

PRESS RELEASE



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GOVERNOR SCOTT'S "FIGHTING FOR FLORIDA'S FUTURE" BUDGET INVESTS IN FLORIDA'S FUTURE STUDENTS

TAMPA, Fla. – Governor Scott announced yesterday that the 2017-2018 "Fighting for Florida's Future" Budget recommends \$1.1 billion for the Office of Early Learning, which is an increase of approximately \$36.1 million. These investments will help ensure Florida's earliest learners are prepared for their future.

Governor Scott said, "As a father and grandfather, I know firsthand how important early learning is when it comes to preparing children for future success in the classroom and beyond. I am proud to invest more than \$1 billion to ensure we prepare our youngest students to be successful throughout their lives."

"It is now up to the Coalition, our community and our advocates, to work with our Legislators to push this budget through the approval process," said Dr. Steve Knobl, CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County.

Governor Scott's "Fighting for Florida's Future" Budget includes:

- **\$406.5 million for the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program:** More than 175,000 children were enrolled last year in the state's free VPK program, which prepares 4- and-5-year-olds for kindergarten. The Governor's budget includes an \$11.3 million increase, raising the base student allocation \$50 per child in the VPK school-year program (from \$2,437 to \$2,487) and \$43 per child in the summer program (from \$2,080 to \$2,123).
- **\$25 million to serve more children in the School Readiness Program:** The program helps eligible low-income families get child care so parents can work or attend training and/or education programs to be able to work. Florida served approximately 207,000 children in the program last year and, on average, more than 37,000 children were on waiting lists statewide. This funding will serve approximately 4,600 more children.
- **\$15.5 million for Early Learning Performance Funding:** Performance-based funding improves outcomes for children in School Readiness by providing special training and incentives to child care providers and instructors.



- **\$10 million for T.E.A.C.H.:** This statewide early childhood scholarship program helps child care center teaching staff, preschool teachers and providers earn certifications and degrees while they continue to work in early childhood and school-age care settings. The education level of child care providers is a critical indicator of early child care quality.

Representative Jackie Toledo, Florida House District 60, said, "I fully support the Governor's mission in funding Florida's Future Students, and as a mother of five, I see the importance of early education of a child's development. Investing in early education and preparing students at a young age has tremendous long term benefits to their future and our community."

Aakash Patel, board chair of the Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County, said, "The Governor's recommendations are a clear indication of his unyielding commitment to laying a solid foundation for Florida's economic future. He understands that early childhood is where the life-long economic path for our youngest citizens begins. Ensuring that families can access and afford high-quality early learning opportunities secures the economic future of our communities and our nation."

Dr. Steve Knobl, CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County, said, "These budget allocations show Governor Scott's firm commitment to making early childhood learning and education a permanent and vital component of the education continuum in Florida. This investment in our youngest citizens will have a measurable return for our community as a whole."

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