

Policy Brief: Introducing Home-Based Educator Programs in the State of Florida to Provide Additional Positive Early Childhood Education Programs to Disadvantaged Children

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Executive Summary. The purpose of this brief is to encourage government leaders in the state of Florida to fund and support initiatives that could be implemented to support young children and their families, particularly in sparsely populated rural areas or communities with a higher proportion of low-income families. More specifically, it is recommended that the state should consider implementing a home-based educators program. This type of program works by sending teams of certified teachers to engage in home visits with families who have young children to model effective parenting practices, engage with children, and build relationships with the families. The goal of a home educator program is to provide child development, social, health, and parent involvement services directly to families in the home environment. In rural and low-income areas throughout the state, there are often gaps in the education and resources that are available and accessible to young children due to problems including a general lack of resources and infrastructure, a shortage of qualified, well-trained child care and preschool teachers, and a culture that may not strongly support education and parental involvement. Therefore, supporting the implementation of a home-based educators program would be very beneficial, as it would fill in many of these gaps and support early childhood issues, despite the many cultural and logistical challenges.

Statement of the Problem. It is well established that early childhood development is a combination of biological brain development and experience.ⁱ Moreover, early educational experiences and positive social interactions are considered particularly effective in enhancing young children's socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive development, as well as their health and well-being. Unfortunately, many of Florida's preschool aged, particularly those who live in rural and/or low-income areas, may not have access to quality early educational experiences that can support their optimal development. Others could be living in situations where they could be subjected to adverse childhood experiences, leading to high levels of stress that can potentially affect brain development. To combat such problems and challenges it is frequently recommended that interventions and programs, such as quality preschool or child care programs, should be implemented to support preschool aged children's overall development. Yet, in many of Florida's rural communities, the lack of transportation, cost and affordability, as well as cultural and social challenges limit the potential of this approach. Consequently, there is a need for other more family centered approaches to reach and support young children's healthy development. Thus, the policy question addressed in this brief is as follows: Should the state of Florida fund and support the implementation of a home-based educator program to directly support young children and families in the home environment?

Background. According to the 2010 census, approximately 5.71% of Florida's population is between the ages of zero and four years old, and an additional 5.75% is between the ages of five and nine, therefore making up a significant portion of the state's residents.ⁱⁱ Research has shown that the most significant brain development occurs in young children from birth to age 3, and that 90% of this brain development occurs by the time a child is five years old.ⁱⁱⁱ It follows that

resources should be directed toward supporting initiatives that can enhance and support the education and development of these young children. Research has shown that quality early childhood programs have many positive short-term effects for the children, as well as profound, long-term effects on both cognitive development and academic outcomes.^{iv} These effects include the following:

- Improved cognitive and social development while the children are in child care during the first few years of life, as well as during the first few years of school
- Improvements in socio-emotional outcomes immediately after the early childhood program/intervention (though of a smaller magnitude than the cognitive/academic improvements).

Furthermore, children from low-income and disadvantaged homes often see additional benefits from early childhood care and education programs:

- Higher reading scores in comparison to children from low-income families who did not receive quality early childhood education and care, particularly if they entered the program early.
- Immediate boosts in IQ averaging around eight IQ points, leading to significant improvements for children in academic performance.

The potential benefits that Florida, as well as the United States as a whole, forgoes by underinvesting in early childhood education is estimated to cost billions of dollars.^v

One type of early childhood care and education program that has shown to be successful is a home-based educators program, or a home visiting program. As described above, these types of programs involve training certified teachers and sending them to the homes of young children to provide additional child development services, social services, health services, and parental

involvement services directly to families in the home environment. These services may include delivering education support and home-based services such as planning safe, developmentally appropriate experiences for infants and toddlers that meet the needs of each individual family. Existing programs are very structured in an effort to provide consistency. They typically include a strict protocol for each visit, a formal curriculum designed by professionals in the field, and an individualized plan for each family to meet their specific needs and incorporate the program into the family's regular routine.^{vi} Some of the benefits of home-based educator programs include the following:

- The ability to overcome barriers such as transportation and accessibility issues that are especially prevalent in rural, low-income areas.
- Professionals could maintain regular contact with families – this would allow them to get to know each family, build trust, and hopefully prevent child and family related problems from escalating.
- Potentially combatting the cultural challenges of supporting early childhood education in low-income, sparsely populated communities.
- The opportunity to focus on families in which the child is more vulnerable due to health, developmental, or social concerns.

