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Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. **Fact Sheet**

- The Florida Legislature passed the School Readiness Act in 1999, creating the Florida Partnership for School Readiness (FPSR) and called for the formation of local school readiness coalitions to improve the readiness of children when they enter school. The Broward County School Readiness Coalition, Inc. was formed in June of 2000.

Since that time:

- *The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc.* (formerly the *Broward County School Readiness Coalition, Inc.*) has been dedicated to the implementation of an integrated, high-quality, seamless early care and education service delivery system for children.
- *The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. (ELC)* has been accountable for assessing the early care and educational resources available in Broward County, as well as developing local plans to address identified needs. The Coalition itself is made up of 25 diverse board members from the private sector, as well as various community/human service organizations in Broward County. Additionally, 13 staff members work for the Coalition.
- *ELC* has funded and overseen a system of services designed to help ensure that Broward County children are ready for school upon entry into kindergarten, while also ensuring that parents have access to the necessary support services for strength and stability. The Coalition has partnered with Family Central, Inc., Broward County Public Schools, Nova Southeastern University, University of Miami, United Way of Broward County, Broward County Health Department, Children's Services Council, and Broward County, Human Service Department, Children's Services Administration Division, Child Care Licensing and Enforcement Division to more effectively work toward these goals.

The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. now administers the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Education (VPK) program:

- Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) implementing legislation was passed in January 2005, which placed responsibility for this program with local school readiness coalitions. Moreover, all school readiness coalitions were renamed "Early Learning Coalitions" to reflect their enhanced roles in meeting the early care and education needs of children and their families.
- *The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc.* now falls under the direction and funding of the Office of Early Learning, a division of the Agency for Workforce Innovation.
- *ELC* will organize VPK to give all Broward County parents access to the program which is designed to prepare four-year-olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. This new program will be an addition to all of the existing school readiness programs that *ELC* currently oversees.
- Presently, *ELC* has a combined School Readiness and VPK projected budget of \$90 million, which is comprised of federal, state, local, and private funding. Although funding does not cover all of the identified unmet needs in Broward County, *ELC* strives to use all of its resources in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

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Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK)

FACT SHEET

Who Established Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten: Florida voters who passed a constitutional amendment in 2002 that requires a voluntary pre-kindergarten program in our state for all four-year-old children by fall, 2005. VPK is being administered by the government-mandated, not-for-profit Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc.

What VPK is: VPK is designed to help prepare children for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. The program allows a parent to enroll his or her eligible child (four years old by September 1 and residing in Florida) in a free VPK program. The program is voluntary for children and providers.

When VPK will be offered: Beginning in the 2005 school year, parents have the option of enrolling their children in a school-year VPK program consisting of 540 instructional hours, or in a summer program beginning in the summer of 2006, consisting of 300 instructional hours.

Why was VPK established: To encourage school readiness, nurture a love of learning and create a brighter future for Florida's children. VPK enhances existing school readiness programs that had been established in 1999 with the Florida Legislature's passing of the School Readiness Act. This Act created the Florida Partnership for School Readiness and called for the creation of local school readiness coalitions. In Broward, the original coalition was called the Broward School Readiness Coalition. With the additional responsibilities of administering VPK, the coalition has become The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County.

What is the difference between VPK and School Readiness: VPK is a voluntary program available to all Florida residents, regardless of income. School readiness services mainly target lower income families, and focus on helping families find affordable, quality childcare.

Where VPK will be offered: Private childcare providers, parochial schools and public schools throughout Florida that meet the state's requirements for eligibility to offer VPK.

Where can I find out who will offer VPK: You can visit the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. website (www.elcbroward.org) to get a complete list of providers. Keep in mind that this is a living document and will be updated throughout the year.

Who is eligible for VPK: VPK is offered free to Florida residents who have children who are age four by September 1 of each school year beginning in 2005. We are projecting approximately 16,000 4 year-olds in Broward County will participate in the program.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LONG AWAITED PREKINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT OPENS TO BROWARD PARENTS

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL, June 9, 2005 -The Agency for Workforce Innovation announced today the beginning of the registration process for parents to enroll their children in the state's new Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program. Parents will have the option of enrolling children in a school-year program, beginning this fall, consisting of 540 instructional hours, or a summer program, beginning in 2006, consisting of 300 instructional hours.

