

Investing in a Quality Universal Prekindergarten Program in Florida: Lessons from Other States and Initiatives

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"Raising expectations for children's readiness without raising the quality of programs will do little to meet national education goals or to help children grow and learn."

(Schumacher, Irish, & Lombardi, 2003)

The well-being of young children and adults is significantly related to the quality of their early care and education experience. In order to improve children's long-term prospects for success, Florida must carefully consider how to enact a high quality school readiness system, with universal prekindergarten being one component. As legislators in Florida grapple with the implementation of a 2003 voter mandate for universal quality prekindergarten services for four-year-olds, there has been little discussion of the \$8,000 to \$12,000 per child for a full-day program or \$4,000 to \$6,000 per child for a half-day program that will be required to deliver quality prekindergarten. There have been even fewer discussions of the impact of universal prekindergarten on the "system" of early childhood services that extends from prenatal services through infancy and toddlerhood and into before and after-school services for school-age children.

With the focus on prekindergarten for four-year-olds, it may be extraordinarily difficult to direct attention and resources to the birth to age three population in the system of early care and education. For children at most jeopardy for school unreadiness, waiting to provide services at age four is likely to be too little too late. Even the successful and high quality High/Scope Perry Preschool that provided services to three- and four-year-old children was only able to reduce risks by one-quarter to one-half. In a longitudinal study of vocabulary, oral language, and emergent literacy among preschool children, Hart & Risley (1995) found that vocabulary growth rates, related to numerous school and life outcomes, were rarely altered by intervention beginning at age four. Comparison of the findings of the Abecedarian preschool project to other interventions suggests that effects may be more persistent if a program is preventative, intensive, and starts very early in life. Without adequate funding of a *system* of quality early care and education across birth to age five, efforts with four-year-olds are diluted at best.

In order to realize the best outcomes for children and their families, Florida's school readiness system should plan for and fund seven key elements to ensure quality services: partnerships with families; standards; training and compensation; curriculum; infrastructure planning and support; assessment, evaluation, and data collection; and comprehensive service linkages. Budgetary debates and decisions should be based on the consideration of each element in terms of the immediate and long-term costs and benefits. Florida is most likely to ensure that young children succeed in school and become productive citizens by funding a quality system of school readiness services.

Defining Quality

Perhaps the most contested element of calculations to determine the cost of early childhood services revolves around the definition of quality and what should be included. Golin and Mitchell (2004) describe three main indicators of quality in early childhood settings:

- Structural (i.e., staffing ratios, group sizes, teacher and director education, training and experience, and space per child)
- Process (i.e., the actual services provided and how teachers and other staff relate to children and parents); and
- Child outcomes (i.e., scholastic achievement, cognitive ability, literacy) as well as family and community benefits.

Assimilating the work of research and professional experts, there is general agreement on the following seven elements of quality:

- ◆ **Partnerships with Families** - Programs that recognize the importance of the parent-child relationship and develop policies and activities to support relationship building have the greatest impact.
- ◆ **Standards** - Regulations and standards, and monitoring to assure adherence to the standards, promote and are correlated with higher quality care. Teacher-to-child ratios of 1:10 and group sizes of no more than 20 are associated with better outcomes for preschool-age children.
- ◆ **Training and Compensation** - Children receive more stimulating, appropriate, and responsive care and education from adequately compensated teachers who have more specialized training and formal education. A career ladder and articulation are necessary supports for training and compensation.
- ◆ **Curriculum** - Positive short- and long-term child outcomes are associated with programs that utilize curriculum content and learning processes that cultivate school-related skills and knowledge, with a heavy focus on language, social-emotional development, and collaborative relationships with parents.
- ◆ **Infrastructure Planning and Support** - Quality programs require high quality indoor and outdoor equipment including replacement, maintenance, and safety upgrades; ongoing funding for program supplies; and appropriately designed facilities.
- ◆ **Assessment, Evaluation, and Data Collection** - A strong accountability system includes multiple types of assessment and evaluation, enables data sharing, and prevents inappropriate forms of measurement.
- ◆ **Comprehensive Service Linkages** - Outcomes from quality early care and education programs are significantly enhanced, particularly for at-risk children, when these programs are integrated with health care, nutrition, and family support resources, including extended day services for part-time care and education programs.

