

School Readiness

Children who are ready for kindergarten are primed for success. School Readiness Programs are offered to income-eligible families and others to ensure they receive the best start possible on their education journey. School Readiness offers developmental screening and age-appropriate curriculum to prepare preschoolers for Kindergarten. When children attend preschool, parents are free to work or to complete their education.



5,528 children received services at **230** different early learning programs in any given month.



Early Childhood Specialists

The Early Childhood Specialists have conducted provider training sessions, completed technical assistance visits, conducted teacher observations and assessments, provided one-on-one coaching support for teachers, and supported providers in implementing best practices around all four counties.

The ECS team supported and coached over **295** providers through the use of the web-based statewide data system, Florida's Early Learning Provider Services Portal, where they completed the Provider Profile and their SR/VPK contracts.

Child Care Resource & Referral



Child Care Resource & Referral is a non-income-based free service which helps families find quality childcare. CCR&R also assists families in choosing before and after school programs or summer education programs.

We received **9,688** requests for child care information from families regarding School Readiness, Voluntary Prekindergarten and child care services.

Professional Development

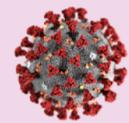


Our coalition recognizes that professional development is an important component of quality early care and education for young children. The State of Florida has adopted the Florida Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Practitioners. The program defines a set of knowledge and skill standards that are necessary for those who work directly with children. We support that effort by offering a variety of training opportunities. **915** teachers participated in **69** trainings.

Voluntary Prekindergarten



The VPK program is free for all Florida families. In 2002, voters approved a ballot initiative for a high-quality prekindergarten program for every 4-year old (and sometimes 5-year olds). There are no income requirements to attend up to 540 hours of preschool during the regular school year, or 300 hours of summertime preschool. The VPK program helps preschool children get ready for kindergarten which is the start of their education journey. **8,140** children attended **266** different VPK programs in our 4-county region.



COVID-19 Response

When the Coronavirus began to make itself felt in Southwest Florida in March, we had no inkling of how it would change our way of life for months on end. In mid-March, our Board and our leadership team agreed we should telework, and continue to provide services to parents and preschool providers. The Office of Early Learning, recognizing the value of preschools remaining open, agreed to continue program funding to the end of the fiscal year. During this time **181** preschools decided to temporarily close, and **2** permanently closed during this pandemic.

As social distancing turned into lock-downs, our industry has finally gotten the recognition it deserves. Preschool providers became as "front line" as first responders, health care professionals and other essential workers. New procedures were put into place, sanitizing efforts were ramped up and parents who were members of the essential workforce had a place to safely place their children while they fought to control the spread of disease and to maintain our way of life.

Bags of essential cleaning supplies were distributed in drive-by fashion in May at the Collier County Salvation Army. Members of the business community in Collier County, such as Sunshine Ace Hardware, Collier Office of the Florida Department of Health, and NCH Healthcare System provided help to assemble and distribute the supplies to Collier preschools that remained open to serve the essential workers of our community. By June, open preschools in Lee, Glades and Hendry Counties received bleach, hand sanitizer, masks, face shields, thermometers, paper towels and gloves to help them meet new safety standards. In all, **133** preschools were served.

To help preschools navigate the new landscape of health and welfare regulations, our ELC holds weekly ZOOM call meetings to bring the latest information to them.

Our Coalition staff worked from home from March and began a phased return by July. In September we re-opened our offices to the public with new social distancing and sanitizing procedures in place.



Literacy Buddy Program

The Literacy Buddy Program works with volunteers to provide books to 3, 4 & 5 year old children in preschools overseen by our coalition. The program also encourages children to take their first steps toward reading and writing by corresponding with their adult volunteer. The books provided by the volunteer are for the child to keep. The exchange of books and letters happens three times during the school year.

1,359 children wrote letters to **917** adult volunteers to tell them about their interests and received a total of **2,718** books.

This year we welcomed corporate participation into this program. Employers such as Hertz, Humana, and Busey Bank understand the importance of early literacy. Their employee book drives delivered **1,398** books to preschool children.

Inclusion

Warm Line
866-863-1366

Inclusion Warm Line is a free support, information and referral service for families of children with special needs or disabilities in our 4-county region.

The Inclusion Coordinator is available for on-site environmental technical assistance, educational support for programming, teacher and challenging behavior observations.



Our Inclusion Coordinator provided technical assistance to community child care providers and teachers through **246** phone conferences, **86** on-site visits, **59** observations, **77** collaborative conferences with other agencies, and **144** family conferences.

Community Connections

Connections to our community are key to our success! We joined other Early Learning Coalitions to bring awareness to a number of state/local outreach efforts including:

- Censu 2020
- Florida Prepaid
- Pinwheels for Prevention
- Bosses for Babies
- 3Ts Initiative through a grant offered by PNC Bank



Preschool Providers are our heroes. Many programs stayed up and running so essential workers could continue to provide services to our community. With grants made available through federal funding, the CARES allocations and Child Care Development Funding, preschool providers were offered opportunities to strengthen their infrastructure, health and safety needs, and professional development for teachers. Emergency funding was provided for preschools that stayed open, and quality funding was offered for those preschools that opened before August 1, 2020. Some grants were also offered to non-contracted preschools.