Eligible children must reside in Florida and be four years old on or before September 1st of 2005. Parents and providers can find the registration forms online at www.vpkflorida.org or call (954) 724-7577 for a paper copy of the registration form. Each parent who has completed the registration form will be contacted within 30 days in order to arrange to complete the eligibility and enrollment process.

"We are receiving applications from both parents and providers simultaneously," stated Penny Westberry, Chief Executive Officer of the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. "This means that provider options for parents are continuously increasing."

The Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program is designed to prepare Florida's children for kindergarten and develop the skills they need to become good readers and successful students. It includes standards for literacy skills, strict accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes and qualified instructors. Early Learning Coalitions will administer the Voluntary Prekindergarten program at the local level, register providers and provide applications and information to parents. To locate contact information for the nearest Early Learning Coalitions, parents can visit www.vpkforida.org and click on "where do I go for VPK information in my area." They may also contact the VPK information line toll free at 1-866- FL-READY (866-357-3239) with any additional questions.

Since 2000, the Early Learning Coalition of Broward, Inc. (ELC) has been dedicated to the implementation of an integrated, high-quality, seamless early care and education service delivery system for children. The Coalition is accountable for assessing the early care and educational resources available in Broward County as well as developing local plans to address identified needs. Presently ELC has a budget of \$55 million, which is comprised of federal, state, local, and private funding and VPK will add approximately \$43 million to the budget. For more information, visit the website at www.elcbroward.org.

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VOLUNTARY PRE-K PROVIDERS LOOK FORWARD TO SERVING COMMUNITY

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., June 9, 2005 -- With the launching of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten throughout Florida this fall, local childcare centers and schools in Broward County are gearing up to offer the free program to parents who have a child who is age four on or before September 1, 2005.

"We've had tremendous interest from providers throughout the county, including many faith-based and private childcare centers who have long been dedicated to helping children prepare for success in later school years," noted Penny Westberry, Chief Executive Officer of the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. (ELC). The Coalition was formed through the Florida Legislature's School Readiness Act, which called for the creation of local school readiness coalitions. These coalitions, which have been responsible for overseeing a variety of school-readiness programs, now have the additional task of implementing Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten.

"Providers who applied to offer Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten have worked to ensure that they meet the state's standards for qualification," Westberry added.

At First United Methodist Pre-School in Coral Springs, located at 8650 West Sample Road, Director Julie Bergstrom knew right away that it was important to be on board with the program when the implementing legislation was passed this year.

"The Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program was created by Florida's voters, who wanted more structured, measurable educational programs to help children achieve future success," said Bergstrom. "I felt it was very important for our pre-school to offer this program to the parents we serve, so I began advocating that we take the steps necessary to be qualified as a provider."

With Bergstrom's encouragement and direction, First United Methodist Pre-School underwent significant renovations to increase its capacity and update its facilities. She also began the process of achieving Accreditation.

"I saw Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten as the perfect opportunity to take our already high standards to the next level," Bergstrom noted.

When the school opened registration to parents this past February for the fall school-year, Bergstrom offered the option of expressing interest in enrolling their child in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten if the pre-school were eligible to be able to provide it. Interest was sufficient to tentatively fill three classes, so the pre-school has now planned for a fourth classroom.

Voluntary Pre-K Providers
(more)

"There's a huge demand out there for this type of program, and we are proud to be able to help fulfill this need," said Bergstrom.

The staff at Baby Boomers Childcare Center at 261 S.E. 13th Avenue in Pompano Beach recognized a similar opportunity to better serve the community by offering Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten.

"We want to be a provider of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, so we can meet the needs of more parents and their young children in our community – especially those who may not have been able to afford high quality care," said Baby Boomers owner Julia Musella. "Our school has been in operation for 10 years, we are NAEYC accredited, and our teachers are certified with bachelor's degrees in such areas as early childcare education and child psychology.

"We also speak and teach in three languages: English, Spanish and Portuguese, and we see the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program as a way to reach out to the huge bi-lingual community in our area. The program will also create a strong foundation for all children to develop, both as great learners and as great citizens, she added.

All Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten providers have flexibility in structuring the hours per day and days per week to meet the program's instructional hours. They can offer a school-year program consisting of 540 instructional hours, and/or a summer program consisting of 300 instructional hours. In order to qualify to offer Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, each provider must meet the standards for child-teacher ratios, licensing, and developmentally appropriate curricula.

"It is exciting to see the wide range of providers who are interested in offering Pre-Kindergarten, and who want to be a part of helping our community's children develop a love of learning early in their lives," said ELC Chief Executive Officer Penny Westberry. "By enhancing Florida's educational opportunities, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten will help us in so many ways; both for parents of young children and for the future of our community and state."

For more information on Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, call the VPK Information Line at (954) 724-7577, or visit www.vpkflorida.org.

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Interview with Penny Westberry, Chief Executive Officer, Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. (ELC)

Q. Why is it important for children to attend pre-kindergarten?

A. A quality pre-kindergarten program helps prepare children for the challenges they will face in kindergarten – socially, emotionally, and cognitively. If children have the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten, there's a better chance that they will develop a love of learning, and enjoy future success in school.

Q. Is there really a link between early school success and real-life success?

A. Yes. Research on early childhood programs has shown that children experienced an increase in IQ levels, a higher employment rate and a higher monthly earning rate when they became young adults, compared to their peers who didn't have the benefit of quality pre-kindergarten.

Q. What about our existing pre-kindergarten and childcare programs, don't they already accomplish this school-readiness goal?

A. Many do provide outstanding programs that help with school readiness. Others need assistance and guidance in order to focus on the teaching relationship, as a part of the caregiver relationship, with a child. One of the primary missions of the School Readiness Act is to help to establish an across-the-board standard of excellence for early care and education programs. Current studies show that fewer than 40% of the five-year-olds in our state performed at a "proficient" level on the literacy standards of Ready-for-School Behavioral screener. We hope to increase this number significantly with the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program.

Q. Just 40% of five-year-olds are considered to have proficient literacy skills for kindergarten?

A. That is a staggering number. What are some of the ways Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten will help more children be better prepared for school? The program mandates a low staff to child ratio, and important education standards for the teachers and staff who are delivering Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten. It will also be universally available and free to all four year olds in Florida. Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten is designed to teach children the skills they need to learn to read, understand math and make progress in other areas. Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten enables children to become more familiar with books, ways to use language and problem-solving strategies. The programs also help children develop skills like paying attention and following directions.

Q. It seems like a monumental task to establish the same quality standards – with all of the different school districts in our state and all of the various childcare options. How is the state going to implement Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten in a manageable way?

A. When the School Readiness Act was passed, the legislation created the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, and called for the creation of local school readiness coalitions. We had been operating as the Broward County School Readiness Coalition, and had been administering many school readiness programs before taking on the responsibility of implementing Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten. When we added Voluntary Pre-K to our roster of services, we became the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc., and the responsibilities for the Florida Partnership for School Readiness were fully transitioned to the state Office of Early Learning/Agency for Workforce Innovation.

Q. What is the difference between the school readiness services you were already providing and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten?

A. I'd like to emphasize that we are still providing the same outstanding school readiness services that we were providing before taking on Voluntary Pre-K. Voluntary Pre-K is now an added program that we are administering. The other school

readiness services mainly target lower income families, and focus on helping families find affordable, quality childcare. Overall, one of our primary goals continues to be to help strengthen families in our community.

Q. Does Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten also target lower income families?

A. Actually, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten is aimed at all families in our community and has additional quality standards required. It is a free program to everyone, and all parents who have a child who is four years old by September 1, 2005 are encouraged to pre-register their child.

Q. How do parents enroll?

A. Currently, parents can find a registration form online at www.vpkflorida.org, call the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. at (954) 377-2188 for a hard copy of the application, or call the VPK Registrar at Family Central at (954) 724-7577.

Q. Aren't the providers going to be public schools in Broward County? Isn't your organization part of the school board?

A. The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. is independent of the School Board of Broward County. While some public schools may be on the provider list, others may not. The provider list will also include private childcare centers and parochial schools that meet the state's standards and would like to participate.

