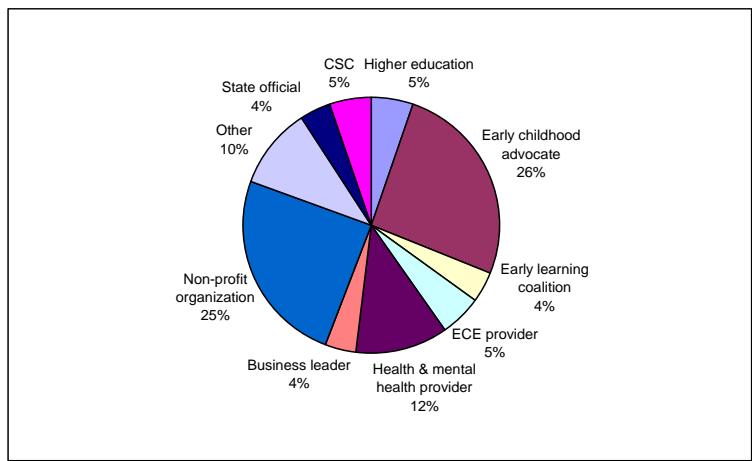
The Policy Matters Team also noted the unique aspects of Florida's governorship. For example, the Governorship is responsible for the budget, but the Florida Legislature has unlimited power to change it. The Governorship has item veto power that only a special majority of the Legislature can override, and limited appointment power in major functional areas (i.e., Corrections, K-12 education, Health, Transportation, Public Utilities Regulation, Welfare). The Commissioner of Education Office is appointed by and serves at the will of the State Board of Education, but the Governor appoints all seven voting members of the State Board.

The Policy Matters Team’s political analysis included mention of Florida’s new Governor Charlie Crist, who was elected with a comfortable majority. Crist has shown a steady progression in his political career. It is early in his term and he can run again. So the influence of Governor Crist on early childhood issues remains to be seen. Governor Crist enjoys a high approval rating (73% approval in March 2007).

The team found that Florida’s Legislature is above the national average on indicators of professionalism. Lawmakers are full-time (spend approximately 80% or more of their time on the job) and receive professional compensation.

Finally, the Columbia University Policy Matters team reviewed recent legislation establishing a Florida Children’s Cabinet. Designed as a vehicle for interagency collaboration, the Cabinet is mandated to provide “coordinated and comprehensive” services for children and youth. There will be 15 members: the Governor (Chair) and nine agency heads (including the Secretary of the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Director of the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Secretary of Health, the Commissioner of Education), plus five children and youth advocacy leaders who will be appointed by the Governor. The establishment of a Cabinet provides promise for beginning to integrate a system of services.

In addition to analyzing the Florida political context, The Columbia University Policy Matters team also conducted a web-based survey of nearly 426 stakeholders in Florida with a 15% response rate. Respondents represented a diverse group of stakeholders (see chart) whose perceptions of early childhood leadership, collaboration, funding and other issues were explored.



**Survey Respondents by Category**

Survey respondents identified key legislators and certain state agency officials as early childhood champions within government. Identified as champions outside government were Dave Lawrence (chairman of The Children’s Trust, Miami, and former Chair of the Florida Partnership for School Readiness), the Florida Children’s Services Councils, and the Florida Children’s Campaign. Perceived opponents to an early childhood system in Florida were other legislators and some private child care provider associations. Some respondents expressed uncertainty over who opponents were and who champions were!

Participants were asked the barriers to getting 10 different stakeholder groups (e.g., business, media, advocates, legislators) more involved in early care and education issues. Across the board, respondents said they believed the biggest barrier was that early care and education is not a high priority.

