



5778 children received services at 240 different early learning programs in any given month.

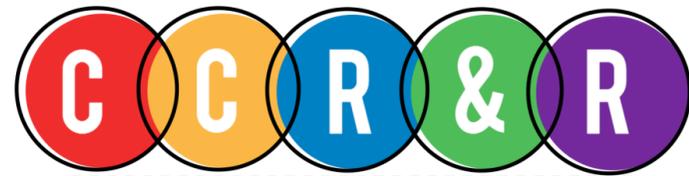
Children who are ready for kindergarten are best prepared for success upon entry into formal educational programming. School Readiness funding is offered to income-eligible and other qualifying families to provide financial supports to children and families. To prepare children for kindergarten, early learning programs offering School Readiness offer developmental screening and an age-appropriate curriculum with a focus on high quality care and education.

During 2020-21, with the assistance of additional funding from the Florida Office of Early Learning, all families on the long-standing wait list were offered the opportunity for School Readiness supports. A special thanks to the Florida Legislators who allocated these funds to ensure that families received this help. We began the year with over 1500 families on the Wait List and completely cleared this list, several times over.

In part, the mission of the ELC is to "enhance the quality of children's lives". The ability to enroll children in School Readiness programs fulfills an important aspect of this mission and is particularly satisfying in support of children, families, and the employers of Southwest Florida.

## Early Childhood Specialists

The Early Childhood Specialists have conducted 243 provider training sessions, completed technical assistance visits, conducted 18 teacher observations and 249 assessments, provided one-on-one coaching support for 66 teachers, and supported providers in implementing best practices around all four counties. The ECS team supported and coached over 357 providers using 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 and 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 9,211 requests for child care information from families regarding School Readiness, Voluntary Prekindergarten and child care services.



The Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) is free for all Florida families. In 2002, Florida 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 - the start of their education journey. 6,091 children attended 278 different VPK programs in our 4-county region.

## Pandemic Response



The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida, through the Division of Early Learning (DEL), allocated more than \$10.6 million to support Southwest Florida's youngest learners. These funds, from Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF), General Revenue (GR), Preschool Development Grant (PDG), and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), were used to provide the resources and support needed to help providers remain open or re-open as soon as they could safely do so.

### Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF) March - December, 2020

- Spring 2020: Distributed to providers \$2.384 million in mini grants to meet infrastructure, cleaning, and supply needs as well as teacher training stipends. Directly distributed cleaning supplies.
- March - August 15, 2020: Suspended termination of SR childcare services, and extended timelines for submission of paperwork by parents to maintain eligibility for families.
- May - October 2020: Provided flexibility for eligibility for SR childcare by adding "job search" as a purpose for care for families.
- April - December 2020: Waived required SR copayments for parents and reimbursed SR (birth-age 5 and school age programs) based on enrollment as opposed to attendance.

### Preschool Development Grant (PDG) \$201,435

The PDG funds, designed to strengthen Florida's overall early childhood system to improve quality early learning experiences for children, were redirected to provide mini grants to support the provision of mental health services to childcare staff and the families they serve, as well as support for the use of high-quality curriculum by SR providers. Monies carried over to the new fiscal year.

### General Revenue Funds (GR) \$2.16M

April-September 2020: Reimbursed SR/VPK providers based on enrollment as opposed to attendance.

### Cares Act Response

In April 2020, ELCSWFL, in coordination with the Office of Early Learning gave priority access to childcare services for health care and first responder professionals. This provided expedited access and referrals for children of first responders and health care workers. More than 130 eligible early learning/childcare providers with SR contracts received a monthly bonus/incentive of \$500 per child (with a maximum limit of \$12,000 per provider location).



## 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.

1,064 children wrote letters to 635 adult volunteers to tell them about their interests and received a total of 3,192 books. This year we welcomed corporate participation into this program. Employers such as Herc Rentals, Humana, and Busey Bank understand the importance of early literacy. Their employee book drives delivered 1,163 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 328 phone conferences, 308 email & 14 on-site connections; 34 observations, 57 collaborative conferences with other agencies, and 191 family conferences.

