

2026 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

High-quality early care and education is a proven investment in Florida's economy. The School Readiness Program helps children develop key skills and supports working families by making child care more affordable, allowing parents to remain in the workforce.



For the future of our workforce and the strength of our communities, let's join together and champion these critical legislative priorities this session:

1

FUNDING METHODOLOGY

Align state investments with Florida's workforce and education goals by ensuring child care access isn't jeopardized by sudden funding shifts.

CURRENT SITUATION:

- The Legislature determines the amount of SR investment each year as part of the budgeting process. Individual community allocations are based on a formula that considers both fluctuating county population and projected SR enrollment (FTE) by county.
- Available funding is then proportionately allocated to individual communities based on these combined factors.

CHALLENGE:

- Absent additional investment into the program, any growth in one county driving a subsequent increase in funding, drives funding away from other counties, leaving them with insufficient funding to sustain their current level of FTE.
- The resulting large swings in year-to-year funding create uncertainty for local communities, making it difficult to plan, invest in long-term infrastructure, and support working families.

SOLUTIONS:

- Incorporate a stabilizing (or "compression") factor in the methodology to balance funding differences between fast-growing and slower-growing regions.
- Retain "Revert & Reappropriate" language to roll over unspent funds to the next Fiscal Year.
- Eliminate 14-day waiting period for the reobligation/deobligation process.

2

ADDITIONAL STATE INVESTMENT

By investing in early education, we prepare Florida's future workforce to be kindergarten-ready and reading on grade level by third grade.

CURRENT SITUATION:

- Statewide enrollment in the program is driven by shared state (16%) and federal (84%) investment. Despite generous funding, only a fraction of eligible children receives SR.
- Without new state dollars, Florida's early learning system risks falling behind in meeting family and workforce needs.

SOLUTIONS:

- Investing now helps maintain Florida's competitive edge and positions the State as #1 not only in K-12 outcomes, but also in early childhood education.

The ELC of Hillsborough County is dedicated to preparing every child, from birth through age five, for lifelong success. Our work supports families, early learning providers, and the broader community. As state funding changes, the needs of children and families remain at the forefront.

This section provides an at-a-glance summary of our service population, waitlist trends, and the fiscal realities that shape our ability to deliver high-quality early learning services.

- our waitlist reached **4,551 children** on 8-25-2025.
- **5.5% population** increase in children 0-5

HILLSBOROUGH SCHOOL READINESS (SR) PROGRAM FUNDING

	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26
SR Base Allocation	\$ 74,435,522	\$ 78,714,219
Hold Harmless Allocation	\$ -	\$ -
Sufficient Funds Allocation	\$ 6,000,000	\$ -
Waitlist Allocation	\$ 441,897	\$ -
Reobligation and/or Deobligation of Funds	\$ 2,167,925	\$ -
Total School Readiness Program Funding for Direct Services	\$ 83,045,344	\$ 78,714,219

2025-26 Difference from 2024-25 BASE \$ 4,278,697

% Difference from BASE 5.7%

2025-26 Difference from 2024-25 TOTAL SR PROGRAM FUNDING \$ (4,331,125)

% Difference from 2024-25 TOTAL SR PROGRAM FUNDING -5.2%



\$1.1 million of the \$4.3 million was recovered through Revert & Reappropriate

LOCAL IMPACT



To Families:

- Longer waitlists
- Children cut from programs at renewal

To Providers:

- Closures due to underfunding
- Reduced quality supports
- Staff Reductions



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