



Effective Public Policies Benefiting Children, Youth and Families

GOAL: The Florida Children's Council supports effective prevention and early intervention policies and investments that minimize families' long-term dependence on government services.

EARLY LEARNING AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Congress reauthorized the federal guidelines related to the School Readiness program resulting in an opportunity to address children's access to quality early learning settings, program standards and benchmarks, payment rates, teacher-preparedness and continuity of care for children and families. Given there will be considerable changes to the early learning system to comply with the new federal guidelines, the Council has prioritized the following public policy priorities:

Maximize early learning investments by including education-based performance standards and a tiered-payment structure for early learning to prepare children for school success, to enhance the private business model of early learning, and to ensure accountability of public funds.

Provide continuity of services for children and families served through School Readiness by eliminating policies and practices that result in disenrollment of families eligible for the program.

Provide School Readiness educational, enrichment programs for children of low-income working families, birth-12, in early learning and school-age care to support children's readiness for and success in school.

Maximize out-of-school time investments for K-12 students to foster grade promotion, graduation, and college and career preparedness.

Align family access and benefits of the School Readiness programs and CareerSource workforce development plans with the focused outcome of better employment and economic stabilization.

Include differential-rate contracts with high quality early learning programs in high-poverty areas to increase family access to quality early learning programs.

Support teacher preparation in all publicly-funded early learning programs by requiring each lead teacher to have a Child Development Associate degree within five years and by requiring 20 hours of annual professional development.

Increase family access to community resources through Help Me Grow to support the healthy development of young children.

Align increased investments in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program for four-year-olds to quality benchmarks to improve kindergarten readiness and later school success.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Increase student learning outcomes by targeting child health and well-being through maximized use of state and federal funding for health care coverage for eligible children.

Reduce the number of children served in costly emergency care and improve health outcomes by providing access to preventative health care for all lawfully-residing, eligible children through Florida KidCare.

Streamline enrollment and reenrollment procedures in Florida KidCare to ensure continued access to preventative health care services.

Reduce infant mortality and disparities in birth outcomes by increasing the capacity of Healthy Start to serve parents at highest risk, including those experiencing perinatal depression, substance use and intimate partner violence.

Support the healthy development of infants and young children by making infant mental health services accessible as needed, including services for substance-exposed newborns, and supports related to maternal/paternal depression, and substance abuse.

Promote greater access to physician services in underserved neighborhoods through reimbursement for telemedicine in school settings.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Maximize the impact of intervention services and reduce more costly treatments for older children by managing caseloads and adequately serving infants and toddlers with significant delays or with pre-existing conditions in the Early Steps program.

Implement universal developmental screening and improve the process for referrals to the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) for comprehensive assessment and access to appropriate interventions to optimize investments supporting children's healthy development.

Strengthen public policy by eliminating restrictive limitations in Children's Medical Services (CMS) and by educating families on eligibility for services.

Ensure that children with developmental disabilities in state custody receive priority status from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

CHILD PROTECTION

Coordinate services and increase accessibility to preventative evidence-based substance abuse and mental health programs for children and families to decrease the incidence of child abuse and neglect; as well as maximizing investments capable of disrupting existing cycles of substance abuse that contribute to generational and hereditary addiction.

Support young adults who are leaving foster care and are transitioning to independence.

Ensure that children who have been abused and/or neglected are provided with safe, stable and permanent homes.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Maximize investments in youth through evidence-based prevention and diversion programs including those for Juvenile Assessment Centers (JACs) in areas of high utilization, Children in Need of Services/Families in Need of Services (CINS/FINS) and effective girls' programs.

Ensure that juvenile records are not sold for commercial purposes. Ensure juvenile records are expunged after court review when a juvenile turns 19 or 21 (when juvenile court jurisdiction ends), if the juvenile has no pending juvenile or criminal cases, and is not serving a sentence, thereby removing barriers to higher education, employment, housing and military service.

Reduce the number of children held in detention through evidence-based diversion programs and promote increased opportunities for career and technical education in the juvenile justice system.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Maintain the ability for local communities to determine the best use of resources to develop, implement and administer programs that address the needs of children and families.

Support evidence-based policies and programs to ensure healthy, educated children, stable families, and safe and supportive communities.

Ensure equitable funding for programs affecting children and families that are adequate and respect regional economic differences.

Maximize all available revenue streams for strategies that support child development and economic stabilization.

Minimize requirements and regulations to local government or community services that increase the need for taxpayer-funded programs.

Support programs that promote the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

Ensure the health, safety and well-being of children in all publicly funded programs.