ELC Leadership Message

Dear Friends,

The 2019-2020 Annual Report provides information about the accomplishments of our early learning coalition. In many ways, this report is typical with highlights of our work over the past year including service to a record number of children served through our School Readiness (child care subsidy) program and implementation of a transformational new law designed to improve the quality of child care. Increased services to families and systematic change align with both the short and long-term goals of the ELC, and are worthy to include in our report to the community. We made gains during the year in spite of challenges during the end of the year.

The year started with great promise. However, no matter what else happened during this particular year, it will be remembered for the abrupt, unexpected shift in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic in the spring of 2020. The highlights of this time include the struggles of early learning professionals to maintain or reopen early learning programs while facing the threat of virus transmission, the uncertainties of working families, and the spotlight on the necessity of childcare to inspire and support the economy of our area.

Over the past several months, we have been encouraged and assured by our ability to provide services to families and children using today's technology to make sure that our work remains uninterrupted. The ELC sustained day-to-day operations and, at the same time, implemented new initiatives like the First Responder Referral program. Our work reflects an ability to overcome the challenges. We are mindful that families and providers count on us, and we take that job seriously.

Our sincere desire and the focus of our work for the coming year is to take advantage of our community's awareness of the importance of early learning. With a greater awareness of the impact on education and the economy, the ELC works toward building a stronger early learning system. With the dedicated support of our Board of Directors along with the hard working team at the ELC, we are confident that positive changes will result from trying pandemic experiences.

With the end of the pandemic nowhere in sight, we will continue to work on issues affecting our families, our early learning programs and of course, our community. While the ELC's year ends with many uncertainties, we are confident that together we can ensure a community where high quality early learning is affordable and available to all of our families. Therefore, the year ends as it began, filled with possibilities.

To all our community partners, advocates and volunteers thank you for your dedicated effort to support our youngest citizens and their families.

Susan E. Block, Ed.M., Chief Executive Officer

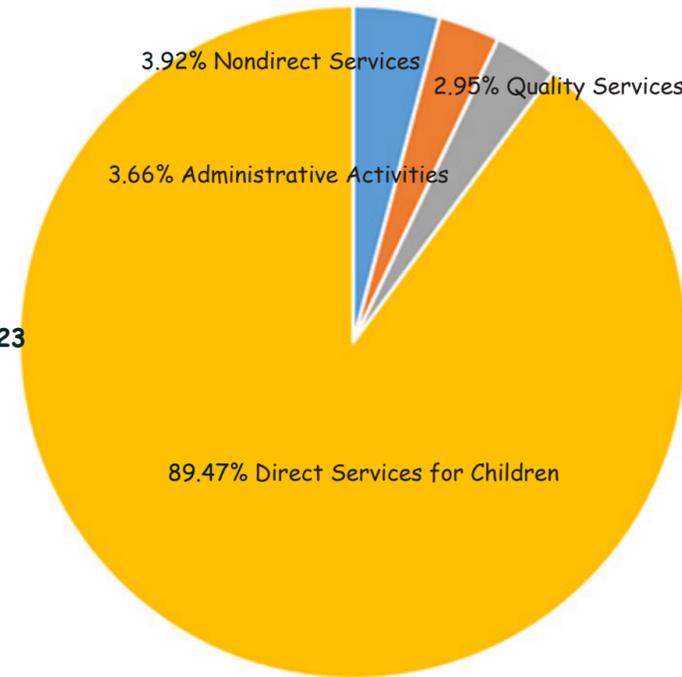
Marshall Bower, Esq., Interim Board Chair



2019 - 2020 Fiscal Year

Details of Expenditures

Administrative Activities:	\$1,763,281.96
Quality Services:	1,424,311.00
Nondirect Services:	\$1,889,494.18
Direct Services for Children:	\$43,139,706.09
Total:	\$48,216,793.23



2019-2020 Board Members

- Marshall Bower** - Interim Board Chair, *The Foundation for Lee County Public Schools*
- Nate Halligan** - Board Vice-Chair, *Busey Bank*
- Doug Szabo** - Board Treasurer, *Henderson, Franklin, Starnes & Holt, P.A.*
- Selina Jefferson** - Board Secretary, *Mount Hermon Ministries/Dew of Hermon Early Learning Center*

- Jeff Alluri**, *Element Technologies, LLC*
- Damaris Boone** - *Redlands Christian Migrant Association*
- Rita Dellatore** - *Kid City Early Learning Academy, LLC*
- Brooke Delmotte** - *Early Steps/ Health Planning Council*
- Yara Duchesne** - *Redlands Christian Migrant Association*
- Jason Himschoot** - *Maughan, Himschoot & Adams Law Group*
- Kim Jordan** - *Glades County School District*
- Michelle King** - *Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida*
- Selena Lucas** - *Florida Department of Health, Collier County*
- Roger Mercado** - *Lee County Human and Veteran Services*
- Jim Palmer** - *Department of Children and Families*
- Joe Paterno** - *CareerSource SWFL*
- Kimberly Ross** - *Ross Dynasty Cares*
- Dr. Kelly Roy** - *Florida Southwestern State College*

Susan Block, Ed. M.
Chief Executive Officer



Annual Report 2019 - 2020



*Nurturing the young children of Southwest Florida
and those who care for them!*

Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida
2675 Winkler Ave. Suite 300 Fort Myers, FL 33901

239.935.6100

www.ELCofSWFL.org