

## AELC Talking Points for Legislative Priorities

### Fully Fund Early Learning Programs

- 856,634 children (age 0-12) were living at or below 150% of the federal poverty level in 2007, meeting eligibility requirements for school readiness services. Only 247,349 children (less than 30%) received services in 2008-09 due to funding limitations.
  - Without school readiness assistance, many parents cannot work. For families that do receive school readiness services, the typical cost of care is 7% of family income; without support, the cost would be 50% of family income.
  - Inadequate child care arrangements costs Florida businesses through increased absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover. Thirty-eight percent of young children in Florida have parents that have had to change child care arrangement in the past month or change jobs in the past year (or both) due to child care conflicts.
  - Low income mothers who receive child care assistance are 40% more likely to remain employed after 2 years than those that do not receive assistance.
  - The school readiness assistance waiting list is now approaching 80,000.
  - Children in high quality early learning environments have better development, academic, and life outcomes.
- \$37M in General Revenue must be reinstated to maintain services to the children currently participating in school readiness.
  - During the past two legislative sessions, recurring General Revenue funding for school readiness has been replaced with non-recurring funds.
  - Reductions in General Revenue funding are likely to reduce the federal Child Care Development Block Grant funds that Florida is eligible to receive. Every \$1 million in additional state funding reductions would trigger an additional loss of \$1.2 million in matching federal funds. The federal funds lost to Florida would be made available to other states willing to provide matching resources.
  - Any additional reductions in state funding for the School Readiness program could jeopardize federal funds received by Florida under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) as well as Florida's eligibility for early learning challenge grant funds currently being considered by Congress.
  - An average of \$4,000 is spent annually to serve a full-time child in the School Readiness program. Therefore, each \$1 million dollars cut from the program results in a minimum of 250 children and their families no longer having access to affordable child care.
- \$38M is required to replace non-recurring federal funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act utilized in 2009-10 for the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program.
  - Florida elected to utilize American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to support the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program during 2009-10; those non-recurring dollars must be replaced this year.
- \$17.8M must be added to address 2008-09 and 2009-10 deficits and maintain services to the children currently participating in the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program.
  - The Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program is a constitutionally mandated program for four-year-old children.
  - Sixty-four percent of Florida's eligible four-year-old population participated in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program in 2008-09.
  - Voluntary Prekindergarten Program funding was short in 2008-09 by approximately \$8.3 million and funding for 2009-10 was utilized to meet 2008-09 expenses; a similar scenario exists for the 2009-10 budget year with a projected deficit of approximately \$9.5 million.
- \$22M must be added to address anticipated growth in the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program.

- The June 30, 2009 Voluntary Prekindergarten Program Estimating Conference an enrollment growth for the 2010-2011 year of 8,439 children.
- Quality early learning services are critical components of economic development, enabling families to work while their children are prepared to enter school ready to learn, have fewer special education placements, read at or above grade level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, graduate high school on time, and be employed with higher earnings.

### **Authorize AWI as the Responsible State-level Entity for All Voluntary Prekindergarten Services**

- Create a unified early care and education system with efficiencies in staffing, infrastructure, and resources across the three state agencies.
  - Florida Department of Education Office of Early Learning currently utilizes five staff persons as field staff to support Voluntary Prekindergarten Program training and technical assistance. The Agency for Workforce Innovation also has field staff available to support training and technical assistance. Potential savings: Approximately \$500,000.
  - Both agencies utilize fiscal, information technology, program, and research/evaluation staff. Potential savings: undetermined.
  - State appropriation processes are complex as each agency involved is staffed by different legislative committees. Numerous legislative staff must dedicate time to understanding, communicating, analyzing, and coordinating early learning issues. Potential savings: undetermined.
- Support a seamless early care and education system that simplifies access for parents and providers.
  - One responsible agency would simplify access issues for parents who currently must visit multiple state websites or make multiple calls for information on the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program.
  - One responsible agency would simplify procedures and processes for early learning service providers. Currently providers that serve children through the 3-hour Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program and provide school readiness services have to:
    - Keep two separate eligibility procedures, attendance rosters, verification processes, and multiple other forms
    - Follow different absentee processes and payment policies
    - Navigate two separate sets of standards for four-year-old children, the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Standards and Florida Birth to Five Performance Standards
    - Conduct different child assessments for the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program and the School Readiness Program on the same children
    - Monitor and participate in training requirements from three different agencies
- AWI Office of Early Learning is the administrator for the Child Care Development Block Grant and oversees birth to age five early care and education services for Florida and has staff with expertise in early childhood.
  - AWI Office of Early Learning has the early childhood and child development expertise among its staff to best guide Florida's early care and education system.
  - AWI Office of Early Learning works successfully with local early learning coalitions, and local coalitions provide direct connections to providers and parents and have a successful history of being responsive to local needs.