

# Paving the Road to Early Learning Success

## Community Feedback Tour



### Background

The Future Project is all about imagining a new early learning future in Florida. Grounded in parent and educator voices, [we are creating an actionable roadmap for the future of early learning policy and funding in our state.](#)

This work was designed with [three initial phases](#):

- From April to November 2022, we traveled the state meeting with small groups of parents and educators to talk about their dreams, challenges, and experiences with early learning.
- Following the listening tour, parents, educators, center owners and directors, advocates, and state policy experts on our statewide Steering Committee worked collaboratively to plan the future and draft The Future Project Roadmap.
- Now, we are sharing the draft recommendations with the community for feedback before we finalize the roadmap.



### Our Draft Recommendations

The recommendations that follow offer a roadmap to our shared destination—our collective vision for Florida’s early learning system and what it provides children, families, and the community of professionals required to ensure our children’s success.

[This vision consists of four key components](#):

1. Successful Parents
2. Magical Early Learning Experiences
3. A Happy Workforce
4. A Well-Coordinated, Resourced, & Data-Driven System

### Your Feedback

As a participant in this third phase, we look forward to hearing from you: what did we get right? What needs to change? What are you excited to help make happen?

**For more information about our listening tour or statewide Steering Committee, please visit [www.childrensmovementflorida.org/future-project](http://www.childrensmovementflorida.org/future-project)**



# 1. Successful Parents

**Goal:** All parents and families can access the resources and support they need to help their children thrive, including mental health resources, parent support systems, and affordable year-round early learning that meets the unique developmental needs of their children.

## Objectives, Strategies, and Key Activities:

**A. Make information available for parents—in various family-centered spaces—about early learning opportunities and how they can support their child’s learning and development, in partnership with educators.**



- i. Expand the availability and reach of information and resources for families with young children, beginning at birth—including leveraging existing Early Learning Coalitions to offer regular parent orientations, information about available programs, and how to navigate the early learning system.
- ii. Improve parent engagement practices and expectations for Florida’s early learning programs to increase communication and partnership between parents and early learning teachers and providers, particularly as it relates to their child’s progress and early learning curriculum and standards.
- iii. Develop and implement a statewide framework for parent advocacy and leadership development training that can be customized for local contexts and includes modules for developing parents' ability to understand and advocate for children across settings.
- iv. Provide resource and information sessions for families statewide and in their local communities across multiple languages, formats, communication platforms, and agencies so parents have up-to-date information on health care, child development, mental health, available resources, how to identify quality early learning, and changes in early learning programs and policies.

**B. Expand the availability and accessibility of services that support the mental health and overall success of parents.**

- i. Make available accessible, free support groups for parents and caregivers to access peer support, encouragement, and community, especially for parents of children with disabilities.
- ii. Provide affordable or free mental health screenings and therapies for parents to understand and address their own mental health needs.

## 2. Magical Early Learning Experiences

**Goal:** Every teacher has the tools to provide every child with engaging, hands-on, high-quality, developmentally appropriate, and differentiated early learning experiences that foster the magic of exploration and learning as the foundation for healthy early childhood development and school readiness.

### Objectives, Strategies, and Key Activities:

**A. Move towards a fully-funded quality early learning system that supports the early brain development of all children, birth to age five.**

- i. Increase per-child funding levels across early learning programs to support improved quality and increased access that is in line with the true cost of care.
- ii. Find sustainable funding streams to provide reliable resources year-to-year for the early learning system to support healthy child development from birth to kindergarten.
- iii. Increase teacher compensation to better support quality and attract and retain talent in early learning classrooms. (See Strategy 3C).

**B. Increase understanding of the importance of early learning and the value of developmentally appropriate practice among policy makers and the public.**

- i. Engage state and local policy makers as champions to educate their peers on developmentally appropriate practice and the need to increase funding levels for early learning.
- ii. Launch a public awareness campaign to educate community stakeholders on the importance of early learning and developmentally appropriate practice.
- iii. Promote programming that effectively addresses the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers.
- iv. Strengthen Florida's accountability system to provide more support for quality improvement and help advance high-quality, and developmentally appropriate instruction.

**C. Improve training, professional development, and the availability of expert support for early learning teachers to implement developmentally appropriate practice and meet differentiated student needs.**

- i. Increase training available for teachers to meet varying student needs in early learning settings.
- ii. Establish more pre-teacher training in early childhood development to better prepare teachers to enter and remain in early learning classrooms.
- iii. Educate and increase awareness and instruction in all domains of early childhood development.
- iv. Provide additional trained personnel with expertise in behavioral health and assessing and serving students with disabilities to support teachers in meeting their needs in the classroom.