Home-visiting programs have proven to be successful at ensuring that at-risk children and their families are provided with the social support, educational services, and health, development, and safety education. These programs often incorporate not only educational services, but also health and social services. Pediatricians are supportive of such programs because they provide the educational and social services that young children need for adequate brain development, thus improving childhood health and supporting the children and families in ways that the

doctors cannot^{vii}. An example of a successful home-visiting program is the Florida Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home-Visiting Initiative^{viii}. This initiative used federal grants to make almost 16,000 home-visits to over 1,500 families around the state in the 2015 fiscal year. While it was only implemented in a handful of Florida counties, it was successful at promoting positive early childhood experiences by sending teams of health and education professionals into the homes of at-risk pregnant women and their families to help parents of children from birth to age five develop the resources and skills necessary to ensure that their children develop appropriately and have sufficient early childhood experiences. While various home-visiting programs may differ slightly, all such programs typically incorporate modeling effective techniques to parents, providing families with information, resources, and guidance, promoting early learning in the home, and screening children for developmental delays.

Statement of the State's Interests. Inadequate early childhood education programs can lead to many negative consequences for the state of Florida long-term. Research has shown that children who participate in successful early childhood education programs see significantly higher scores on academic assessments when they are young adults, higher rates of completing high school and attending a university, and lower rates of self-reported violence and law-breaking.^{ix} Young children who are considered to be disadvantaged and do not receive adequate early childhood education and care are thus not only more likely to experience school failure and developmental delays, but they are also more likely to drop out of school or become involved in juvenile crime.^x These negative outcomes are not only very detrimental to the children, but they also become a burden on the State of Florida. However, these burdens can be reduced

intervention programs that provide these children with the education and care that they need to succeed. A prime example of such a program is a home-based educators program.

It is in the best interests of the State to fund programs, such as a home-based educators program, that increase the levels of educational attainment among its population. For example, increasing the state-wide high school graduation rate by reducing the number of dropouts even by half would lead to over \$100 million in additional earnings, over one thousand new jobs created, and an increase of millions of dollars in state tax revenue.^{xi} Furthermore, individuals who graduate from college are half as likely to be unemployed as those with only a high school diploma, and among the employed, college graduates earn an average of 84% more than those without a college education.^{xii} It is evident that increased educational attainment is extremely beneficial to the State economically.

Additionally, reducing the rate of juvenile crime would also benefit the State by saving taxpayer dollars. For example, incarcerating a youth costs, on average, \$407.58 per person per day, when the most expensive form of imprisonment is used.^{xiii} However, juvenile crime is not the only potential negative consequence of inadequate early childhood education programs that could be an economic burden on the State. Children who suffer from developmental delays may have to be placed into special programs later in their education, which again costs more money. Many of the problems faced by these children could be prevented with participation in an early childhood education program, thus avoiding

Pre-Existing Policies or Laws. In the State of Florida, all preschool and early childhood education programs are voluntary – no one is required to send their children to preschool. However, there are some programs in place to provide early childhood education and care to low-income families. Some of these programs are summarized below.

- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Part of this act encouraged the use of a portion of state funds to support preschool programs.^{xiv}
- Florida Statutes on Child Care: There are various laws regulating the quality of child care providers and facilities in Florida, but they do not focus on the quality and accessibility of early childhood education programs – rather, they describe the standards necessary for safe and reliable child care facilities.^{xv}
- Florida Head Start: While it is not a policy or law, Head Start is a program that was implemented to improve the lives of young children by providing preschool programs free of charge to low-income families.^{xvi}

There are no existing policies, laws, or regulations related to home-based educator programs.

Policy Options. Below is a list of potential policy options.

- **Option 1:** Establish a state regulation requiring all young children to have some form of early childhood education and care, whether it is attending a preschool program or participating in a home-based educators program.
- **Option 2:** Allocate some state funding to establish home-based educator programs, particularly in low-income and/or rural locations, that would be provided to families free of charge.
- **Option 3:** Establish a home-based educator program, but charge parents a nominal fee for enrolling their child.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Each Policy Option. The advantages and disadvantages of each policy option are summarized below.

