

Florida's Early Childhood Policy Pathways

Up to 1998

Today

Florida's Future

Health Care

More than 823,000 children were uninsured in Florida. In addition, children who were lawfully residing immigrants had a five-year waiting period that prevented them from being insured through KidCare.

In 1998, Florida's KidCare was established to improve access to health insurance for the state's uninsured children. In 2016, HB 5101 passed, removing an enrollment wait period for legally residing immigrant children. Currently, 2.4 million children are enrolled in Florida KidCare, but more than 250,000 children remain uninsured.

We want every child in Florida to have access to a pediatrician.

Access to School Readiness

The early education and child care systems resulted in varying quality levels and outcomes, and insufficient accountability.

In 1999, The School Readiness Program was enacted. This program provided children from low-income working families with a subsidy to attend preschool. Today, however, 31,399 children are waitlisted for the program.

We seek adequate funding for the School Readiness Program so wait times are removed and the cost of preschool is subsidized for all children who qualify.

Quality Measures

No statewide system oversaw early childhood. That meant, community by community, outcomes varied and accountability was poor. Quality for centers receiving funds for subsidized programs was not measured.

In 1999, the Florida Legislature enacted the School Readiness Act, which created what we now know as Early Learning Coalitions statewide. In 2018, H.R. 1091 established quality measures for centers receiving funding for the School Readiness program.

We seek a comprehensive system that ensures all subsidized early learning programs are of high quality.

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Universal Pre-K

Four year olds in Florida were not guaranteed schooling.

In 2002, Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment for voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK). Officially adopted in 2005, VPK today enrolls more than 175,000 Florida 4 year olds. But, many programs are still not high quality.

We are fighting for a comprehensive system that ensures all VPK programs are of high quality.

Parenting Support

A comprehensive parent resource system did not exist in Florida.

In 2012, Florida became an affiliate of the Help Me Grow network, now available through 2-1-1 in 32 counties.

We seek to provide adequate funding so Help Me Grow can serve all 67 Florida counties.

Business Buy-In

Business buy-in for early childhood initiatives was low. Local business leaders and Chambers of Commerce were typically not involved in early childhood initiatives.

In 2014, the creation of the Florida Chamber Foundation's Early Learning Business Alliance boosted business buy-in and participation statewide.

We look to expand local-Chamber level support for early childhood.

Support for Children with Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C required a statewide system of coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, interagency programs providing early intervention for all eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities. Children's Medical Services within the Department of Health provided administration and oversight of the Early Steps program in Florida.

The Early Steps program served 31,902 children in Florida in the 2016-2017 year. Although federal and state funding for Early Steps has increased by 23% from fiscal year 2014-2015 through fiscal year 2017-2018, additional funding is still needed.

We seek a fully funded Early Steps program so children with disabilities are identified at the earliest possible stages and provided with the appropriate screenings and interventions they need to be prepared for school.