

Anticipated Outcomes of The Florida Policy Agenda

Developed with

The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children

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Our Reason for Being

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*.

The Policy Group 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 Policy Group was established in 2001 as a non-profit organization and is committed to having a Board that benefits from diversity in racial, ethnic and gender composition; diversity of personal and professional experiences and competencies; and diversity of geographic region.

The impetus for the development of The Policy Group came from the statewide organization of Children's Services Councils. The Policy Group includes leaders from statewide and local organizations and universities with long histories of concern about the well-being of Florida's families and children. The Fellows of The Policy Group bring to the table statewide perspectives, local perspectives in implementing change in Florida communities, experience in policy analysis and development, and research and evaluation.

The Policy Group, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, benefits from financial and in-kind support from its membership and their organizations. Additionally, the Policy Group seeks additional funds for its research and publications costs, principally from private foundations, and individual and corporate sponsors. By donating to The Policy Group, your tax-deductible gift of any size will contribute to the future of the children of Florida.

The specific issues and topics addressed by The Policy Group are strategically selected by the Board with input from other leaders in Florida based on their potential to have a large positive impact on Florida's families and children. The Policy Group identifies and studies policies and practices that have proven successful, or have the potential to be successful, in promoting outcomes such as healthy births, child growth and development, educational success, family stability and safe and supportive communities. The group has conducted searches within Florida, across the country and internationally to identify promising policies and practices. These studies are producing practical, easy to understand reports that can serve a broad public education function. The Policy Group is 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.

Our Mission

The mission of The Policy Group is to design and promote evidence-based policies and practices that create the opportunity for Florida's families with the support of their communities to successfully raise their children.

The members of The Policy Group came together in recognition that 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:
In order for the state to realize these outcomes, Floridians must implement the following key policies and practices.

- * 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 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 education and care 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 in 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 education and care commensurate with K-college educational investments.
- Increase in the percentage of children served by quality early education and care programs (e.g., Gold Seal or other accreditation measures)
- Reduction in the turnover rate for early education and care workforce.
- Increase in the percentage of early education and care workers with CDAs and other credentials.
- Increase in the percent of early education and care 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 education and care.
- 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 education and care 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 education and care.
- 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 education and care 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.

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Glossary

Accountability — The concept of holding appropriate parties responsible for their actions or performance.

Approaches toward Learning — Children’s learning styles, motivations, task attentiveness, curiosity and creativity.

Assessment — The process of collecting data to measure the performance or capabilities of a person, group or system.

Asset and Strength — A community’s assets are its tangible and intangible strengths and capabilities. Tangible assets include buildings, services and people. Intangible assets include skills, knowledge, contacts and individual capacities. Internal assets are within the control of the community such as cultural organizations, personal income, businesses, business associations, individual capacities, religious organizations, advocacy groups, citizen associations, home-based enterprises, etc. External assets may be located within a community, but are largely controlled externally for the community. These include law enforcement, parks, fire departments, libraries, public schools, hospitals, higher education institutions, energy/waste resources, social service agencies, and vacant buildings, land, etc. Additionally, there may be external assets and resources available to a community that originate outside of the community and are controlled by outsiders, such as public information, welfare expenditures, capital improvement expenditures, philanthropic organizations, etc.

CDA (Child Development Associate) Credential — The CDA is designed for employees in the field of early childhood education and certifies success completion of courses in teaching methods in nursery schools and daycare centers. CDA credits may be applied to an associate degree program in Early Childhood Education.

Child Development — Growth or maturation that occurs primarily because of the emergence of underlying biological patterns, preconditions and environmental conditions.

Cognitive Development and General Knowledge — Basic knowledge about the self (e.g., name and address), the environment (e.g., basic science and community concepts), cognitive competencies (e.g., basic mathematical constructs of shape, size and sequencing) and basic problem solving skills (e.g., similarities and differences).

Communication/Language Development — The verbal and non-verbal skills necessary to convey and understand meaning via early literacy, speaking and print awareness.

Community — A community is any group of people brought together for a common purpose or compelling reason. This establishes its borders or parameters. It may be small, medium or large; a service area; a geographic area; a political division; an economic region; a combination of individuals, organizations, associations and institutions; a group of people with common characteristics or goals; etc. Sometimes, community membership is voluntary (e.g., neighborhood, club, advocacy group, church, Internet Listserv, etc.) and sometimes it is not (e.g., zip code, ethnicity, school district, etc.). The nature and composition of a community change shape and membership. A community could be established based on an ideology or on interests. Therefore, an important step in any community work is identifying the borders (for example, immediate section or sub-section, bureau, department, street, block of homes; number of church families; etc.) of the community. Whatever its description, people within a community are bonded together around a common parameter or issue.

