

# Proposed Accountability Strategy for the School Readiness (“SR”) Program

## Challenges

- ✓ Research has documented that before there is an achievement gap there is a readiness gap identifiable as early as 18 months for children from low-income families.
- ✓ Currently, funding is approximately \$30 million below the level from more than a decade ago.
- ✓ Florida’s average reimbursement rate is approximately 50% of the actual cost of care, undermining the ability for the child care industry to invest in quality programming.

## Proposed Solutions

- Establish a clear definition of quality
- Institute accountability
- Serve children at greatest risk of school failure
- Provide appropriate funding

## Policy Recommendations

**Define Structural quality:** Guarantee the current 20% payment differential for a Gold Seal provider that is accredited through an agency that has demonstrable impact on child outcomes.

**Define Process quality:** Given the number one predictor of child success is the interaction between teachers and children, define process quality in law and include a reporting structure for identifying for identifying providers that do not meet a minimum threshold of quality.

**Address Accountability:** Incorporate standards for process quality as a requirement of the provider contracts. Providers that do not meet the minimum threshold requirement will have a specified period of time to complete a corrective action plan and if after that time there is no improvement the contract will be terminated.<sup>1</sup> Providers that meet quality standards will be eligible for a payment differential.

**Maintain Local Flexibility:** Through the Early Learning Coalition Plan process, communities will: document quality improvement strategies that align to the newly defined Quality Standards; differential payment rates for quality programs; use of contracted slots; and assurances of preserving parental choice.

## Funding For the Bill

- **\$5.9 million** for a base line assessment for every early learning provider that serves a certain percentage of School Readiness children; and
- **\$100,000** for evaluation of Gold Seal accrediting entities.

## Additional Funding Priorities to Increase Quality

- **\$15.5 million** recurring for the continuation of the Performance Funding Project;
- **\$10 million** for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to increase the number of credentialed lead teachers;
- **\$3 million** for Early Learning Florida to provide specialized professional development; and
- **\$30 million** recurring investment to pay providers a reimbursement rate, provide for contracted slots, or support quality initiatives that allows SR programs to improve and sustain quality.

## Impact to the System

1. Reduce the number of low quality SR providers receiving taxpayer funds.
2. Improve language skills and help reduce the achievement gap to increase kindergarten readiness and early grade success.
3. Ensure that communities are able to focus services for the children most at risk for school failure.

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<sup>1</sup> The only exceptions to this policy would be if the provider is located in a ‘child care desert.’