

CHILDREN & YOUTH CABINET
HEADLINE INDICATOR WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS
STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE

Background:

The Children and Youth Cabinet commissioned the Children's Summit Workgroup to begin work in defining Headline Indicators. As a result, the Children's Summit Workgroup produced the *State of Florida's Child Report* (2009). This report provided an objective knowledge base to support the Cabinet's mission to improve the outcomes of the state's children and families.

In July 2011, Cabinet Chair, David Wilkins, requested that the State Advisory Council take lead on one Headline Indicator. As the advisory group to the Cabinet, the State Advisory Council formed a subcommittee to develop an action plan for formal presentation to the Cabinet during the November 2011 meeting.

Headline Indicator: Quality Early Learning Experiences

Goal/Outcome: Every Florida Child is Ready to Learn and Succeed

Indicator: Children whose kindergarten entry assessment scores show they are ready for school

To begin planning to realize change in the above Headline Indicator, the subcommittee embraced a national early learning model, which broadened the scope of the specific indicator. Nationally, a birth to 3rd grade model is increasingly being messaged and supported, which is inclusive of a child's educational experience through 3rd grade. Researchers have demonstrated that 3rd grade reading success is a significant predictor of 8th grade reading level and 9th grade course performance even after accounting for demographic characteristics. Further, 3rd grade reading level has been shown to be a predictor of graduation and college attendance. This model ensures a focus on both preparing children for kindergarten and continued success in school.

The State Advisory Council subcommittee recommends a broader approach to school readiness to include children ages birth to 3rd grade with an emphasis on children in the state's VPK program. This model is inclusive of children enrolled in the state's School Readiness education program to ensure policy-level decisions, based on better data, benefit a broader base of children from various backgrounds. To fully meet this goal, improved data collection policies and procedures are necessary along with continued improvement to the data sharing agreements and partnerships between and within agencies.

The State Advisory Council subcommittee makes the following recommendations for the state to realize tangible improvements in children's school and life outcomes.

Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards

Recommendation 1: Require all early education providers and program directors offering the School Readiness program and/or the VPK program to complete the Early Learning and Developmental Standards training.

Florida benefits from comprehensive and nationally recognized Early Learning and Developmental Standards which outline holistic child development birth to five years. Florida's Standards include the Early Learning and Developmental Standards Birth to Four Years (2010) and the Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds (2011). Given the Standards are the foundation of what children should know and be able to do, requiring all School Readiness and VPK program directors and teachers to complete the training will ensure broad-base understanding and exposure to the Standards leading to improved outcomes for children.

Action by: Florida's Office of Early Learning and the Department of Education's Just Read Florida!/Office of Early Learning

Type of Change: Law

Timeline: 2012 Legislative Session

Recommendation 2: Develop and offer Early Learning and Developmental Standards educational opportunities and resources for all families with young children.

Revise and make available to all families support materials based on information found in the Standards such as "It's Okay to Play in VPK" and "First Teacher: A Parent's Guide to Growing and Learning." These resources present every day learning opportunities for families to ensure children are meeting developmental milestones and provide examples for teachers to ensure that individual children are progressing developmentally and holistically. The Standards include the following domains of child development and learning: Approaches to Learning, Cognitive Development and General Knowledge, Language, Communication and Emergent Literacy, Physical Development, and Social Emotional Development.

Action by: Florida's Office of Early Learning and the Department of Education's Just Read Florida!/Office of Early Learning

Type of Change: Work Plan

Timeline: On-going

Unique Child Identification Number

Recommendation 3: Create a 10 digit unique identification number to be issued before kindergarten.

Currently, no consistent data exist across programs birth to 3rd grade. Creating this unique ID number would enable agency administrators and local implementers to accurately use data to improve services for individual children, program delivery by child care providers, and cross-agency coordination. The unique ID data connected to individual children would be directly housed within the Early Learning Information System (ELIS) planned to launch in 2013.

Action by: All State agencies responsible for data collection for children including: Florida's Office of Early Learning, the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Health

Type of Change: Law

Timeline: 2012 Legislative Session

Assessment and Accountability System

Recommendation 4: Restructure and redesign the VPK accountability system by embedding a VPK pre- and post-assessment aligned with the Standards. Expand this pre- and post-assessment to enrolled children in the School Readiness program by embedding a mechanism by which assessment results can be utilized by all teachers to improve classroom instruction.

Creating a robust accountability system includes implementing a combination of pre- and post-assessment scores with results of a valid teacher-child interaction assessment instrument. Further, to ensure teachers are equipped to improve child outcomes in their daily instruction, an on-going comprehensive progress monitoring instrument should be used across all age groups of children. On-going progress monitoring is an added support for children with special considerations such as English language learners and those with identified disabilities and special health care needs. This model of combined assessment and improved accountability practices benefit children before entering VPK who are enrolled in School Readiness and benefit the 4-year-olds enrolled in VPK.

Action by: Florida's Office of Early Learning and the Department of Education's Just Read Florida!/Office of Early Learning

Type of Change: Law

Timeline: 2012 Legislative Session and On-going

VPK Eligibility and Program Structure

Recommendation 5: Allow children to participate in VPK during the year that precedes kindergarten entry, including ages 4 and 5.

Eligibility would include children at least age 4 by September 1st and also include children who are 5. This change would open VPK enrollment to 4-year-old children beginning kindergarten at age 5 and to 5-year-old children entering kindergarten at age 6.

This would positively impact those 4-year-olds determined “not ready” by their parents (e.g., summer birthdays), children with special considerations (e.g., English language learners), and children with developmental delays.

To accommodate children who are determined “not ready” for kindergarten – an optional summer VPK program would be available, by parent choice, to serve as an intervention before entering kindergarten. Data on child outcomes would be available to ensure that child care providers could improve classroom practice.

Action by: Florida’s Office of Early Learning and the Department of Education’s Just Read, Florida!/Office of Early Learning

Type of Change: Law

Timeline: 2013 Legislative Session

Membership: State Advisory Council Subcommittee - Chair Brittany Birken (Florida Children’s Services Council), Lucia Zaikov (Owner, Helping Hands and Peppermint Tree Schools), Bob Chilmonik (Edison State College), Melinda Webster (DOE), Michelle Sizemore (DOE), Lynn Marie Firehammer (DOH), Susan Main (Association of Early Learning Coalitions), Lilli Copp (Florida Head Start Collaboration Office), Noelle Bee (DoD-funded Military Child Care Liaison Initiative), Jess Scher (United Way of Miami-Dade), and Beth Rawls (District School Board of Pasco County).



The State Advisory Council, established in 2010, serves as an advisory group to the Florida Children & Youth Cabinet. Charged with creating a coordinated, comprehensive and collaborative birth to five early learning system, the Council is comprised of experts in early learning and represent a cross-section of state agency leadership. To learn more, visit www.flgov.com/child_advocacy_cyc_saceec/.