

Recommendations for Quality Universal Prekindergarten

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Amendment to the State Constitution. Florida's Constitution Section 1: Public Education, paragraph (b) reads: *“Every four-year-old child in Florida shall be provided by the State of Florida a high quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunity in the form of an early childhood development and education program which shall be voluntary, high quality, free, and delivered according to professionally accepted standards. An early childhood development program means an organized program designed to address and enhance each child's ability to make age appropriate progress in an appropriate range of settings in the development of language and cognitive capabilities and emotional, social, regulatory, and moral capacities through education in basic skills and such other skills as the Legislature may determine appropriate.”*

UPK – Recommendations for High Quality Learning Opportunity		
Research-based Recommendations	UPK Advisory Committee Recommendations	State Board of Education Recommendations
High Quality Learning Opportunity		
<i>“Quality standards that provide children a high-quality prekindergarten learning opportunity. These quality standards must include specific recommendations or options for the expected outcomes of the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program” (SB 1334 (2)(b))</i>		
Cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development are complementary, mutually supportive areas of growth all requiring active attention during the preschool years. Early learning in these interrelated domains of development, none operating in isolation, lays the foundation for later achievement and success. Responsive, interpersonal relationships with teachers nurture young children's dispositions to learn and their emerging abilities, and early child development can be seriously compromised by social, regulatory, and emotional impairments.	Developmentally appropriate practices should be emphasized through a balance of teacher-directed and child-directed learning opportunities addressing and enhancing children's literacy and language, cognitive, emotional, social, self-regulatory and moral capabilities. Meaningful and authentic experiences should build on children's interests and skills, and curriculum choices should be age-appropriate, research-based, designed to promote all domains, consistent with Florida Statutes, affordable, and address indoor and outdoor space.	The Department of Education (DOE) should work with the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) to review the <i>Florida School Readiness Performance Standards for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Old Children 2002</i> to propose additional content to emphasize early literacy and oral language skills. These revised standards should be adopted for use in Florida's UPK program.
No single curriculum or pedagogical approach has been identified as best. Children who attend well-planned, high-quality early childhood programs in which curriculum aims are specified and integrated across domains tend to learn more and are better prepared to master the complex demands of formal schooling.	The State should certify curriculum choices for programs to select plus provide a mechanism for UPK providers to request certification of alternative curricula.	Curricula used in UPK programs should be aligned with the expected child outcomes (standards). The DOE should work with FCRR and other experts to develop and identify curricula that meet these standards.
An appropriate assessment system includes different assessments for different categories of purpose, such as assessments to support learning, assessments for identification of special needs, assessments for program evaluation, and assessments for high-stakes accountability. Careful decisions need to be made about the purpose of “ready for school” indicators to avoid misuse of data.	Statewide expectations of accountability should be established, and programs should measure a continuum of performance in all domains with progress evaluated against child and program baseline data. Programs should be measured on quality of the learning environment and interactions between children and staff.	The Legislature should provide the State Board of Education the necessary authority to adopt rules identifying the indicators for when children are “ready for school”. These indicators, at a minimum, should include knowledge of print, oral language ability, and phonemic awareness.
Child and family well-being is best supported through an integrated service delivery system that recognizes and supports home and work responsibilities. Current school readiness funding for income-eligible four-year olds will be needed for wrap around, extended day, and other support services.	UPK funding should support up to a six-hour day of which a minimum of four hours must be high quality instruction. Minimum of 1080 hours a year with at least 720 contact hours of quality learning experiences. All funding that currently supports early learning for four-year-old children should be used to the maximum degree possible including wrap-around and extended day services with local communities collaborating through public/private partnerships to increase capacity and resources. A one-time per-child allocation for start-up costs should be considered.	The Legislature should fund the UPK program for a four-hour per day program for a total of 180 days. Payments for UPK programs should be consistent across the state and provide for an incentive to achieve positive outcomes.
Local community input and decision-making is a core component of an integrated and sustainable service delivery system.	A diverse provider system to support parental choice and maximize use of existing program capacity and community resources is required, and there must be a concerted effort to build physical and program capacity through partnerships with local governments, community and faith-based organizations, and businesses.	The State Board of Education should assess the state's capacity to provide high quality universal prekindergarten education programs by 2005 and thereafter, addressing capacity needs of each county and developed in partnership with local governments, businesses, community and faith-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions.

