

Ms. Luisa Santos, Board Member

**SUBJECT: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

**COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS, & INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS**

“Early childhood education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and success, setting the stage for academic achievement and reducing disparities in educational opportunities”<sup>1</sup>. This excerpt comes from our M-DCPS Strategic Plan Pillar I: Relevant, Rigorous, & Innovative Academics, outlining the need to support our students' early childhood education. The first five years of life are critical for academic success, as this is when foundational skills develop, shaping future learning and achievement.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is defined as the period from birth to age five, before children enter kindergarten. Research in neuroscience and child development highlights this as the most rapid phase of brain growth, where early experiences shape the brain's structure and long-term capabilities<sup>23</sup>. A strong start fosters cognitive, social, and emotional skills essential for success in school and beyond, while adverse experiences can create lasting challenges. Early intervention and high-quality learning experiences are crucial as the brain's adaptability diminishes as children age<sup>4</sup>.

A successful outcome of prioritizing ECE for our students would be ensuring that all children enter kindergarten with the foundational skills needed for long-term academic and social success. Success in ECE directly influences a child's readiness for kindergarten and long-term academic achievement. Research shows that high-quality preschool programs can significantly boost cognitive development, with effects strong enough to move a child from the 30th to the 50th percentile on standardized assessments in reading, math, and IQ<sup>56</sup>. Additionally, children who attend high-quality preschool programs enter kindergarten with stronger cognitive and social-emotional skills, reducing the likelihood of grade repetition, special education placement, and behavioral challenges<sup>7</sup>. These early advantages contribute to higher graduation rates, better job prospects, and lower involvement in the criminal justice system<sup>8</sup>. Investing in ECE ensures that children start school on a strong footing, setting them up for lifelong success.

M-DCPS is committed to providing high-quality preschool programs. Data revealed that 62% of Pre-K students who were VPK completers from programs under the purview of M-DCPS were kindergarten-ready. The readiness rate for M-DCPS VPK completers was 13 percentage points higher than the 49% overall readiness rate for Miami-Dade County, including public and private

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<sup>1</sup> Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2023). *2023 strategic plan annual report*.

<https://api.dadeschools.net/WMSFiles/346/Report/2023-Strategic-Plan-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Brown, T. T., & Jernigan, T. L. (2012). Brain development during the preschool years. *Neuropsychology review*, 22, 313-333.

<sup>3</sup> Barnett, W. S., & Frede, E. (2010). The promise of preschool: Why we need early education for all. *American Educator*, 34(1), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center. (2021). *The science of early childhood*. [PDF]. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/C.-1-The-Science-of-Early-Childhood.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Artz, B., & Welsch, D. M. (2016). The impact of publicly provided early childhood education programs on district-level test scores. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 34(1), 89-106.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

providers, and 11 percentage points higher than the state's 51% overall readiness rate, including public and private providers<sup>9</sup>. Kindergarten readiness is determined by a student's learning outcomes on the FAST Star Early Literacy and quality programming is determined by the VPK Program Assessment, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). For two years in a row, 100% of M-DCPS schools passed the CLASS, showing high-quality programming for VPK across the district. CLASS is an observation tool that focuses on the effectiveness of classroom interactions among teachers and children in the areas of social/emotional, classroom organization, and instructional support<sup>10</sup>.

Florida has made significant strides in ECE, especially in supporting districts as they expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. As an active participant in the Early Learning Coalition (ELC), M-DCPS collaborates closely with the organization to support early childhood development and school readiness. The ELC works to ensure that young children have access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs by administering state and federal funding, supporting providers, and guiding families in accessing educational resources. In addition, Florida has strengthened its commitment to early education by establishing a Chancellor of Early Learning, reinforcing the state's focus on improving early childhood outcomes. Notably, our district, M-DCPS, is the largest single provider within the ELC network, demonstrating our leadership and dedication to early learning initiatives.