The remainder of this section provides descriptions of components that should be considered, planned for, funded and supported in the development and implementation of Florida's universal quality Prekindergarten.

Partnerships with Families

Nurturing relationships are essential to optimal early childhood development. Although young children's relationships with their caregivers and teachers are associated with child development outcomes, their relationships with parents and other family members are more significantly tied to long-term outcomes. Programs that recognize the importance of the parent-child relationship and develop policies and activities to support relationship building have the greatest impact. ***Florida must support partnerships with families by:***

- ◆ Development and dissemination of resources for parents, such as the ***Sunrise Skills Builders*** and ***The Best We Can Be: Parents and Children Growing Together***, that support them in choosing quality school readiness services and in preparing their children for school success
- ◆ Development and dissemination of resources and training for caregivers and teachers to prepare them to give explicit attention to parent-child interaction patterns and to support parent-child relationships
- ◆ Provision of training, technical assistance, and resources to support parent involvement, education, and collaboration
- ◆ Provision of infant and child mental health resources and professionals to serve as resources to parents, caregivers, and teachers

Standards

High quality early childhood programs are more likely to be found in states with more stringent licensing and regulatory requirements, and programs that exceed minimum required standards by obtaining accreditation are more likely to be of higher quality. A state governance entity is a cost-effective way to ensure that school readiness program standards are developed, implemented, and evaluated. ***Florida must plan for and fund the following standards components:***

- ◆ Establishment and enforcement of teacher-to-child ratios that are associated with more positive teacher-child interaction and better child outcomes across early childhood programs, including 1:10 teacher-to-child ratios and group size limits of 20 in prekindergarten programs
- ◆ Establishment and enforcement of teacher education and training requirements that are associated with more positive teacher-child interaction and better child outcomes across early childhood programs (see training and compensation below)
- ◆ Continued dissemination and provision of training, and technical assistance regarding the Florida Birth to Three Learning and Developmental Standards and the Florida Performance Standards for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Olds
- ◆ Development of a strong monitoring and enforcement system and sufficient funding to ensure an adequate number of monitoring staff and training
- ◆ Provision of incentives and rewards for programs that achieve and maintain high levels of quality

Training and Compensation

According to the National Academy of Science report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, “Quality of care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the child care provider or teacher and the child”. Staff qualifications are significantly related to the overall quality of early care and education. Children receive more stimulating, appropriate, and responsive care and education from teachers who have more formal education and specialized training. Without adequate compensation and benefits, qualified staff will continue to leave the field. Staff turnover, as much as 36%, undermines program quality and is associated with poorer child outcomes in language and social skills. ***Florida must plan for and fund the following training and compensation components:***

- ◆ Establishment and enforcement of pre-service education requirements
- ◆ Establishment and enforcement of requirements for specialized training in child development
- ◆ Establishment and enforcement of in-service specialized training
- ◆ Provision of education and training supports such as scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, release time, and course credit
- ◆ Implementation of a professional development system that ensures access across the state, a career ladder, and articulation
- ◆ Implementation of public and private initiatives to expand benefits for staff
- ◆ Provision for compensation comparable to public school teachers with similar education and experience

Curriculum

Positive short- and long-term child outcomes are associated with programs that utilize curriculum content and learning processes that cultivate school-related skills and knowledge, with a heavy focus on language, social/emotional development, and collaborative relationships with parents. In addition, teachers with formal education and specialized training and accredited programs are more likely to implement high quality curricula. Florida has invested in developing learning standards (i.e., expectations about what children should know and be able to do) to inform curriculum and practice. ***Florida must plan for and fund the following curriculum components:***

- ◆ Continued dissemination and provision of training, and technical assistance regarding the Florida Birth to Three Learning and Developmental Standards and the Florida Performance Standards for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Olds
- ◆ Provision of training, technical assistance, and resources to support implementation of identified appropriate curricula
- ◆ Provision of training, technical assistance, and resources to support parent involvement and collaboration
- ◆ Provision of materials and equipment sufficient to implement identified appropriate curricula
- ◆ Development and provision of incentives and rewards for programs that achieve and maintain high quality standards