UPK – Recommendations for High Quality Learning Opportunity

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<p>The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends maximum class sizes of 16 to 20 for four-year old children with a 1:8 to 1:10 minimum staff to child ratio.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both class size and adult-child ratios are correlated with greater program effects. ▪ Low adult-child ratios are associated with more extensive teacher-child interactions, more individualization, and less restrictive and controlling teacher behavior. ▪ Smaller group size is associated with greater child initiations, opportunities to work on extending language, mediation of children's social interactions, and support for exploration and problem-solving. <p>Preschool teachers with four-year college degrees are the most effective. Better-educated teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have more responsive, sensitive, and positive interactions with children; ▪ are less authoritarian, punitive, and detached; and ▪ provide richer language and cognitive experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximum of 20 children in a single class with a minimum class size of 5 (with exceptions for unique community or child needs). ▪ A 1:10 minimum staff to child ratio. ▪ Regardless of setting, programs must meet Gold Seal Standards or Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation within one year of UPK program implementation. ▪ Require at least two staff for every 20 children to have a minimum of a national Child Development Association (CDA) certificate or a Florida CDA Equivalent certificate (with a possible time-limited waiver for the second CDA) with a multi-level reimbursement system based on staff qualifications. ▪ Establish a phased implementation to have at least one staff member in each classroom with an associate's degree in early childhood education within 5 years and at least one staff member in each classroom with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education within 8 years. ▪ Provide incentives for high performance in achieving positive outcomes. 	<p>The Legislature should provide the State Board of Education with the necessary authority to adopt rules establishing licensing standards for providers of UPK programs. These standards must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applicable state and federal requirements related to health, sanitation, safety, and physical surroundings ▪ Meeting the Gold Seal Standards by 2006-07 provided that there is capacity to meet the state's needs ▪ A minimum instructional staff to child ratio of 1:10 beginning in 2005-06, with the minimum credential requirement for such staff being a national Child Development Associate (CDA) or a Florida Equivalent CDA; a second staff member is required for classes of 11-20 children with the same credential requirements.
<p>Preparing children to succeed in school requires a holistic approach involving children, families, communities, and local and state resources and must begin prenatally and continue throughout the early childhood years.</p>	<p>A statewide performance measure should be established requiring that at least 90% of children who complete UPK are assessed as "ready" upon entering kindergarten.</p>	<p>The outcome for Florida's UPK program should be that 100% of all children enter kindergarten ready for school by 2012.</p>
<p>Formal early childhood education and specialized training is consistently linked to positive teacher behaviors.</p>	<p>Establish a continuing education requirement for the Florida CDA Equivalent, as required by the national CDA, which includes effective practices for parental involvement.</p>	<p>The Department of Education should conduct a review of all currently approved CDA equivalent programs and any corresponding state requirements. The Legislature should provide the State Board of Education with the necessary authority to adopt rules identifying the standards for the approval of such programs and for the renewal of the CDA credential.</p>
<p>Formal early childhood education and specialized training is consistently linked to positive teacher behaviors.</p>	<p>Provide funding for resource teachers to provide coaching and development of programs for UPK staff, including assistance to meet the needs of non-English speaking children and children with disabilities.</p> <p>Establish a ratio of resource teachers to classrooms that reflects the qualifications of UPK staff.</p> <p>Require a continuing education requirement for UPK staff and administrators, including meeting the needs of non-English-speaking children and children with disabilities.</p> <p>Require individual professional development plans/supports for UPK staff.</p> <p>Provide career ladder opportunities.</p>	<p>The State Board of Education should assess the capacity of the state's trained workforce for the provision of high quality instruction in UPK programs in collaboration with the Agency for Workforce Innovation, community colleges, and vocational/technical centers, and should include opportunities for current providers to earn the appropriate credential.</p>
<p>Formal early childhood education and specialized training is consistently linked to positive teacher behaviors.</p>	<p>Establish a continuing education requirement for the Florida CDA Equivalent, as required by the national CDA, which includes effective practices for parental involvement.</p>	<p>The Department of Education should conduct a review of all currently approved CDA equivalent programs and any corresponding state requirements. The Legislature should provide the State Board of Education with the necessary authority to adopt rules identifying the standards for the approval of such programs and for the renewal of the CDA credential.</p>