- **Option 1:**

- **Advantages:** All young children throughout the state of Florida would receive early childhood education and care. This would hopefully improve both their academic success and their social development, potentially reducing state-wide rates of juvenile crime and contributing to the state's economy in the long-term.
- **Disadvantages:** Some families may be opposed to the state government requiring them to enroll their child in an early childhood education program. Additionally, the funding to pay for establishing more programs would likely have to come from an increase in taxes, which would be an unpopular decision. Finally, it may be difficult to regulate all of the various programs throughout the state and ensure that all children are receiving the same standard of education and care.

- **Option 2:**

- **Advantages:** Establishing a home-based educator program would allow many disadvantaged children who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to attend preschool to receive the education, care, and support that the need to be successful. Such a program would be particularly beneficial to families who had difficulties transporting their children to a traditional preschool. As described above, more children receiving adequate early childhood education would be beneficial to the state of Florida in the long run.
- **Disadvantages:** Finding enough money for the state to be able to fund a home-based educators program and provide it to families free of charge may prove to be

difficult, as it would likely require an increase in state taxes, which the public may be opposed to.

- **Option 3:**

- **Advantages:** As described above, establishing a home-based educator program would provide the opportunity for many children to receive quality early childhood education. Charging a fee for the program would eliminate the need for increasing taxes to provide enough state funds to develop the program.
- **Disadvantages:** Charging parents a nominal fee to enroll their children in the program would make it difficult for low-income families to take advantage of it. This would essentially defeat the purpose of establishing a home-based educator program, as this type of early childhood education program would be particularly beneficial to disadvantaged children and those who live in rural parts of the state, as it may be more difficult for these children to attend typical preschool programs.

Recommendation. My recommendation is **policy option 2**. Establishing and funding a home-based educator program to provide to families free of charge would be the best way to fill in the gaps in early childhood education throughout the state of Florida. It could be applied to any area, whether it is urban or rural, and it would allow families who are not able to take their children to a traditional preschool program to provide their children with sufficient care and educational opportunities that are essential to proper brain development. The establishment of such a program would also provide more choices to families, enabling them to select the preschool program that best suits their needs. A home-based educator program would also promote healthy parent-child relationships and interactions and incorporate high-quality learning

experiences into the home. While attending preschool would still not be mandatory for young children in this policy option, a home-based educator program would encourage more parents to enroll their children in early childhood education programs without having to mandate it. Furthermore, the costs associated with providing free home-based educator programs in the state of Florida would be worth it in the long run, because, as described previously, investing in early childhood education is economically beneficial to the state. Investing in early childhood education and development can boost earnings (and thus Florida's economy) by 25%.^{xvii} In fact, the rate of return for investing specifically in the early childhood education and development of disadvantaged children is between 7% and 10% annually, due to improvements in not only education, but also health, sociability, economic productivity, and reduced crime. While some home-based educator programs do exist in Florida, they are limited in scope and are restricted to certain parts of the state. Expanding these programs and providing them to more low-income families would be extremely beneficial.

Annotated Bibliography.

ⁱThe Core Story of Early Brain and Child Development (EBCD). (n.d.). American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved 2017, from <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/EBCD/Pages/Overview.aspx>.

This article describes the health and developmental benefits of positive early childhood education programs for young children.

ⁱⁱ April 1, 2010 Census Counts. (2010). Retrieved from http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/Medium_Projections_ARSH.pdf.

This webpage provides 2010 census information for the state of Florida. I specifically utilized the data on the percentage of young children in Florida's population.

ⁱⁱⁱ Perry, B.D., Pollard, R.A., Blaickey, T. L., Baker, W.L., & Vigilante, D. (1995). Childhood Trauma, the Neurobiology of Adaptation, and "Use-Dependent" Development of the Brain: How "States" Become "Traits". *Infant Mental Health Journal*. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0617/cc58f96c914d78c59721b995d15e87c4aaaf.pdf>.

This journal article describes the negative effects of childhood trauma on brain development, and discusses the critical periods where brain development occurs, and how early life experiences can impact this development.

^{iv} *Children's Brain Development* [Pamphlet]. (n.d.). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/fbnp/files/2013/07/Education-Matters-CFBNP-Childrens-Brain-Development.pdf>.

