

THE POLICY GROUP

for Florida's Families and Children

Delivering a Quality Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten Program in Florida

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Through their votes and voices, three million Floridians have made it clear that they want a high quality voluntary universal prekindergarten program (VUPK) for four-year-olds. Legislators have decided to give parents a choice of either a Florida's 540 instructional-hour program (e.g., 3-hour part-day program) or a summer 300 instructional-hour program.

Provider Payments

In order to make sure these part-time programs meet quality standards, Florida lawmakers need to provide funding to VUPK providers of approximately **\$2,847 per child for provider payments (i.e., personnel and operating costs)**. **Anticipating an enrollment of 154,597 children, the state should commit \$440,137,659 for a 3-hour day VUPK.** This amount would provide enough money for providers to include the following important quality elements:

- Qualified teachers who are paid on the basis of their credentials, which includes a mix of bachelor's degrees, associate degrees and Child Development Associate credentials
- Three hours of instruction with a 1:10 teacher-to-child ratio and a maximum group size of 18 children
- Operating costs that cover: rent, utilities, maintenance/repair, healthy snacks, kitchen supplies, education supplies, education equipment, consultants/training, office supplies, audit, insurance (liability, accident), telephone, postage, advertising, fees/permits, etc.

Perhaps most important to the quality of the classroom is the quality of the teachers. We know that teachers with degrees in early childhood and child development are more likely to interact with children in ways that help them to be successful in school. In order to have and keep degreed teachers, we must provide them with sufficient salaries and benefits. As currently designed, Florida's 540 instructional-hour VUPK, does not require degreed teachers (the summer 300 instructional-hour program does require degreed teachers). We can encourage more teachers to become degreed by providing increased salaries with increased credentials.

Non-recurring Facilities Start-up Costs

Current programs frequently lack adequate equipment and supplies necessary to implement a high-quality prekindergarten. Commensurate with Georgia's election to allot \$8,000 per classroom for start-up costs, Florida should ensure that the classrooms set up for VUPK have the appropriate space, equipment and supplies necessary for delivering a program according to professionally accepted standards. In many instances, no one is evaluating the program to make sure that the children are benefiting. **By providing \$68,641,068 (\$444 per child) in funding for non-recurring facility start up costs,** Florida can make sure that necessary quality elements are in place for four-year-olds participating in VUPK.

First Year Florida VUPK Cost Detail According to the Florida Cost Model Developed by The Policy Group

Model Parameters:

Part-day model - 3 hours of instruction, 180 days
1:10 teacher to child ratio, Maximum group size of 18
154,597 children (70% participation rate)¹
Lead teachers with mix of credentials²
Teachers work 4 hours per day for 190 days

3-Hour Day Cost Category	Statewide Cost	Cost per Child
Provider Payments (personnel & operating)	\$440,137,659	\$2,847
Facilities Start Up Costs (non-recurring)	\$68,641,068	\$444
Total (154,597 Children¹)	\$508,778,727	
Total Cost per Child		\$3,291

¹ Based on 4-year-old 2005 population estimate of 220,853 by the Office of Economic and Demographic Research of the Florida Legislature, 21 February 2005

² Mix of credentials reflects existing workforce: 20% baccalaureate, 20% associate degrees, and 60% with Child Development Associate credentials.

The vision of The Policy Group for Florida's Families and 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.

Providing Parents with a Choice to Meet Needs

Florida's VUPK program has the opportunity to ensure that no four-year old child will be left behind by providing additional needed instructional time and continuity of teacher intervention to those most likely to enter kindergarten without the requisite skills and abilities. Additionally, many parents (e.g., single parents working full-time and households with both parents working) may not be able to enroll their children in a three-hour VUPK program and then transport them to an alternative program for the remainder of the day. The opportunity for a 6-hour instructional day would enable those children and families who may most need more instructional time with solid early learning opportunities to participate in Florida's VUPK program.

The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children recommends that Florida's VUPK program be funded sufficiently to ensure a high quality system that provides parents with a choice of length of day (i.e., 3 hours or 6 hours to accommodate parents and their children's early learning needs) and the most qualified and credentialed teacher workforce, recognizing that initially Florida will have to start with a mix of credentials. **To adequately fund a high-quality VUPK program that provides parents with a choice of a 3-hour day or a 6-hour day:**

- **Provider payments should be at least \$4,049 per child or \$625.9 million to serve 154,597 children and**
- **Funding for non-recurring facility start-up costs should be \$68.6 million.**

That is, for an increase of only \$6.68 per child per day, Florida could provide to Florida parents the choice of a 3-hour day or a 6-hour day, which ever would best meet the parents' and children's early learning needs!

First Year Florida VUPK Cost Detail A Comparison of Direct Program - Provider Payments* For Three Instructional-Day Models

Provider Payments (Personnel and Operating Costs)	Statewide Cost (154,597 Children) Cost per Child
3-Hour Day	\$440,137,659 \$2,847
Variable-Day Model (2/3 choose 6-hours and 1/3 choose 3-hours of instruction)	\$625,885,684 \$4,049

* Note: These costs reflect only the direct costs of provider payments. To estimate the total commitment the State of Florida should make to the VUPK, \$68.6 million should be added for non-recurring facility start-up costs and \$88.3 million should be added for outcome and accountability costs, and governance and administrative costs.

Non-Provider Cost Category	Statewide Cost Cost per Child
Governance and Administration	\$22,571,162 \$146
Outcome and Accountability	\$65,703,725 \$425
Total (154,597 Children¹)	\$88,274,887
Total Cost per Child	\$571

¹ Based on 4-year-old 2005 population estimate of 220,853 by the Office of Economic and Demographic Research of the Florida Legislature, 21 February 2005

Non-provider Costs

Current programs rarely have support from consultants or early childhood experts to help them arrange their classrooms, plan good activities, and understand differences in children's behavior and development. Frequently, they lack adequate equipment and supplies. In many instances, no one is evaluating the program to make sure that the children are benefiting. **By providing \$88,274,887 (\$571 per child) in funding for outcome and accountability costs, governance and administrative costs, and non-recurring facility start up costs, Florida can make sure that these frequently missing quality elements are in place for four-year-olds participating in VUPK.**

Conclusion

Florida has the opportunity and moral imperative to design, fund and implement a **high quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunity** for our four-year-olds and their families. *The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children* strongly urges Florida to invest the state's resources wisely in a quality prekindergarten program that:

- Maximizes the state's return on its investment.
- Is delivered according to professionally accepted standards.
- Ensures a high quality learning experience for all participants.
- Provides parents with choices of the appropriate programs to meet the learning needs of their children.
- Assists families, communities, and our state in realizing the best outcomes for our children.

For additional information about **The Policy Group**, this policy brief or other products, please visit the web site at www.policygroup.org, email policygroup@aol.com or call 850-921-9111.