

Early Learning Consortium

TALKING POINTS FOR THE VPK BSA INCREASE

- All children in Florida should be given the chance to succeed, and we applaud the Legislature's efforts to implement appropriate assessments to ensure high-quality VPK programs.
- Many private providers have been offering quality early learning since the inception of Florida's VPK program, but low payment rates make it difficult to sustain them.
- Well-trained teachers are the first indicator of a quality program as the CLASS® assessment tool affirms. Successful teachers possess the following capabilities:
 - Understand child development and plan appropriate learning experiences,
 - Help children understand the connection between their classroom and the outside world,
 - Understand social-emotional development and help children regulate emotions and gain impulse control,
 - Are consistent, reliable and stable to help young children develop strong relationships,
 - Know how to effectively engage children and scaffold their learning,
 - Participate in ongoing professional development to bring the best techniques and practices to the classroom.
- The next most important measure of quality is the classroom environment. This means that there are ample books, developmental toys, activity centers, curriculum materials and a balance of teacher-directed and child-directed activities to enhance the learning experience for all children.
- With the current appropriation, we are expecting high-quality VPK but reimbursing for the bare minimum. The cost models demonstrate that the only way VPK providers can exist with the current appropriation is to:
 - Pay teachers less—which means high turnover with negative impacts on children's relationships. Further, it is difficult to retain well-trained teachers which result in a negative impact on instructional practices.
 - Have few resources for classroom instructional materials—which means the learning environment is lacking the resources for curriculum supports, developmentally-appropriate toys and supplies to engage child learning.
- The current VPK BSA is \$2,437 per student and has not been raised in four years. We know that a rate closer to \$3,800 would better allow providers to serve our children and meet quality measures.
- Raising the VPK BSA to 50% of the K-12 BSA would achieve this level. In order to accommodate the increase, the Early Learning Consortium is proposing a phased-in approach at 25% per year over the next four years.
- As we work toward greater accountability in the system, we must remember that Florida voters demanded a "high-quality" program in passing the constitutional amendment for VPK, with the

intention to truly invest in our children before they enter kindergarten. Research affirms that brain growth occurs most rapidly during this period. Florida is strongly encouraged to increase the investment in VPK to maximize children's learning potential.