Infrastructure Planning and Support

Parents do not have equal access to school readiness opportunities in their communities. Some communities in Florida, particularly low-income ones, have fewer licensed and accredited settings with the potential to be prekindergarten settings. Many existing facilities will need improvements to meet quality standards. Local governance entities are cost effective in terms of ensuring a good match between the supply of programs in communities and the needs of families. ***Florida should plan for and fund the following infrastructure components:***

- ◆ Development of mechanisms to review, plan for, and finance facilities construction and capital investment in areas of greatest need, convening all levels of government and private entities to leverage funds and coordinate capital planning
- ◆ Development of a long-term infrastructure plan at the state and local levels
- ◆ Provision of grants and loans, through government agencies and community-based intermediaries, to fund a variety of improvements to physical space in non-profit, for-profit, and faith-based programs that adhere to quality standards and oversight
- ◆ Provision of start-up funding to assist community-based programs in meeting the quality standards of prekindergarten

Assessment, Evaluation, and Data Collection

A strong accountability system includes multiple types of assessment and evaluation, enables data sharing, and prevents inappropriate forms of measurement. Furthermore, long-term planning is essential to sustainability of the system. ***Florida should plan for and fund the following assessment, evaluation, and data collection components:***

- ◆ Development of a long-term school readiness plan with significant input from evaluators and the public
- ◆ Development and support of assessment strategies to support learning and instruction with particular attention to early literacy and social/emotional development outcomes
- ◆ Development and support of assessment strategies to identify children for additional services
- ◆ Development and support of assessment strategies to evaluate programs and monitor trends
- ◆ Development and support of assessment strategies to hold systems and policies accountable
- ◆ Development and support of data sharing mechanisms across programs and systems
- ◆ Implementation of a regular review process of the accountability system by a state governance entity and a third party to ensure program coordination, availability, and quality

Comprehensive Service Linkages

Positive child outcomes are associated with high quality school readiness programs, and one element of high quality programming is integration of comprehensive services. At-risk children, who have less access to health care, nutrition, and adequate financial resources, are most likely to benefit from comprehensive services. Another element of comprehensiveness is the hours in care. Most families need full-day care for their children while they work, and low-income working families are unlikely to be able to afford quality after-school options for their children.

Comprehensiveness should also address what happens to children before and after their prekindergarten experience. Research has found that family risk factors (e.g., low maternal education, poverty, single parenthood, and parents who speak a primary language other than English) are associated with children who are less likely to arrive at school ready and are more likely to have educational difficulties. Such findings indicate a need to intervene earlier in children's lives and underscore the importance of developing a school readiness system that supports infants and toddlers and is integrated with pregnancy planning and prenatal services. The transition to kindergarten is also recognized as a critical passage for children and their families, and children do better when transition planning and services are available. ***Florida should plan for and fund the following comprehensive service components:***

- ◆ Establishment of a state governance entity with responsibility for ensuring coordination of efforts with all agencies and organizations that support children and families
- ◆ Screening and referral mechanisms to identify children and families in need of comprehensive services
- ◆ Integrated fiscal and administrative structures to provide families access to a continuum of services through no "wrong door"
- ◆ Continued support of Florida's Child Care Resource and Referral System to help inform parents of choices in setting and quality
- ◆ Wrap-around services to provide full-day care for children of low-income working parents
- ◆ Utilization of a systems approach to early childhood services, ensuring resources that support partnerships with families; standards; training and compensation; curriculum; infrastructure planning and support; assessment, evaluation, and data collection; and comprehensive service linkages are shared across programs providing education and care to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and before- and after-school care to school-age children
- ◆ Creation of coordination mechanisms between prekindergarten programs, schools, and health systems, including joint training opportunities, transfer of records, and joint planning

The Investment

The Florida State Board of Education reported that it costs \$4,200 per child per school year to provide a K-3 education with 25 children per teacher (this estimate was provided prior to class-size reductions). A quality prekindergarten program meeting the recommended teacher-to-child ratios will need to add an additional teacher, raising the cost closer to \$5,000 per child. In addition, school readiness programs outside of the public school system currently utilize higher teacher-to-child ratios, employ staff with less education and specialized training, are less likely to have the infrastructure and material resources of public school programs, and are likely to require substantial start-up funds in order to provide a quality program. Additional funding will be needed for staffing, resource development, and addressing professional development needs of teachers outside of the public school system.

