



FACT SHEET

The State of Early Childhood in Florida

April 10, 2015

Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2002 to provide free, voluntary preschool to all 4-year-olds, creating the voluntary prekindergarten, or VPK, program.¹ Unfortunately, the program continues to lose funding, lacks quality standards, and leaves out 3-year-olds. Florida has one of the lowest-quality early education programs in the country. Without substantial investments in quality measures, Florida's early childhood programs will continue to be inadequate to the detriment of Florida's children and families. The program currently serves 78 percent of the age-eligible population in all settings, including public schools, child care centers, and family child care homes.²

Florida families have access but not quality

One of the leading research intuitions on state preschool programs, the National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER, has established 10 benchmarks of quality. Florida meets just three of them. The state falls short on benchmarks related to ensuring that teachers have adequate training and resources, maintaining a low staff-child ratio, and providing screening and support services for vision, hearing, and health.³ Part of this is due to the substantial underfunding of the program, especially when compared to higher-quality programs around the country.

- In 2013, Florida ranked 35 out of 41 states in per-student funding.⁴
- Florida currently spends \$2,242 per student each school year, one-third less than the spending rates in states with programs that meet almost all the benchmarks, including Oklahoma and Georgia, and well below the national average of \$4,026.⁵

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Early childhood education can support Florida's most vulnerable populations

Many Florida children live in families that suffer from severe financial strain. Growing up in such an environment affects young children's ability to thrive, putting them behind their wealthier peers on a number of developmental, educational, and social measures. The stress that often comes with living in poverty can also adversely affect brain development in children's early years. High-quality early education has been proven to alleviate these risk factors and help close the school-readiness gap.⁶

- 53 percent of Florida children under age 6 live in low-income families.⁷
- 14 percent of Florida children live in areas of concentrated poverty, putting them at a greater risk of starting kindergarten behind.⁸

Child care is out of reach for many Florida families

Florida is one of 31 states where the cost of child care is higher than in-state tuition and fees at a public college.⁹ In Florida, where 66 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, child care is not a luxury—it is a necessity.¹⁰

- For a family with children in Florida, the median income is \$51,100 per year.¹¹
- The average annual cost of a child care center in Florida is \$8,376 for an infant and \$6,647 for a 4-year-old.¹²

Endnotes

- 1 Children's Movement of Florida, "Improving Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten in Florida," available at <http://childrensmovementflorida.org/issues/agenda/vpk/> (last accessed March 2015).
- 2 Daphna Bassok and others, "Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program: An Overview of the Largest State Pre-School Program in the Nation" (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2014), available at <http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/EdPolicyWorks-Report-FL-VPK.pdf>.
- 3 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), available at <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.
- 4 Bassok and others, "Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program."
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Jack P. Shonkoff and others, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129 (1) (2012): e232–e246, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e232.short>.
- 7 National Center for Children in Poverty, "Florida: Demographics of Young, Low-Income Children," available at http://www.nccp.org/profiles/FL_profile_8.html (last accessed March 2015).
- 8 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6795-children-living-in-areas-of-concentrated-poverty#detailed/2/2-52/false/1376,1201,1074,880,11/any/13891,13892>.
- 9 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care" (2013), available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf.
- 10 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473>.
- 11 Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-income-among-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365>.
- 12 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."
- 13 Authors' calculations based on Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

66%

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For a typical family with an infant and a 4-year-old in Florida, the average cost of child care at a center amounts to

1/3

of annual income¹³