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, School Readiness offers developmental screening and an age-appropriate curriculum with a focus on high quality care and education.

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.

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The ECS team supported and coached over 366 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.

For every child, the start of their education journey - Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) is free for all Florida families. In 2002, Florida voters approved a ballot initiative to provide a high-quality prekindergarten program for every 4-year-old (and sometimes 5-year olds). The VPK program helps preschool children get ready for kindergarten - the start of their education journey.

Grant Funding

The Child Care Stabilization Subgrant Program was authorized by Congress through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). States received funding to provide direct assistance to eligible child care providers to support their financial stability and offset unexpected costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Florida’s program is designed to help stabilize providers now, support them to make strategic investments in their employees and programs, and to reward high quality and participation in the School Readiness Program, with an emphasis on directing higher rates of support to high quality programs in an area with a childcare infrastructure deficit (desert).

The Division of Early Learning (DEL) is overseeing the Child Care Stabilization Subgrant Program in partnership with the Early Learning Coalition (ELC) Redlands Christina Migrant Association (RCMA) throughout the State. ELCS will review applications to verify eligibility, confirm tax information, approve applications for payment, and issue payments to providers.

The following provider types (meeting all requirements) were eligible to receive grant funding:

- Licensed Family Home
- Licensed Family Child Care Homes (FCCH), including Large FCCHs Licensed-Exempt
- Family Home Registered Family Day Care Homes
- Licensed Center: Licensed Child Care Facilities
- Licensed Exempt Center: Exempt Child Care Centers, including Religious
- School District Sites

Inclusion

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 320 phone conferences, 267 emails & 23 on-site connections, 38 observations, 42 collaborative conferences with other agencies, and 409 family conferences.

Professional Development

Our coalition recognizes that professional development is an important component of quality early care and education for young children. The Florida Alliance for the Future in Early Childhood Education (FAFICE) and the Florida Association of Early Childhood Educators (FAECE) have joined forces to create a single professional development program that brings all species of early childhood providers together.

Professional Development

The qualifications for Lead VPK instructors and VPK Directors have been strengthened to encourage quality in the program. VPK Directors are required to take an additional 5 courses and Lead VPK instructors are required to take 15 hours of emergent literacy courses as well as the newest Florida Core Competencies for Early Care & Education. Providers that work directly with children are encouraged to take these courses on their own time. Additionally, as of the 2020-2021 school year, teachers are required to take 1066 professional development hours. Providing teachers with opportunities to learn from each other is essential to the success of the VPK program.
Dear Friends,

The 2021–2022 year was notable due to the waning pandemic and continuing changes within the early learning community. While most of us grew tired of the constant uncertainties, our early learning programs continued to meet the needs of SWFL children and families. We are grateful for these efforts!

Highlights of the year included implementation of new literacy requirements for those teaching Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), preparation for program assessment in VPK programs, and keeping pace with the growing needs for childcare, especially for children under the age of three. With the assistance of the Florida Legislature, funding to support childcare subsidy (School Readiness) increased, allowing our coalition’s ability to enroll more children than ever. During this year, we found new childcare partners to provide School Readiness services, helping us to meet that need. As SWFL continues to grow at a rapid rate, the challenge of ensuring the availability of high-quality early learning programs is a high priority for our coalition. Our hat is off to the caring community of early learning professionals who continue to serve our coalition. Our early learning programs continue to meet the needs of SWFL children and families. We are grateful for these efforts!

Throughout the year, the ELC team stayed busy distributing grants to providers designed to support early learning programs striving to maintain their operations as child attendance ebbed and flowed throughout the year. Using the online portal, staff assisted many families seeking help to find childcare. No matter how the ELC staff is tested, they rise to accomplish the important work behind the scenes to help families and early learning programs. Thank you to the ELC team for your focus on moving us closer to our mission of “enhancing the quality of children’s lives!”

At the center of our organization is our board of directors. Zoom has become a regular part of our meetings. The 2021–2022 year was notable due to the waning pandemic and continuing changes within the early learning community. While most of us grew tired of the constant uncertainties, our early learning programs continued to meet the needs of SWFL children and families. We are grateful for these efforts!

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

- Futuremakers Coalition
- Florida Prepaid
- Pinheels for Prevention
- 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 Counties
- United Way of Collier County

The Early Learning Coalition of SWFL budget supports the SWFL VPK program for the fiscal year of 2021-2022. During this fiscal year, the ELC received additional federal funds to sustain the community during 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 direct guidance for the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The Early Learning Coalition of SWFL is a driving force behind the development and delivery of high-quality early childhood education programs in Southwest Florida. Our mission is to enhance the quality of children’s lives by providing leadership, resources, and support to the early childhood education community.

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

Char-Nequa Smith
Ex-Officio

Our coalition is here to serve the needs of SWFL children and families. We are grateful for these efforts!

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