Following thorough research, the Center for the Study of Social Policy found that states should allocate \$8,000 to \$12,000 per enrolled preschooler to fund full-day, quality prekindergarten services or \$4,000 to \$6,000 per enrolled preschooler to fund half-day, quality prekindergarten services. This estimate did not include funding for extended day services, educational enhancement, or infrastructure development. In order to meet the needs of working parents, wrap-around services need to be funded to supplement prekindergarten programs. The researchers also note that states may need to pay additional rates and provide additional resources to providers that care for children with special needs. In addition, the researchers recommend allocating \$800 per early childhood professional to fund professional development.

Current estimates of \$2,880 per child for Florida's universal prekindergarten program are woefully inadequate for a system that intends to utilize existing community-based child care programs that typically do not have the identified elements of a quality school readiness system. Funding at this level will not create a quality, sustainable prekindergarten program that leads to positive outcomes for children and families.

Recommendations to utilize existing school readiness subsidy dollars to fund universal prekindergarten also pose numerous pitfalls. Although some CCDF and TANF funds may technically be used to fund prekindergarten services for low-income families or to improve the quality of care, the state must be mindful of the fact that funds are fixed, and that use of funds for higher income families has the effect of shifting funds away from services to low-income families. Florida cannot utilize existing school readiness subsidy dollars to fund universal prekindergarten without:

- ◆ expanding the gap between Florida's low-income and upper-income families,
- ◆ diminishing quality of care for low-income children,
- ◆ limiting access to before- and after-school care critical to low-income working families,
- ◆ risking long-term negative outcomes as a result of insufficient investments in the birth to three population, and
- ◆ limiting the provision of comprehensive services for at-risk children.

In the tables that follow, the costs associated with five preschool programs that have proven to be successful and two projection models are described. Additionally, information is provided regarding how each program addresses or proposes to address the key elements of quality.

Overview of Quality Elements in Identified Programs

Name of Program and Cost	Brief Description	Standards	Training and Compensation	Curriculum	Infrastructure Planning and Support	Assessment, Evaluation, and Data Collection	Comprehensive Service Linkages
Abecedarian Preschool Project \$13,900 per child ¹	An intensive full-day program (operating from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., five days a week for fifty weeks a year) for children in low-income families from infancy to five years of age operated through the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center	Adult-to-child ratios ranged from 1:3 for infants/toddlers to 1:6 for preschool-age children	One-fourth of teachers had a bachelor's degree; all teachers received specialized and on-going training	Educational activities emphasizing language, social, emotional, and cognitive development	High quality early childhood program from infancy through age five delivered in a university child development setting	Longitudinal research and evaluation data; cost-benefit analysis	Children received medical and nutritional services; families received social services referrals; parenting activities provided
Chicago Child-Parent Centers \$6,700 per child ²	The preschool portion of the program, for children ages 3 and 4 (services are available for children from ages 3 to 9), operates 9 months a year and 8 weeks during the summer for 3 hours each weekday; operated with Title I funds through the Chicago Public School System.	Adult-to-child ratio of 2:17; programs adhere to public school accreditation standards	All teachers have a bachelor's degree and an early childhood certificate	Developmentally appropriate curriculum with strong emphasis on literacy, math, and psychosocial development	Program delivered through Chicago's public school system; some infrastructure costs subsidized by the school system	Longitudinal research and evaluation data; cost-benefit analysis	Children are followed and provided tutoring and supports in elementary school for grades K-3; each center has a parent resource room staffed by a full-time teacher; all parents participate in the program the equivalent of half a day a week; health, nutrition, and other social services provided