As a district, we remain committed to supporting our youngest learners, as evidenced by our efforts to meet strategic plan priorities, including increasing the number of students participating in District preschool programs by 10%. We are committed to advancing ECE support and addressing the achievement gap by expanding early childhood programs district-wide. These efforts align with the directives set forth by our school board, including: H-6 Reimagining Educational Spaces: Transforming Underutilized School Sites Into Early Childhood Centers In Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS ) (May 14, 2025), proffered by Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall; H-7 Expansion Of Early Childhood Programs Through Provider Partnerships (May 14, 2025), proffered by Dr. Steve Gallon; H-7 Early Childhood Curriculum Development: Primary Focus On Equity And Engagement In M-DCPS (October 16, 2024), proffered by Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall; H-14 Enhancing and Expanding M-DCPS' Early Childhood Education Options (April 17, 2024), proffered by Mr. Danny Espino; H-2 Proposed Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) 2024 State Legislative Program Priority – State Funding For Programs To Serve Pre-K 3 Students (September 6, 2023), proffered by School Board Chair Maria Teresa Rojas; and H-6 Student Regression and Learning Loss in the Early Grades – Prekindergarten, Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade, and Third Grade (March 17, 2021), proffered by School Board Chair Maria Teresa Rojas.

To ensure our youngest learners are ready for kindergarten and beyond, we must prioritize the following framework:

**Expanding Resources and Best Practices Supporting Quality Programs:** M-DCPS will continue to support programs in creating a high-quality learning environment for students.

**Accountability:** M-DCPS must continuously review the standings of all early childhood education programs to maintain a high standard of excellence.

**Early Literacy:** Early literacy is foundational for long-term academic success, and M-DCPS will continue to be committed to fostering early reading habits.

**Collaboration and Advocacy:** M-DCPS will continue to build and strengthen partnerships across the state to support early childhood education.

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<sup>9</sup> O'Bryan, Ph.D., S. T. (2024, June). 2022-23 VPK attendance and fall 2023 kindergarten ... Miami-Dade County Public Schools. [https://api.dadeschools.net/WMSFiles/244/Research%20Briefs/2023-24/2223VPKAttFall2023KGRReadinessreport\\_Final.pdf](https://api.dadeschools.net/WMSFiles/244/Research%20Briefs/2023-24/2223VPKAttFall2023KGRReadinessreport_Final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> La Paro, K. M., Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. (2004). The classroom assessment scoring system: Findings from the prekindergarten year. *The elementary school journal*, 104(5), 409-426.

**Family & Caregiver Support:** M-DCPS will continue to support families in actively engaging in their children's early education.

To strengthen the impact of ECE, schools must take on a shared responsibility with parents, caregivers, and teachers in supporting children through their formative years. As a district, our role extends beyond the classroom by ensuring schools actively engage in providing high-quality learning environments while also serving as hubs of support for families and communities. By focusing on these key areas—supporting quality programs, maintaining accountability, promoting early literacy, fostering collaboration, and supporting families—we as a district will help strengthen the foundation for our youngest learners.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the Office of the General Counsel as to form and legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY  
MS. LUISA SANTOS:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, affirm its commitment to the continuous improvement of Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs by directing the Superintendent to:

1. Schedule a School Board workshop no later than September 30, 2025, to provide an in-depth overview of the current state of ECE in M-DCPS, including but not limited to:
  - a. Identify key areas for future growth and alignment with this ECE Framework: supporting quality programs, maintaining accountability, promoting early literacy, fostering collaboration, and supporting families; and
  - b. List of ECE programs offered in M-DCPS and corresponding funding models; and
  - c. Year-over-year, site-level program demand, including the number of seats available, the number of students on waitlists, and the total students enrolled, since the adoption of the 2021-2026 strategic plan; and
  - d. Analysis of the 0-5 year old population demographics by geographical area to inform future demand; and
  - e. Provide an overview of progress monitoring for upcoming ECE designations (including CLASS, FAST Star Early Literacy, and learning gains) and performance analysis related to the state, the county, and the private sector.