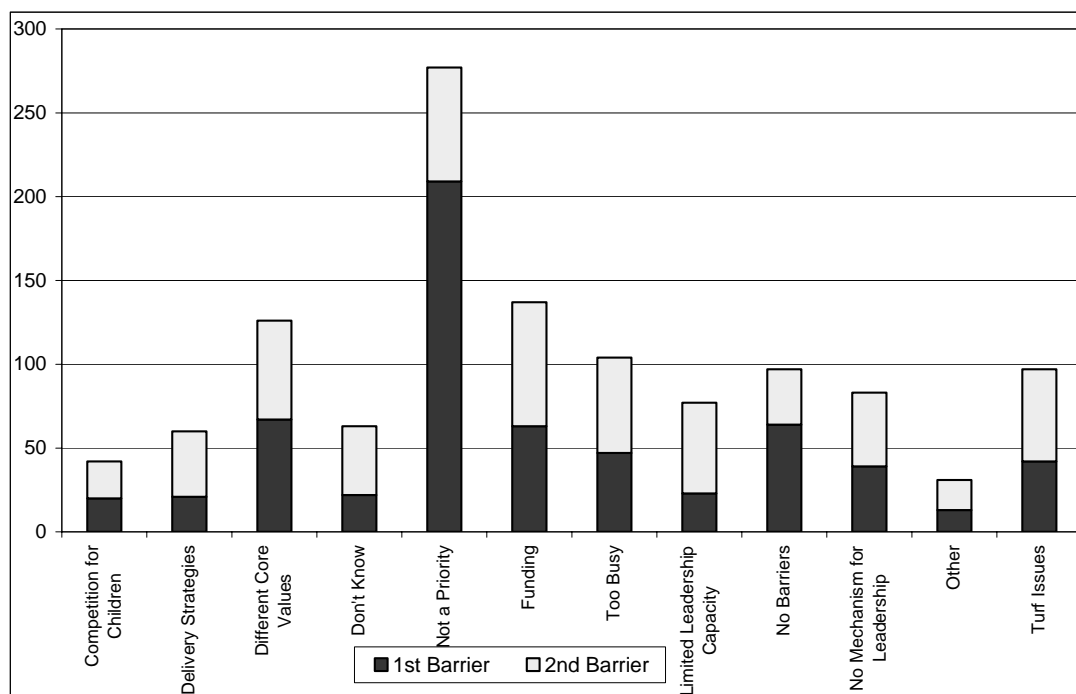
The survey also asked about collaboration, which is crucial to an effective early childhood system of services. Nearly 74% want much more collaboration; only 32% thought formal collaboration happens somewhat or very frequently, and 45% thought informal collaboration happens somewhat or very frequently.

In terms of making systemic change, respondents believed the most important facilitators are:

- Leadership from the Governor
- Common core values
- Consolidated regulations and funding streams
- Leadership from agency directors
- Paid staff positions that coordinate collaborative efforts

Most important barriers were believed to be funding and competing priorities.

### Barriers to Early Childhood Systemic Change



A key component of the survey addressed potential funding sources for new early childhood investments. When asked to identify potential funding sources, respondents indicated that investment from the business sector has high potential as a funding source, while advocacy for increased federal funding, allocation of existing public general revenue and alternative revenue sources have medium potential. Generation of new public revenue was judged to be a source with low potential.

Respondents indicated that Florida needs advocacy voices and elected officials who support early childhood. They also consider strengths of Florida's political context to be changes in leadership (a new governor and a new climate of "more voice" and bi-partisanship), and governance, particularly Children's Services Councils, Early Learning Coalitions, the pending Florida Children's Cabinet; greater collaboration, a greater awareness of the importance of early childhood, and strong advocates. Unclear,

however, is the impact of property tax reform in general, and on supporting early childhood in particular.

Overall, the survey revealed that the creation of a Children's Cabinet creates opportunity for leadership, coordination and alignment across early childhood policy areas. Changes in leadership present a window of opportunity for systemic early childhood change.

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## Next Steps

With Policy Matters as a firm foundation, the necessary components of an early childhood system are defined and supported. Early childhood systemic change now has a vision, purpose and direction. Collaboration, determination and leadership can contribute to Florida becoming a model early childhood state. There are no limits other than the willingness and capacity of stakeholders throughout the state to create the future.

Later this year, Lynn Kagan, Ed.D., Kristie Kauerz, M.A., and others will publish the results of a new study of state governance structures. Dr. Kagan has reviewed the governance strategies of all 50 states and will provide case studies of noteworthy approaches. It is expected that the results of this study will help state policy makers as they consider various strategies to link the governance of early childhood programs at the state and local level.

The importance of this study to Florida cannot be overemphasized. During the past legislative session, The Florida Legislature passed legislation creating a Florida Children's Cabinet, designed to bring together all of the agencies serving children to develop and implement a shared vision for improving child and family outcomes. Also passed was an amendment asking for an independent study by OPPAGA on the issue of consolidating all early education programs into one entity.

Florida's Policy Matters stakeholders ranked governance and planning issues as three out of five top priorities to emerge from the Policy Matters process. Early childhood planning ranked No. 1, with alignment of early childhood education with other systems as No. 4 and state and local governance entities No. 5. (No. 2 was adequate compensation and No. 3 was incentives for quality. Both these areas are being addressed with current QRIS initiatives and activities.)

To complete the third phase of Policy Matters, in late October 2007, Lynn Kagan will bring together Florida's Policy Matters participants and other key stakeholders around three issues: 1) what "best practice" information has been gained from the study of early childhood governance in all states; 2) the history of governance in Florida; and 3) several promising models that would work in Florida.

Florida's foundational work in Policy Matters is not expected to end there. With multiple uses and implications for early childhood system development supported by policy, Florida's Policy Matters provides a rich basis on which stakeholders can confidently move forward in developing and sustaining that system in Florida.

For more information on Florida's Policy Matters project, please visit [www.policygroup.org](http://www.policygroup.org), email [policygroup@att.net](mailto:policygroup@att.net), or call 863-651-8445.

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## Acknowledgement

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