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Early Learning Parents' Pages

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DIVISION OF EARLY LEARNING

After the Storm: Hurricane Ian Relief Efforts

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ian, the Florida Department of Education, the Division of Early Learning, the Association of Early Learning Coalitions and the state's early learning coalitions worked together to support impacted communities and families. By early November, fewer than 10 of 9,084 contracted providers remained closed due to storm damage. We applaud the resilience and dedication of Florida's early care and education providers, while looking for ways to support the providers who are still working to reopen.

Coalitions helped each other, with those less impacted taking on administrative tasks for neighboring coalitions that were directly hit and needed to work to get offices and systems back online. Coalitions also worked together to make contact and assess the needs of impacted providers, and helped families temporarily relocate to other providers across town or even to other counties.

The Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida (ELCNWF), which took the brunt of Hurricane Michael four years ago, provided exceptional insight and advice and is also shining a spotlight on how to move forward. Since Hurricane Michael, ELCNWF launched Operation Kaleidoscope to assist in rebuilding child care facilities as well as create growth and expansion opportunities for child care. The initiative also has helped to restore more than 80 provider classrooms, has spent more than \$2.3 million on new outdoor playgrounds, provided more than 1,800 hours of mental health therapy to children and families and held more than 60 community events offering health and wellness resources.

The same level of coalition and community response is occurring in southwest Florida in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. Early Learning Chancellor Matt Mears joined the Early Learning Coalition of Florida's Heartland (ELCFH) and worked alongside ELCFH staff and volunteers to provide needed classroom supplies to Charlotte County childcare providers. The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida also has received an outpouring of support statewide, including hand-made blankets made for preschools by local residents.



Community Comes Together

Florida's Early Learning Chancellor Matt Mears (R) and ELCFH volunteers work to remove fencing destroyed at a Charlotte County preschool.



2022 Family Engagement Month Pledge

As a parent, guardian or caring adult, I pledge to support my child’s education and healthy development to the best of my ability because I am my child’s first teacher. I have high expectations for my child and want them to succeed in school and in life. I pledge to stay involved, serve as a positive role model and maintain open communication with my child’s teachers to ensure education remains a top priority in my household. I understand that it is my responsibility to stay informed and involved in all parts of my child’s education and well-being. Education is the key to success, and I will do everything I can to promote my child’s ability to learn.

Take the Family Engagement Pledge this month!

Developed by the Division of Early Learning Team

Importance of Family Engagement

November is Florida Family Engagement in Education Month, a time to celebrate the significant role that parents and caregivers play in their children’s education. Children benefit tremendously from positive family engagement in their education.

Family engagement can help children succeed in school by:

- Increasing motivation to learn.
- Reducing behavioral problems.
- Improving social-emotional development.
- Fostering skills in young children such as impulse control, attention, memory and planning skills.

Find moments during your daily routines to actively engage in conversations with your child. For example, you can help your child learn new words and concepts by talking with them about the food they eat for lunch. Ask them about the color of the fruit, the shape of the sandwich or the number of grapes or carrots on their plate.



The Department of Education and DEL urge families to be purposefully involved in their children’s learning experiences. Reading to your child daily is the best way to support your child’s vocabulary development and reading skills. Set aside time each day to read a story, sing songs or play games with your child.

- The [Florida Early Learning Developmental Standards](#) provide resources and activities for families to use that support the standards young children need to achieve for each age.
- Your local [early learning coalition](#) has a Child Care Resource and Referral Program that can connect you with even more resources to help support your family.

Family Engagement at Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving for some families is a time to enjoy being together or to share a festive meal with extended family.

Cooking with your child is a wonderful way to teach some of the following skills:

- Fine Motor Skills: Using their hands to stir, mix or combine ingredients.
- Social and Emotional Development: Giving them a sense of belonging while you cook together.
- Language and Literacy: Giving them an opportunity to listen and follow directions
- Mathematical Thinking: Exploring and measuring ingredients.



Visit the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) to learn more about ways to enhance your child's learning experience.



Florida Prepaid: The Gift of Debt-Free College

Florida Prepaid is encouraging families to create a new holiday tradition by giving your child the gift of debt-free college! It's the gift that doesn't break, require batteries and makes a lifetime impact.

Even if your child is still crawling or just gearing up for preschool, it's never too early to consider their future college expenses. When a child knows their college fund is growing, it grows their own expectations for themselves. Research shows a child with college savings is 2.5 times more likely to attend and graduate from college.

Florida families are especially fortunate to have the option of Florida Prepaid Plans. These plans are available exclusively to Florida residents and are part of the longest-running and largest prepaid program in the nation. At a time when fewer states have prepaid plans covering tuition, Florida's program is robust and thriving as it enters its 32nd year. Plans start around \$45 a month – about the cost of a dollhouse or a few action hero figurines.

Remote control cars will break. Pieces of LEGO sets will go missing and dolls will get lost or neglected. But the gift of college is forever. So, add this to your holiday shopping to-do list. Research college savings at myfloridaprepaid.com.

This article was written and provided by Florida Prepaid.

Meet Libssen Chaves

Libssen Chaves, of the Early Childhood Learning Center in Lakeland, has a proven record of 23 years of exceptional teaching. When she started working in preschool education in 1997 she was an assistant teacher. The next year, while working as the lead teacher at her preschool, she began working on her bachelor's degree in preschool education. She immediately began her master's degree in Early Childhood Education while still continuing to work as the lead teacher.



Today, Libssen supports fellow veteran teachers, or new ones who need instruction and encouragement. She is passionate about mentoring and coaching and is proud that 92% of her instructional staff are certified in child assessment. Her center's school readiness rate is 88%.

She involves parents in her students' learning in many ways, including sending them pictures of their children engaging in fun learning activities. During the pandemic, she put together learning kits complete with instructions and materials for the children, ensuring all students successfully completed their year of VPK.

"Libssen Chavez is the epitome of fine teaching and embodies the very spirit of highly effective instruction! As a teacher who initially appeared wary of incorporating C.L.A.S.S. scores into the VPK kindergarten readiness rate, she now fully embraces the necessity and appreciation of those teacher/classroom interactions that are so vital in earning high marks! Her classroom is a model and her passion for teaching is breathtaking! Every child deserves a Libssen Chavez at the forefront of their VPK classroom!"

CEO Dr. Marc Hutek
Early Learning Coalition of Polk County



If you are interested in becoming an early learning educator like Libssen, here are a few resources to get started! **DCF Child Care**, <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-care/>, **DCF Child Care Training and Credentialing Requirements**, <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-care/training.shtml>, **DCF Training and Registry**, [Florida Early Childhood Professional Development Registry](#).

Do you have a child who will be 4 years old on or before September 1, 2023?

Registration for the 2023-24 VPK school year will open on January 1, 2023. To register your child for VPK, simply visit the Family Portal at: [Early Learning Family Portal](#).

Parents and caregivers may also contact their local early learning coalition for additional information and assistance. Coalition contact information can be found at: [Locate Your Early Learning Coalition](#).



Manny Diaz, Jr.
Commissioner

Matthew H. Mears
Chancellor



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