Q. Is the Early Learning Coalition a nonprofit organization?

A. We are nonprofit, and we are state-mandated. We are a quasi-governmental organization, as we were established legislatively.

Q. As a nonprofit, will you be reaching out to the business community for support as well?

A. The business community is one of the greatest benefactors of the Early Learning Coalition's programs, because we are helping to create a high quality workforce of dedicated, reliable and knowledgeable young adults. Investing in the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. is an investment in a stronger future for all of us.

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Interview with Alan Levy, Past-Chairman of the Board, Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. (ELC), Chairman, Great American Farms, Inc.

Q. What is the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc.'s mission?

A. We have a very clear and straight-forward mission. It is summed up in our vision statement: All children in Broward County will enter kindergarten socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively and behaviorally ready to learn and families will have comprehensive early care and education services readily available to them in order to be stable and strong.

Q. What drives this mission?

A. The understanding that school readiness leads to student success, which in turn leads to a stronger future for everyone. Public education plays a critical role in preparing our young people for productive adult lives. It is vital for employers in our community to have a work base of people with viable skills. Education and business growth is a symbiotic relationship. If schools – including early education programs – get the support they need from the business community, it's a win/win for all of us.

Q. How is the ELC's board helping to accomplish this mission?

A. Our board is made up of 25 Broward County-based members, which include members who have been selected on the basis of their expertise and interest in child welfare and education issues. These positions have been legislatively mandated. Additional board members represent the private business sector. This combination gives us solid direction in creating a strong infrastructure for the organization, and making effective decisions on how to best meet the needs of children and families in our community.

o. What are the legislatively-mandated seats on your board, and which private sector businesses are represented?

A. The Coalition itself is made up of 25 diverse board members from the private sector, as well as various community/human service organizations in Broward County. The members who are mandated by legislature include; Department of Children and Families, Family Central, Inc., the Head Start Program, Children's Services Council of Broward County, faith-based and private child care provider representatives, disability program representative, School Board of Broward County, the County Health & Licensing Departments, Broward Community College and the local Workforce Development Board. Among the private sector appointments are three government appointees from various industries.

Q. That is a diverse group. What brings them together to serve on the Early Learning Coalition board?

A. We all share an understanding of how important it is to give children all that we possibly can to help them thrive – especially in today's competitive world. We want the future leaders of tomorrow to have the foundation and skills they need to help make our world a better place. We also realize that vibrant successful communities need to attract a viable workforce. In order to do that, businesses must offer employees a lifestyle that includes strong public education for their children. School readiness helps raise the education capabilities of the entire child population within a community. By raising the standards through these programs, we help ensure a more

successful publicly educated student population. These high standards result in a more dynamic workforce that will attract and build a flourishing business community.

Q. How is the ELC board helping to establish this foundation for success?

A. We recognize that many skills that lead to productive, successful lives begin to develop at an early age. Our goal is to reach out to young children and their parents to ensure that they have the tools and resources necessary to succeed. To do this, we have to have strong processes and people in place to implement the school readiness and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs that we oversee. That's where the business expertise we have on our board comes in, and the knowledge of childcare and education that other board members provide.

Q. As a nonprofit organization, where does ELC obtain its primary support?

The ELC is legislatively mandated, so most of our dollars are provided through the Florida Legislature – but that doesn't fully cover our needs. Although Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program will be paid for by the state for every child who wishes to participate, the Coalition will continue to seek out additional resources for our other under funded school readiness programs.

Q. How will you fill in the gaps?

A. More and more, we plan to tap into the resources of local business leaders, many of whom already see ELC as an important investment in our community. When business leaders evaluate nonprofits for consideration of support, many look carefully at the way the organization is managed, and whether its infrastructure is viable. Our board continues to apply strategic management principles in developing services and programs that equal, and sometimes exceed the "best practices" that are found at successful profit-focused companies. Businesses will appreciate our structure and our critical mission, and realize the type of impact they will have on young children and families, by partnering with us. It is a long-term impact that gives employers a strong work force, fostering a community that is a great place to both live and work.

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