



What is School Readiness?

In 1999 the Florida Legislature established a statewide school readiness program to target the at-risk birth to kindergarten population to streamline the service delivery system for all publicly funded early education and child care.

School readiness programs include School Based Pre-K, Even Start, Head Start, Migrant Pre-K, and subsidized child care programs.

Recently, the local Coalitions of St. Johns and Putnam County Coalition merged, creating the Early Learning Coalition of Putnam and St. Johns Counties Inc. Our mission is to provide leadership to the communities of Putnam and St. Johns Counties in preparing children for school by enhancing early learning programs through a seamless delivery system with a focus on nurturing our children, our families, our providers, our communities, and our future, with the overall goal of making a positive difference.

The Coalition contracts directly with Episcopal Children's Services for St. Johns County to provide subsidized child care for families receiving temporary cash assistance and meet federal work participation requirements. Other children who qualify are at-risk of abuse or neglect, at-risk of future school failure, or are considered economically disadvantaged based on federal poverty guidelines.

School readiness providers are required to meet minimum quality standards including developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum instruction, health and safety requirements, to conduct developmental screenings to catch any developmental delays as early as possible and to conduct pre-and post-testing to chart the individual progress made by each child.

Parents, who meet the federal poverty guidelines, qualify for subsidized child care and pay a co-payment on a sliding fee scale based on their income. This child care system enables parents to work and earn money to support their families, a critical component of economic stability and growth.

The parents shoulder most of the cost of childcare and they can't always afford it. In fact, childcare costs as much as college tuition in public universities. Yet most families need childcare when they are young and their earning power is at a minimum. The annual average cost per child for childcare is \$3,400 in St. Johns County.

The General Appropriations Act requires a match from local sources for working poor eligible participants on the child care slots in the amount of 6% to draw down federal dollars.

Local funds raised in St. Johns County are used exclusively to provide early education and quality childcare services to children in St. Johns County.

If the \$27,825 match provided by the United Way of St. Johns County is applied in full towards the local match requirement, it leverages **\$435,925** in subsidized childcare funding for the working poor families of St. Johns Counties, or services for 154 children annually. For every \$6,000 raised, \$94,000 is matched by federal sources (6/94 match).

Funds used for the Child Care Executive Partnership Program are matched on a 1-1 basis. Funding for this program is provided through federal and state resources. These dollars are matched with funding from local governments, businesses, and charitable foundations on a dollar-for-dollar basis. If the \$27,825 is applied in full to the Child Care Executive Partnership Program, once matched, would create \$55,648 for children meeting program requirements, or services to 20 children annually.

While child care empowers Florida families to work and contribute directly to economic stability, it also begins the opportunity for children to learn during critical development stages of life. The learning environment cultivates Florida's future workforce, thus reducing the need for social service programs as children grow.

When it comes to raising healthy and productive citizens, the largest growth and profit gain occurs when they are 0-6 years old. Early care and learning is a critical issue. The future of the workforce is being nurtured, taught and cared for in early care and learning environments today. How well they are treated from birth to 6 will determine how productive they will be as adults.

Here in Florida, school readiness remains one of the top educational goals of Democrats and Republicans alike. This is because early childhood investments have resulted in kids who are:

- 50% more likely to attend college;
- 50% more likely to be employed;
- 50% less likely to be teen parents;
- And 40% less likely to be jailed.

A study on the economic impact of child care in Florida concluded that accessible and affordable child care fosters a strong and productive work force by creating new jobs in associated industries and ensuring that parents can work. The experts who conducted the study found that for every dollar invested in quality care for children, more than \$7 is realized by society. Strategic investments in early childhood development yield high public and private returns.

Between 20 and 38 percent of kindergartners in Florida do not have the minimal skills to be considered "ready for school."

While we will be committed to seek involvement from all sectors of the community, both private and public, we ask that the United Way of St. Johns County renew its commitment to its neediest children by continuing to fund our grant request to leverage additional matching dollars in to serve the children of St. Johns County.

Budget Summary/Grant Award Guidelines

Total School Readiness Allocation: \$8,297,520
St. Johns, \$3,800,805; Putnam, \$4,496,715

Not more than 5% may be utilized for Administrative/Overhead Costs
Total Admin Expenditures, 3.47%

At least 70% of total allocation must be spent on childcare slots
Total Slot expenditures, 76%

At least 4% must be spent on Quality Initiatives
Total Quality expenditures, 8.65%
(Not including Gold Seal childcare payments-Gold Seal payments provide a 20% rate increase for those providers who offer an accredited childcare program.)