

OEL SUPPORT FOR FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST LEARNERS AMID THE PANDEMIC



The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), through the Office of Early Learning (OEL), has allocated more than \$363 million in funding to support Florida's youngest learners.

These funds, from Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF), General Revenue (GR), Preschool Development Grant (PDG), and Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), may be used to provide the resources and support needed to help providers remain open or re-open as soon as they can safely do so. A description of Florida's responses to provide resources and supports to both families and child care providers is below. Each of the supports provided are consistent with the following principles:

\$363 MILLION

*in funding to support
Florida's youngest learners.*

- Strategically rebuild the early childhood education and care landscape with an emphasis on quality providers.
- Provide local early learning coalitions with flexibility, as appropriate, to leverage established partnerships and available resources.
- Redirect existing federal discretionary funding, as appropriate to support families, providers and communities.
- Enhance the early childhood education and care workforce through incentives to gain new skills and expand existing skills, competency and professionalism.

I. IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

OEL implemented the following actions to provide supports to both School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) families and child care providers.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDS (CCDF) - \$119.5M (MARCH – OCTOBER)

- **Spring 2020:** Distributed to providers \$14.2 million in mini-grants to meet infrastructure, cleaning and supply needs and teacher training stipends.
- **March-August 15, 2020:** Suspended terminations of SR child care services, and extended timelines for submission of paperwork by parents to maintain eligibility for families.
- **May-October 2020:** Provided flexibility for eligibility for SR child care by adding “job search” as a purpose for care for families.
- **April-September 2020:** Waived required SR copayments for parents, and reimbursed SR (birth – age 5 and school-age programs) (\$9.6M per month) based on enrollment as opposed to attendance (\$7.9M per month).

GENERAL REVENUE FUNDS (GR) - \$84.4 MILLION

- **April-September 2020:** Reimbursed VPK providers based on enrollment as opposed to attendance. Totaling \$84.4M from April – September 2020.

PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT FUNDS (PDG) - \$4 MILLION

- The PDG funds, designed to strengthen Florida's overall early childhood system to improve quality early learning experiences for children, were redirected to provide mini-grants to support the provision of mental health services to child care staff and the families they serve, as well as provided support for the use of high-quality curriculum by SR providers (**\$2M for each two sets of mini-grants to early learning coalitions**).



II. CARES ACT RESPONSE

The information below describes Florida's use of the CARES ACT funds to support the state's childcare providers and the families they serve. To date, \$155,312,343 of Florida's total \$223,605,108 allocation have been awarded.

A. CHILD CARE FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS AND FIRST RESPONDERS - \$52.9M

- In April 2020, OEL, in coordination with local early learning coalitions, prioritized and increased access to child care services for health care and first responder professionals by creating a referral process and financial incentives for programs to swiftly provide expedited access and expedited referrals for 26,000 children of first responders and health care professionals (as of 9/8/2020). 87% of these children are new enrollments in the program. Over 4,000 eligible early learning/child care providers, with SR contracts, received a monthly bonus/incentive of \$500 per child (with a maximum limit of \$12,000 per provider location).

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B. THREE GRANT PHASES TO NEARLY 12,000 EARLY LEARNING/CHILD CARE PROVIDERS – \$88.8 MILLION

- PHASE 1** **Emergency Child Care Relief Grants for Early Learning/Child Care Providers - \$52.8M**
- 6,500 SR and VPK providers and non-contracted providers that were **open** for business as of **April 30, 2020** received grants to continue their services. These providers may have had intermittent closures, and providers that have closed permanently after April 30, 2020 were not eligible for these funds.
- PHASE 2** **High-Quality Reopening Support Grants for Early Learning/Child Care Providers - \$19.1M**
- 2,300 SR and VPK providers and non-contracted providers that **were closed on April 30, 2020 and reopened by August 31, 2020** received grants. These providers were required to have a Gold Seal designation or a program assessment (CLASS score) of 3.5 or higher.
- PHASE 3** **Contracted SR/VPK Providers - \$16.9M**
- 3,100 SR and VPK providers, including contracted public/charter school providers and program assessment (CLASS) exempt providers that **were closed on April 30, 2020 and reopened by August 31, 2020** received grants to assist in reopening during the COVID-19 crisis.

C. OTHER PROGRAMS - 13.6 MILLION

Successful Transition to Kindergarten - \$10.7M

- Incoming kindergarten students had their preschool experience significantly disrupted by COVID-19. Funding has been provided to 36 school districts via their early learning coalition to implement summer programs for rising kindergarten students identified with limited language and emergent literacy skills as determined by the VPK assessments and teacher recommendations. To date, the investment has been \$10.7M, and the remaining funds will be support continuing this program throughout this year.

Progress Monitoring for VPK and K - \$2.9M

- A pilot program for VPK providers to use the same screening tool that is currently required for kindergarten screening (STAR Early Literacy) will begin in January and includes an evaluation component.