



EARLY LEARNING
COALITION
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

News from The Early Learning Coalition SWFL

Winter, 2022
Here's what's happening at the ELC

Visit our Website

Phase VI CRRSA Grant Distribution Helps Preschool Classrooms

In December, "Big Checks" were delivered to many preschools who successfully applied for **Phase VI Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations** (CRRSA) Grants.

These funds have provided resources and support to help early child care and education providers remain open or re-open, pay parent co-pays and provide mini-grants to providers and educators to help them continue to enhance their skills and classroom environments for both safety and high-quality learning.



(l-r) Sherry Shupp, Early Childhood Specialist at the ELC joins Janina Renner and Michaela Pohl, Director of Leigh Child Care Center.



(l-r) Anabel Paz, Director of Paz Child Care Family Home and Antonia Corrales, of the ELC with a Phase VI Grant check.

Legislative Initiatives

VPK Programs May See Increased Funding

The Florida Senate's proposed budget includes nearly \$400 million in additional funding for Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) over the next three years. If approved, the proposal would also increase wages for Florida's preschool teachers.



The funding would increase per-student school year funding from \$2,486 to \$3,294 through an \$808 supplemental payment dedicated to increasing VPK teacher pay to a minimum of \$15 per hour. This increase would represent the largest increase in the program's history.

Florida was one of the first states in the country to offer free prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds regardless of family income. Since the program began in 2005, more than 2.5 million children have benefited from VPK.



The overflowing generosity of our corporate connections! Books delivered through a virtual Amazon book drive.

Literacy Buddies *Book Drive Success*

Our ELC was the beneficiary of the generosity of the good folks at Humana, Central/North Florida Region, who again sponsored a holiday book drive to benefit the **Literacy Buddy Program**. Employees purchased **285** books from an Amazon list curated by Tallica Tidwell, Early Literacy Advisor. Books were distributed at centers in Collier, Lee and Hendry Counties. Thank you, Humana!



Children loved receiving their new books at the PA Geraci Child Care Center in Fort Myers, FL.

Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! *January 24-28, 2022*

In January, we joined together to raise awareness about the importance of reading to young children. Preschools marked the week with a simultaneous reading of selected titles.

3-to-5-year-olds listened to *Regards to the Man in the Moon* - by Ezra Jack Keats, and teachers followed the reading with related lesson plans. Infants and toddlers listened to *My First Busy World*, by Eric Carle

The Division of Early Learning collaborates with ***Just Read, Florida!*** and the Florida Department of Education for this annual statewide event.





Reading *Regards to the Man in the Moon* at Nicea Academy, Naples, FL



Reviewing lessons learned after reading *My First Busy World* at Forza Child Development Center, Naples, FL



Following up with activities at Oak Creek Charter School, Bonita Springs, FL



Thousands of cut-out children's paper hands are suspended from the Capitol Rotunda dome in Tallahassee, FL.

Children's Week

January 30 - February 4, 2022

This event has been held annually for the past 20 years, and coincides with the start of the Florida Legislative Session. Events are centered primarily at the Capitol Courtyard and Rotunda in Tallahassee, FL to remind returning legislators to keep children's issues in mind when considering policy during their session.

A highlight of the activities during **Children's Week** is the "Celebration of the Hands" - where thousands of cutout paper children's hands are created by preschools throughout the state and hung from the ceiling of the Capitol Rotunda.



New ELC Board Members

Have a Seat!



Chantal Porte





Rebecca McKellar



Tara Sherrod



Mary Grace Romo

In January our ELC saw the arrival of six new members to our Board of Directors. **Tara Sherrod**, of Hendry County, represents faith-based providers. She is the Director of the First Baptist Preschool in LaBelle. **Mary Grace Romo** represents Lee County and will serve on the Board's Nominations and Bylaws Committee. **Chantel Porte** represents the Florida Department of Children and Families and will serve on the Board's Program Committee. **Tanya Williams** represents Collier County on the Board. She is employed by the Collier County Library. **Rebecca McKellar** represents private, for-profit child care and is from Lee County. **Alex Breault** works at the Naples Chamber of Commerce and represents the private sector business requirement of the ELC Board. Welcome all!

Thank you to outgoing members Dr. Beth Barfield, Rita Dellatore, Selina Jefferson, Jim Palmer, and Roger Mercado.



Florida Prepaid

Best Bet to Save for College Costs

We know the cost of college, no matter how far off, can seem overwhelming. Yet as a committed parent, you want to make sure your child has all the tools they need – both academic and financial – to succeed in life.

Our partner, Florida Prepaid College Savings Plans, wants the same for your child. That's why Florida Prepaid is encouraging families to start saving for college by joining them in the journey.

When you enroll in a Florida 529 Prepaid Plan now through April 30, 2022, you'll earn \$125 for each year of college or university purchased - up to \$500 total.

Prepaid Plans are the risk-free, stress-free way to save for college – allowing you to lock in future tuition costs for less.

- Covers tuition and most fees; optional dormitory plan available
- Choose the plan to fit your budget; Florida Prepaid manages the rest
- Risk-free plans are guaranteed by the State of Florida
- Set payment schedule (monthly, 5-year, lump sum)

Saving for college is one of the many important steps you can take to secure your child's future. Florida Prepaid is here to help you make that possible. To learn more and enroll [click here](#)

Looking Forward

Early Learning Matters!

In preparation for the distribution of funding to our early learning



providers, we have recently had conversations with them to learn about their specific challenges. To say that the past two years have been difficult would be quite an understatement! As Florida's economy and educational systems start to move back to normal, our early learning providers continue to struggle with the shifting landscape and the impact of COVID-19.

Some things to consider about the importance of Early Learning.

1. Early Learning providers offer care and education for our youngest citizens.
2. The services provided enable parents to go to work and/or go to school to better themselves while they are assured that their child is well cared for.
3. Without Early Learning programs, parents find it difficult to go to work. Employers also find it difficult to have an appropriate workforce without those employees. They too depend upon the availability of Early Learning programs.
4. Early Learning makes the economy run. Literally.
5. Early Learning providers have tremendous responsibilities in their day-to-day work and an expectation that they will prepare children for kindergarten and beyond.
6. Early Learning professionals are grossly underpaid. The way in which the complicated service delivery system operates puts a huge burden on parents to underwrite the cost of care in most instances. This is a system where teachers cannot be paid their worth even though parents contribute significantly to the care and education of their children.
7. When programs operate with high quality standards, they are more likely to positively impact a child's readiness for kindergarten.
8. Readiness for kindergarten is a key indicator of whether a child will ultimately graduate from high school.
9. The greatest determinant of high-quality early learning is the caliber of the teaching staff.
10. With high performance expectations and low pay, it is difficult for Early Learning providers to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers.
11. Early learning is an integral part of our educational and economic success.

The Coalition is optimistic about how a rebuilt, post COVID-19 system might be better organized and funded. Our team looks forward to the work ahead with our provider community to build a system of high-quality early learning programs that is affordable, available, accessible. Many thanks to our SWFL Early Learning programs for your dedication to the children and families in our community. We depend on you and appreciate your hard work and tenacity!

Susan Block, CEO
Early Learning Coalition SWFL

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