Name of Program and Cost	Brief Description	Standards	Training and Compensation	Curriculum	Infrastructure Planning and Support	Assessment, Evaluation, and Data Collection	Comprehensive Service Linkages
Illinois Preschool \$8,558 per child ³	Projection for a full-day prekindergarten program for 4-year-olds (currently a half-day program is available); efforts underway to expand quality preschool statewide	Adult-to-child ratio of 1:10 with a maximum group size of 20	Teachers are required to have a bachelor of arts and early childhood certification; teaching assistants must have an associate's degree; 120 hours of in-service professional development required over 5 years; teachers paid salaries comparable to local public school pay scale	Comprehensive learning standards	Calculations (estimated at \$2,000 per child) developed for infrastructure (technical assistance, monitoring, and child and classroom assessment), facility, and administrative improvement costs to provide preschool in community child care sites	Programs monitored for quality assurance; child assessment to inform classroom practice; planning for statewide assessment and external program evaluation	Children are screened for vision, hearing, and health; parent involvement is required; Family Resource Coordinator offers parenting education, family support services, and linkages to community resources
Perry Preschool \$7,252 per child per year ⁴	A 30 week preschool program (from mid-October to May) including 2 ½ classroom hours each weekday and a weekly 1 ½ hour home visit to each mother and child; served children ages 3 and 4	Adult-to-child ratio of 1:6	Teachers certified in elementary, early childhood, and special education	Developed and utilized High Scope curriculum, an individualized and developmentally appropriate curriculum	High quality early childhood program AND home-visiting program	Extensive data collection and analysis with follow-up of participants and control group for 30+ years; cost-benefit analysis	Strong emphasis on parenting, family support, and resource linkages (teachers delivered 1 ½ hours of home-visiting services each week)

Name of Program and Cost	Brief Description	Standards	Training and Compensation	Curriculum	Infrastructure Planning and Support	Assessment, Evaluation, and Data Collection	Comprehensive Service Linkages
<i>U.S. Military Child Care</i> \$6,954 per preschool-age child; \$12,133 per infant ⁵	Full-day and full-year programs; parent fees are based on total family income and ranges from 50% of the cost of care (for the highest income group) to 25% of the cost of care (for the lowest income group)	Accreditation by NAEYC is a standard (98% accredited); group sizes and adult-to-child ratios mirror NAEYC standards; yearly certification, addressing health, safety, child abuse prevention, developmental programming, training, and funding required; four unannounced monitoring visits per year	Salary increases tied to completion of training milestones; salaries, on average, \$1.04 more per hour than in civilian sector; extensive training program	Curriculum and training specialist at each child development center; specific practices designed to target infants and toddlers	Extensive renovations or new center facilities ensure indoor and outdoor designs are age-appropriate, incorporate space for administrative functions, are accessible to the disabled, and comply with nationally recognized building codes	Extensive data collection and evaluation system; screening and assessment of children incorporated into standards and curriculum	New Parent Support program offers parenting and infant care classes, parent support groups, home visits, and crisis intervention

¹ Cost in 2002 dollars; reflects an average yearly cost from infancy to age five; includes all program costs, including transportation, nutritional and medical services, and facility costs.

² Cost in 2002 dollars; cost includes community outreach, health and nutrition services, parent-resource teacher, home visitation; does not include all facility costs such as provision of school clinic, janitorial services, and building maintenance.

³ Projection includes estimates of all program direct costs (i.e., labor, food, training, facility and classroom materials) and indirect costs (i.e., professional development, technical assistance and consultation, monitoring, evaluation, and administration).

⁴ Cost in 1992 dollars; includes all program costs, including school district administration and building overhead costs.

⁵ Cost in 2000 dollars; includes all program costs; does not include indirect costs for evaluation and monitoring.

Overview of Quality Elements Identified in Projections Based Upon Fiscal and Best Practice Research