UPK – Assessment and Evaluation

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<p><i>Assessment and Evaluation</i></p> <p><i>“Methods for measuring the performance of the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program. These methods must include specific recommendations or options for each of the following elements: 1. Assessment of age-appropriate progress for each child; 2. Evaluation of outcome measures for each provider in each setting; and 3. Evaluation of school readiness coalitions.” (SB 1334 (2)(e))</i></p>		
An appropriate assessment system includes different assessments for different categories of purpose. Policymakers should strive to identify the purpose of assessment to avoid misuse of data.	Retain requirement for uniform screening for all children entering kindergarten and develop linkages for kindergarten transitions with sharing of assessment information.	The Legislature should retain the requirement for the screening of all students entering public kindergarten to determine their level of readiness for school.
<p>According to the National Education Goals Panel, the following principles should guide assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment should bring about benefits for children. ▪ Assessments should be tailored to a specific purpose and should be reliable, valid, and fair for that purpose. ▪ Assessment policies should be designed recognizing that reliability and validity of assessments increase with children’s age. ▪ Assessments should be age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection. ▪ Assessments should be linguistically appropriate, recognizing that to some extent all assessments are measures of language. ▪ Parents should be a valued source of assessment information, as well as an audience for assessment results. 	<p>The State should define essential elements that assessment instruments should address, yet allow flexibility in selection from a limited, defined set of instruments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment instruments should include educational and developmental screening, be comparable and consistent in measurement, include a variety of data sources, be skill-focused and research-based, reflect progress toward a standard in addition to whether a standard was reached or not, and accommodate non-English-speaking children and children with disabilities. ▪ Assessments should be conducted at the beginning and end of each year, and parents should receive periodic assessments of child progress. <p>Assessments should use trend data and multiple observations and should not be too complicated, extensive, burdensome, time-consuming, or expensive. Local coalitions must be provided technical assistance and guidance, and the Chancellor should have authority to require corrective action by local coalitions.</p>	<p>The Legislature should provide the State Board of Education with the necessary authority to adopt rules requiring local coalitions to implement a consumer protection system that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifies appropriate outcomes for purposes of accountability and funding local programs ▪ Establishes meaningful consequences for poor performing programs ▪ Provides information that can lead to program improvement ▪ Provides information to parents on the progress of their child in meeting the expected child outcomes.

UPK – Funding

Research-based Recommendations	UPK Advisory Committee Recommendations	State Board of Education Recommendations
<p><i>Funding</i></p> <p><i>“Estimated cost per full-time-equivalent child of the recommended curriculum, design, and standards. This cost estimate must consider funding for each of the state board’s recommendations or options for each of the program elements described in this subsection.” (SB 1334 (2)(ff))</i></p>		
High quality is associated with stable funding, sufficient to provide livable wages and benefits for staff, implement lower staff-to-child ratios, maintain needed equipment and materials, and support ongoing education and training needs. <i>Poor pay and scant benefits prevent preschool programs from hiring and keeping highly effective teachers, lowering program quality and leading to poorer cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children.</i> Researchers have estimated that lowering the adult-to-child ratio by one is associated with increased costs of approximately 4.5% (approximately \$306 per child annually). A one-year increase in average education is estimated to increase wages by 5.8%.		The estimated cost of a high quality UPK program is approximately \$2,880 per year. This cost estimate is consistent with the funding allocated to current Gold Seal programs.
High quality is associated with stable funding, sufficient to provide livable wages and benefits for staff, support ongoing education and training needs, implement lower staff-to-child ratios, and purchase and maintain needed equipment and materials. <i>In state and national studies, typical preschool program quality has been found to be “poor to mediocre”; salaries are approximately \$7 per hour with few benefits in Florida; and current ratios and group sizes exceed best practice recommendations.</i>	<p>No additional positions or funds should be provided for state-level administration of the UPK program than are used for state-level administration of the School Readiness program for FY 2004-2005.</p> <p>All funding that currently supports early learning services for eligible four-year-old children should be used to the maximum degree possible in implementing Florida’s UPK program, including wrap-around and extended day services, consistent with applicable laws and regulations.</p>	<p>The Legislature should consider appropriating funds in 2004-05 to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement a plan to assess the capacity of the state’s private and public providers ▪ Implement a plan to assess the capacity of the state’s workforce for the provision of high quality instruction.