## Community Connections

Connections to our community are key to our success! These valuable partnerships include:

- Futuremakers
- Florida Prepaid
- Pinwheels for Prevention
- 3Ts Initiative through a grant offered by PNC Bank
- Future Ready Collier
- Harry Chapin Food Bank
- Kiwanis
- Chambers of Commerce
- Greater Dunbar Initiative Partners
- Lee County Public Schools
- Collier County Public Schools
- Hendry County Public Schools
- Glades County Public Schools
- Early Steps
- Healthy Start
- United Way of Lee, Glades, Hendry & Okeechobee Counties
- United Way of Collier County





## ELC Leadership Message



Dear Friends,

This annual report presents all the usual data for readers interested in knowing about the work of the ELC. However, what is not clearly reflected are the incredible challenges faced by the families and providers we serve. Nor does it capture the tremendous response effort by our early learning providers. What a year it was! Thank you to our esteemed early learning community for their dedication to the children and families of Southwest Florida. And, behind the scenes, the ELC team, both staff, and board members, successfully supported those we serve. Kudos to the entire ELC Team! While we begin the 2021-2022 year with ongoing challenges ahead, we are looking forward to implementing newly-passed legislation designed to strengthen the quality of early learning programs. These transformative systems changes, happening gradually over the next few years, place higher expectations for early learning programs, and will strengthen the outcomes for children in School Readiness Programs. Entering kindergarten ready to learn is the first step on the path to third-grade readiness success, high school graduation, and ultimately, all career paths. The foundation of early learning lays critical groundwork for this to happen.

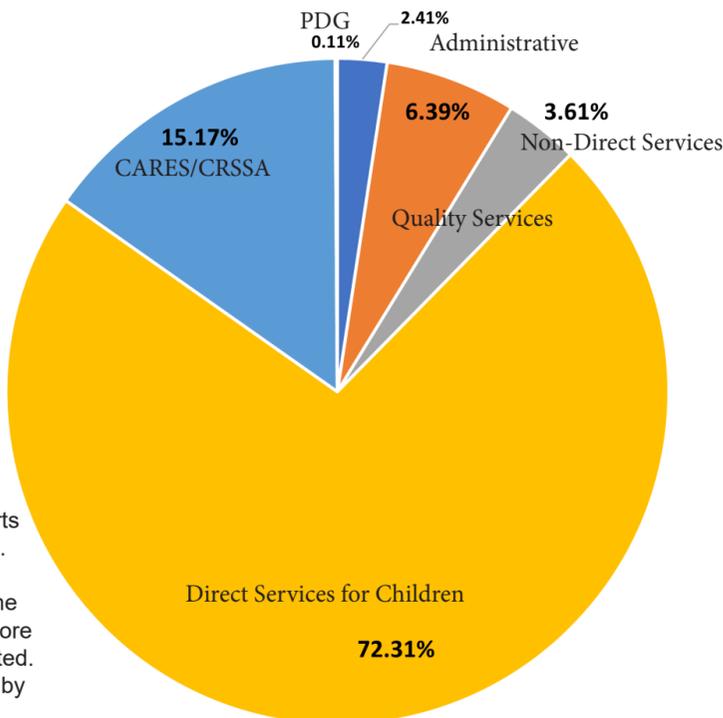
It bears repeating what a year it was! We know, now more than ever, that early learning is important to the educational success of our youngest citizens and the economic well-being of our community. We are fortunate to have many community partners who share our dedication to serving children. By working toward our mission "to enhance the quality of children's lives" we are enhancing the quality of life for all in our community. Please follow our progress and help support our most important mission by visiting our website, [www.elcofswfl.org](http://www.elcofswfl.org) and engaging with us through our newsletter and social media. Thank you!

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

Marshall Bower, Esq.  
Interim Board Chair

### Details of Expenditures

Administrative Activities:	\$1,276,371
Quality Services:	\$3,390,386
Nondirect Services:	\$1,916,899
Direct Services for Children:	\$38,376,687
CARES/CRSSA	\$8,051,620
Preschool Dev. Grant	\$59,090
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$53,071,052</b>



The Early Learning Coalition of SWFL budget supports the SR/VPK program for the fiscal year of 2020-2021. During this fiscal year, the ELC received additional Federal funds to sustain the community throughout the pandemic. These funds were directly distributed to more than 400 providers, both contracted and non-contracted. The method for disseminating the funds was defined by the Phase I - Phase V grants.

### 2020-2021 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*
- Dr. Alice Barfiled** - *Glades County School District*
- 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*
- Michele King** - *Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida*
- Dr. Beth McBride** - *Collier County School District*
- 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*
- Char-Nequa Smith** - *Florida Department of Health, Lee County*

Susan Block, Ed. M.  
Chief Executive Officer  
Ex Officio



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

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## 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. In fiscal year 2020 - 2021, **712** teachers participated in **58** virtual trainings.