Source and Cost Estimates	Brief Description	Standards	Training and Compensation	Curriculum	Infrastructure Planning and Support	Assessment, Evaluation, and Data Collection	Comprehensive Service Linkages
<p>California Projections</p> <p>\$7,320 for preschool-age children</p> <p>\$10,280 for infants</p>	<p>Estimates based on 76% of children in full-time care and 24% in part-time care</p>	<p>Group sizes and adult-to-child ratios not to exceed NAEYC standards</p>	<p>Utilization of degreed teachers with on-going staff training; competitive salaries (equivalent to salaries of elementary school teachers) and benefits, including medical, dental, vacation, sick leave, life insurance, and retirement</p>	<p>Age-appropriate, consistent with NAEYC standards</p>	<p>Facility costs at market rate with high quality indoor and outdoor equipment including replacement, maintenance and safety upgrades; sufficient ongoing funding for program supplies</p>	<p>Administrative staffing and charges; program monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p>Family support services available through each early childhood setting</p>
<p>Center for the Study of Social Policy Projections</p> <p>\$12,000 for full-day</p> <p>\$6,000 for part-day per preschool-age child</p> <p>\$15,000 for full-day</p> <p>\$7,500 for part-day per infant</p>	<p>The Center sets \$8,000 to \$12,000 (full-day) as a benchmark for preschoolers and \$12,000 to \$15,000 as a benchmark for infants and toddlers with the upper limit being optimal and recommended. The Center also recommends that states invest \$500 per infant, toddler, and preschooler for system development (i.e., training, technical assistance, and infrastructure.</p>	<p>Group size and adult-to-child ratios not to exceed NAEYC standards; there are no exemptions from licensure; accreditation is rewarded</p>	<p>Early childhood directors have a masters degree in early childhood education (ECE), child development (CD), or early childhood administration; Lead teachers have a masters degree in ECE/CD; teachers have a BA/BS in ECE/CD; assistant teachers and family child care providers have an AA/AS in ECE/CD; at least 25 clock hours/CEUs on ongoing professional development are required per year; scholarships, release time, course payments, etc. are state-funded at \$800 per staff; wages and benefits are comparable to those of public school teachers with comparable education and experience</p>	<p>Appropriate early learning standards addressing development in language, cognition, physical and motor, social-emotional, and approaches to learning are utilized and coordinated with K-12 standards</p>	<p>Development and implementation of a capital plan; grants and loans available to meet a variety of needs for quality physical space</p>	<p>Early childhood programs receive at least two monitoring visits per year; state-level and local entities oversee early childhood services; screenings and referrals are supported; instructional assessment required and supported; appropriate mechanism for assessing the condition of children upon entering school utilized</p>	<p>State requires and funds collaboration among schools, health systems, and early childhood systems (e.g., joint professional development, transfer of records, and joint funding)</p>

The Challenge

There is a growing bank of early childhood research that addresses the costs and benefits of school readiness. In a review of such research, The Finance Project (2003) concluded:

- There are very significant public (and private) costs, extending across multiple public service systems and responses, associated with a child's unreadiness for school.
- Substantial savings are possible through prevention and early intervention services that address the poor outcomes associated with school unreadiness.
- The greatest gains in school readiness are possible through a comprehensive approach (i.e., attending to one dimension – such as health or preschool – is less likely to produce long-term benefits).
- Quality matters, and programs with demonstrated success have been well-designed, employ skilled staff, and provide high-quality services.

Planning, financing, and implementing a system that attends to these findings should be considered and addressed in Florida's provision of early care and education.

The system of early care and education is under-financed in Florida and in the United States as a whole. Private early care and education businesses lack sufficient financial resources to consistently deliver quality care to children, affordability to parents, and adequate compensation to staff. Funding is also insufficient to create an integrated public and community-based system of services for children birth to age five and their families. A quality system cannot be built solely on the financial contributions of the families who use early care and education. Florida's tax structure and budgeting process create additional challenges for initial and recurring public financing of state programs.

In terms of the average costs that parents pay, the incremental cost of financing high quality care over mediocre quality care is quite small. The Cost, Quality, and Outcome Study, a multi-state study, found that parents pay approximately 25 cents more per child hour for good quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood services than parents paying for mediocre education and care. Given the benefits of high quality care, funding it makes good economic and social sense. Public investments in education and development are seven times greater during the school-aged years and nearly five times greater during the college-aged years than during the early learning years. Public support, along with contributions from families, employers, and civic and private entities, will be required to plan and delivery quality early care and education.

The evidence suggests that funding high quality early care and education for preschoolers requires an investment of \$6,000 (for part-day) to \$12,000 (for full-day) per child. An additional \$500 per child is needed for infrastructure development and support. The Policy Group urges Florida's policymakers to carefully consider the thoughtful recommendations that have been proposed by the UPK Education Advisory Council, the State Board of Education, many early childhood organizations and advocates, and the lessons from other states and initiatives summarized in this policy brief as they move forward to implement universal prekindergarten.

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