Connections — Community building is at first accomplished one-on-one and these relationships are then connected. Connection is the process by which local strengths are not only identified but also mobilized to meet the goals desired by the community. It is central to community facilitation and capacity development. This process of identification and mobilization means:

- discovering those people in the community who are actively doing things behind the scenes and offer them support
- involvement of community residents and members
- communication among individuals and groups
- recognition, acceptance and use of human and resource potential within the community
- a focus on talents, skills, capabilities, desires and vision of all members
- working one-to-one with community people and linking individuals to each other so that small groups form to achieve manageable projects
- sharing information about local strengths
- linking people and groups with other people, local associations, local businesses, local institutions, capital and credit.

Continuity of Care — Continuity of care and consistency help the infant and toddler extract internal models of care and -- if the care is sensitive and responsive -- build multiple secure attachment relationships. It is provided by a community of stable, emotionally invested caregivers, all of whom a child can trust, where child-caregiver relationships are able to build without disruption, until multiple attachment relationships are secure.

Developmental Assessment — Measurement of a child's cognitive, language, knowledge and psychomotor skills in order to evaluate development in comparison to children of the same chronological age.

Developmentally Appropriate — Teaching based on a knowledge of how children learn, specifically through opportunities for direct experience, and of synthesizing this experience through activities.

Early Childhood — The stage of life from birth through age five.

Early Education and Care (AKA Quality Child Care) — A program that makes the healthy development and education of children its first objective and accomplishes this objective.

Family Friendly - An employer that acknowledges that its employees are human beings with important personal responsibilities, and supports them in their efforts to handle those responsibilities.

Home Visiting Program — A professional or para-professional visits families in the home to accomplish a variety of goals such as: promotion of good parenting skills, prevention of child abuse and neglect, promotion of healthy child development and school readiness, linkages to other needed family supports and resources and sometimes the improvement of mothers' lives (e.g., deferral of subsequent pregnancies and promotion of maternal education and employment). The overarching belief is that parents play a pivotal role in shaping children's lives and one of the best ways to reach families with young children is to take the services to them rather than expecting those families to seek assistance in the community.

Indicators — Quantitative or numerical measures that show whether outcomes are improving, holding steady or worsening. A social indicator is a statistic used to report on a societal condition, such as the rate of infant mortality.

Learning — Acquisition of knowledge, skills, ways of thinking, attitudes and values as a result of experience.

Motor Development — Children's abilities to engage in gross motor (e.g., catching a ball, walking a balance beam) and fine motor (e.g., cutting with scissors) activities.

Natural Supports — Familiar people and resources that individuals would naturally approach when seeking help; self, family, friends, neighbors, etc.

Neighborhood — Geographically bounded territory within which people live, a locality recognized by local government and distinguishable on plat maps that can provide a shared frame of reference growing from a dynamic pattern of interactions, a shared history and common interests.

Outcomes — Statements that communicate desired conditions of well-being for children, adults, families or communities

Physical Health — Children's physical development (e.g., growth rates), health status (e.g., immunizations, vision and hearing) and physical abilities.

Primary Supports and Services — Voluntary activities, facilities and events provided by organizations and groups that are part of families' familiar social world. They offer opportunities for participation, avenues for contributing to the well being of others and sources of personal support.

Quality Child Care (AKA Early Education and Care) — A program that makes the healthy development and education of children its first objective and accomplishes this objective.

School Readiness — The match between the range of developmental accomplishments (e.g., emerging literacy and numeracy skills, such as pretending to read stories or counting to 20, and small-motor skills, such as buttoning clothes and holding a pencil properly) and difficulties (e.g., such as restlessness and inattention, speech difficulties, and less than optimal health) that children bring with them when they arrive at kindergarten and the capacity of schools to educate all children regardless of the abilities, interests and talents they bring to school.

Specialized Supports and Services — Interventions aimed at reducing or resolving the difficulties that children or parents may have in physical, cognitive, emotional or behavioral arenas. These supports and services are usually provided by individuals whose disciplinary perspectives, training and skills are geared to understanding and developing remedies for particular child or parent difficulties.

Social/Emotional Development — Children's feelings about themselves and others and the ways in which they form and maintain positive relationships and get along in group settings.



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The Policy Group is an independent, non-partisan policy research 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 for Florida's Families & 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 community. For additional information about The Policy Group, this paper or other products, please visit our web site at **www.policygroup.org** .

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