### 3. A Happy Workforce

**Goal:** The teachers and directors who are the backbone of the early learning system are recognized, respected, and supported with ample training, competitive compensation, and benefits that support them in making a living as career early learning professionals.

#### Objectives, Strategies, and Key Activities:

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**A. Increase public awareness, appreciation, and respect for the important and challenging work done by early learning professionals.**

- i. Launch a statewide **educational campaign** about the importance of qualified professionals for providing quality early childhood learning experiences.
- ii. Expand the number and frequency of state and local **community recognition** opportunities and appreciation activities for early educators, including an Early Learning Teacher of the Year award.
- iii. Provide specialized staff, additional training, and other **resources to support teachers in addressing challenges** in their classrooms (higher rates of children in poverty, challenging behaviors, disabilities, dual language learners, etc.) (See Strategy 2C).

**B. Strengthen career pathways for the preparation, professional development, and advancement of early learning professionals.**

- i. Outline and promote a standard set of **career pathways/progressions** for professionals within the early learning field.
- ii. Promote the role of **master teachers, center directors and other coaching roles** for excellent teachers to remain in the field and impact program quality through work with centers, schools, and Early Learning Coalitions.
- iii. Develop more **training opportunities** for advanced teachers and directors in early learning to continue to hone their craft.
- iv. Engage early childhood educators who have direct experience in early learning classrooms and training and professional development programs in informing the development of the **informal pathway** for early learning professionals.

**C. Improve compensation and benefits for early learning professionals. (See Strategy 2A).**

- i. Document the **true cost of quality care** with a well-compensated workforce and educate policy makers and stakeholders about this along with examples of effective funding models.
  - ii. Explore, pilot, and expand opportunities for **shared services** across multiple early learning providers to affordably access comprehensive health benefits (including vision, dental, and mental health) for early learning professionals.
  - iii. Advance efforts to provide **free or discounted child care** for the children of early learning professionals.
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## 4. A Well-Coordinated, Resourced & Data-Driven

**Goal:** All parents, educators, and other family service providers work together, communicate regularly, and coordinate effectively in an aligned, well-funded, data-driven, accessible, and effective early learning system that supports the growth, development, and overall success of all young children in Florida.

### Objectives, Strategies, and Key Activities:

#### A. Ensure that **early learning programs are accessible, affordable, and responsive to the needs of families.**

- i. Incentivize the creation and funding of **more early learning options to cover more families**, including non-traditional hours, dual language learners and immigrant families, and children who are at-risk of or diagnosed with a disability.
- ii. **Increase funding levels** for early learning programs to provide more quality options. (See Strategies 2A and 3C).
- iii. Expand the availability of federal and state funding to support **specialized instruction and therapies for young children with disabilities and special health care needs**.
- iv. Establish regular feedback loops and **authentic family partnerships to drive program and policy changes** through the participation of parents and caregivers whose children are direct program beneficiaries (School Readiness, VPK, Head Start, etc.) in system governance and leadership, beginning with local Early Learning Coalition boards and expanding to the state-level councils or advisory boards.

#### B. Establish mechanisms and practices that allow parents, educators, and others who regularly interact with families with young children to **share information and resources, express concerns, coordinate to support families, and build community.**

- i. Create and biannually review an **easy-to-understand system map** of early learning options and interactions with family services to identify gaps, duplication of services, and opportunities for coordination.
- ii. **Streamline eligibility processes and determinations**, exploring opportunities to implement categorical eligibility across state and federal programs designed to support families with young children.
- iii. Connect early learning programs with **comprehensive social service programs** to promote early learning and other resources for families.

#### C. Advance regular **data-driven decision-making to support 100% kindergarten readiness through program and process improvements that are informed by real-time, coordinated data systems across children and family services.**

- i. Establish and use **unique identifiers across shared data systems** to streamline screening data, connect early learning quality indicators to other data points, disaggregate data to identify critical success factors and gaps across maternal and child health, education and workforce systems, and conduct system-level evaluation.
- ii. Regularly review data to **identify and address disparities** in outcomes for different populations (e.g., dual language learners, immigrant families, rural populations, children with disabilities or special health care needs, families living in poverty, and/or particular racial and ethnic groups).