UPK Recommendations – Best Practices

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<i>Best Practices to Improve the Outcomes of School Readiness Coalitions and Providers</i>		
<i>“The report must also include the state board’s recommendations or options for best practices to improve the outcomes of school readiness coalitions and providers.” (SB 1334 (3))</i>		
Local community decision-making is a core component of an integrated service delivery system to support optimal outcomes for Florida’s children, families, and communities. It 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. Local decision-making is also an essential element for sustaining comprehensive initiatives.	<p>Maintain a local governance structure with the following modifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consolidate administrative functions to minimize the number of local coalitions while assuring specific needs of each county are addressed. ▪ Voting majority of local coalition members should not have financial interests in the design or delivery of school readiness services. ▪ Ensure key stakeholders are represented in planning and service coordination discussions and decisions. ▪ Reinforce existing statutory requirements on ethics and conflicts of interest. ▪ Revise current membership requirements to reflect changes in role, including representation from post-secondary education providers, programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities under Part C, consumers/parents, and family child care homes. ▪ At least 51% of voting members must be private sector, non-conflicted members, and the chair must be a private-sector, non-conflicted member. 	<p>The Legislature should maintain a local governance structure with the following modifications to strengthen the local coalitions’ efficiency and to address conflicts in membership and operation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consolidate administrative functions to minimize the number of local coalitions, while assuring that program planning, service coordination, and fund allocation address the specific needs of each county ▪ Specify local coalition functions regarding financial and programmatic oversight and accountability to include general accounting principles, reporting of expenditures, statewide reporting, monitoring of provider’s compliance with the UPK standards and with applicable state and federal requirements, accountability for the quality of the UPK program, and the provision of assistance to providers ▪ Revise current membership requirements to include representation from postsecondary education providers, programs for children with disability ages 3-5 and programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, consumers/parents, and family child care homes; authorize local coalitions to submit nominations for membership for consideration ▪ Require that financial decisions of local coalitions must be “non-conflicted”. A voting majority of local coalition members should be persons who do not have a substantial financial interest in the design or delivery of school readiness services in Florida.
Parental involvement is an essential indicator of preschool quality and increases opportunities for formal and informal linkages supportive of more positive outcomes for children, families, and communities. Parental involvement is associated with stronger and longer-term positive outcomes for children.	<p>Opportunities for parental involvement should be provided, and standards should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respect for the role of parents as their child’s first and most vital teacher ▪ Strong expectations of parental involvement ▪ Requirements that the curriculum include a parental involvement component ▪ Parental involvement opportunities and resources offered in the language most familiar to the parent ▪ Requirements for parental education and enrichment opportunities ▪ Linkages to literacy programs for parents who are not literate ▪ Inclusion in the application/entry process for opportunities to get information regarding parental involvement and provide parents with supports 	

UPK Recommendations – Governance

Research-based Recommendations	UPK Advisory Committee Recommendations	State Board of Education Recommendations
<i>State Governance</i>		
Strong, high-level leadership is a critical component for implementation of comprehensive initiatives.	Transfer school readiness programs to the Department of Education under separate Chancellor for Early Learning who will report to the Commissioner of Education.	The Legislature should transfer school readiness programs (for children ages birth to kindergarten entry age and after school programs), effective 2004-05, to the Department of Education under a separate Chancellor for Early Learning.
Leaders must be knowledgeable of systems and solutions; skilled at building consensus and resolving conflicts; adept at reaching across cultural, ethnic, and political boundaries; and able to communicate effectively.	The State Board of Education has final authority for rules. An Early Learning Board, with community representatives knowledgeable of early childhood programs, should be established to advise the State Board of Education and Chancellor and to develop a well-defined state implementation plan for UPK.	The Department of Education should organize a steering committee to guide the development of an implementation plan for the UPK program and to assist in the transition of school readiness programs to the Department. The Department should also ensure that providers of school readiness programs, local coalitions, agencies, and early childhood advocates are provided with frequent and consistent information regarding these activities and opportunities to provide input.

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Credits

This document was developed by Alisa S. Ghazvini and Kathy Schroeder for The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children with input from Barbara Foster, Phyllis Kalifeh and Jessie Leinfelder.

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