This pamphlet explains the significance of early educational experiences on childhood brain development.

^v Barnett, W. Steven (1995). Long Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes. Retrieved from https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/05_03_01.pdf.

This journal explains a study done on the effects of early childhood education programs throughout the child's lifetime. It shows how the benefits from these programs extend far beyond the early childhood years.

^{vi} Gaylor, E., & Spiker, D. (2012). Home Visiting Programs and Their Impact on Young Children's School Readiness. *SRI International, Center for Education and Human Services, USA.*

This article provides data to support the findings that home visiting programs have positive effects on children's later academic success.

^{vii} Council on Community Pediatrics (2009). The Role of Preschool Home-Visiting Programs in Improving Children's Developmental and Health Outcomes. *The American Academy of Pediatrics.* Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/2/598.info>.

This article discusses the positive benefits of home visiting programs not just on the children's academic success, but also their health. It provides the perspective of pediatricians on the impacts of these programs.

viii Home Visiting Program (2016). Maternal and Child Health. Retrieved from <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/MaternalChildHealthInitiatives/HomeVisiting/pdf/fl.pdf>.

This article describes the types of home visiting programs that already exist in Florida. It describes how they mainly focus on health, rather than on education.

ix Campbell, F.A., Ramey, C.T., Pungello, E., Sparling, J., & Miller-Johnson, S. (2002). Early Childhood Education: Young Adult Outcomes from the Abecedarian Project. *Applied Developmental Science*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240519150_Early_Childhood_Education_Young_Adult_Outcomes_From_the_Abecedarian_Project.

This study looks at the long-term effects of early childhood education programs. It reveals how the benefits of positive early childhood educational experiences benefits the individuals when they are young adults, as seen in higher levels of educational attainment, reduced crime rates, etc.

x Reynolds, A.J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D.L., et al (2001). Long-Term Effects of an Early-Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest: A 15 Year Follow-Up of Low-Income Children in Public Schools. *JAMA*. Retrieved from <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/193816>.

This article specifically describes the role of early childhood intervention programs on reducing juvenile crime rates.

^{xi} Zimmerman, Geoff. High School Graduation Rates and the Economy. *The Community*

Research Collaborative Blog. Retrieved from <http://crcblog.typepad.com/crcblog/high-school-graduation-rates-and-the-economy.html>.

This article discusses the economic benefits of higher high school graduation rates for both the individual and the state, thus showing how the state of Florida benefits in the long run from improved early childhood education programs (such as home educator programs).

^{xii} Rothwell, Jonathan (2013). The Economic Value of Education. *Brookings*. Retrieved from

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2013/11/12/the-economic-value-of-education/>.

This article provides data that can be used as examples of how both the state and the individual benefit from higher rates of educational attainment.

^{xiii} Sneed, Tierney (2014). What Youth Incarceration Costs Taxpayers. *USA News and World*

Report. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2014/12/09/what-youth-incarceration-costs-taxpayers>.

This article provides data exemplifying how reducing rates of juvenile crime (which can be done by improving early childhood education programs) is economically beneficial to the state and its residents.

^{xiv} Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. *Florida Department of*

Education. Retrieved from <http://www.fldoe.org/policy/federal-edu-programs/title-i-part-a-improving-the-academic-/preschool.stml>.

This article describes how the No Child Left Behind Act, an example of an existing policy that attempts to regulate some early childhood education program, benefits children from low-income families.

^{xv} The Florida Legislature (2017). The Florida Statutes on Child Care. Retrieved from <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/childcare/docs/2015FloridaStatutes.pdf>.

This article describes the existing laws from the Florida Statutes on the quality of early childhood care, and exemplifies how many of the existing laws do not focus on early childhood education.

^{xvi} (2011). Florida Head Start. *Florida Head Start Collaboration Office*. Retrieved from <http://www.floridaheadstart.org/>.

This article describes the Florida Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These are programs that already exist in Florida to provide preschool programs to low income families, but they do not include home-based educator programs.

^{xvii} 4 Big Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Development. *The Heckman Equation*. Retrieved from <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/4-big-benefits-of-investing-in-early-childhood-development/>.

This article describes the most significant benefits of investing in early childhood education programs. It describes the improved outcomes in academic achievement, health, and economics.