

# MILESTONE 1

## ENTERING SCHOOL READY TO LEARN

### Lead Stakeholders:

Pam Hollingsworth – Early Learning Coalition – Miami-Dade/Monroe  
Annika Holder and Kyra King – Miami-Dade Community Action & Human Services Department  
Suzette Frazier – Florida Department of Children and Families  
Janeen Jones – State Attorney's Office

### Indicators:

Data should be separated by gender as well as race and ethnicity.

- Children in poverty
- Children in a single-parent household
- Percentage of students entering school ready to learn
- Teenage pregnancy: females ages 15-19
- Live teen births: females ages 15-19
- Infant mortality
- Percentage of children read to every day
- Students that are two grades behind grade level; for example, a 16 year old in 8th grade
- Increasing enrollment in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs in high crime communities

### Background:

High rates of poverty among children and adolescents are a concern in Miami-Dade County. Among all people living in poverty, blacks are disproportionately represented at 29%, compared to 21% for Latinos and 12% for non-Latino whites<sup>3</sup>.

The Children's Trust invests \$9 million each year in Quality Counts, their local quality rating and improvement system. The initiative works to improve the quality of Miami-Dade County's Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs and to professionally develop ECE practitioners by:

1. Establishing accountability for voluntary standards of high quality ECE;
2. Building the professional capacity of ECE providers and practitioners;
3. Ensuring high quality ECE is more widely accessible to children from birth to age 5; and
4. Influencing consumer demand for high quality ECE services.

The long-term goals of Quality Counts are to create a coherent, coordinated early childhood system for the community and to improve children's readiness for school. Quality improvement is accomplished by providing child care accountability through a voluntary rating system based on nationally-recognized standards of program quality. Encouraging ongoing professional development among early care and education practitioners, supporting child care program improvement through financial and technical incentives, and educating consumers to demand quality programs for young children also produce positive developments.

**Miami-Dade residents  
living in poverty:**

**Blacks: 29%**

**Latinos: 21%**

**Non-Latino whites: 12%**

Teenage pregnancy and single-motherhood are common factors that present challenges to black families in Miami-Dade more frequently than Latinos and whites, resulting in barriers to early childhood development.

### Teenage pregnancy in Miami-Dade County:

- The percentage of black females between the ages of 15 and 19 who are pregnant was more than twice that of whites and Latinos.

- In 2014, the percentage of black females between 15 and 19 years old with a birth was more than twice that of whites and Latinos<sup>4</sup>.
- In the same year, 56.1% of blacks between 15 and 19 years old lived in single-female households, compared to 31% of Latinos and 21.6% of whites<sup>5</sup>.

Breaking the cycle of poverty and providing opportunities to enhance childhood development requires a commitment from the entire community. Parents must be engaged, instructed and supported to prepare young children for entering school cognitively and emotionally ready to learn.

#### MBK Challenges:

- ✓ Ensure all children have access to high quality early learning programs.

A University of Chicago study notes: "The highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth to age 5, in disadvantaged families. Starting at age 3 or 4 is too little too late, as it fails to recognize that skills beget skills in a complementary and dynamic way. Efforts should focus on the first years for the greatest efficiency and effectiveness. The best investment is in quality early childhood development from birth to age 5 for disadvantaged children and their families<sup>6</sup>."

Miami-Dade County invests heavily in young children and early childhood education. More than 22,000 children living at or below 150% of the federal poverty level are served through daily child care subsidy support. However, close to 4,000 children remain on waiting lists for services<sup>7</sup>. Nearly 50 million programmatic interventions have been initiated to improve the quality across Miami-Dade County's 1,300 early learning environments.

In 2014, three Miami-Dade County agencies were awarded more than \$17 million in federal funding to deliver comprehensive education and family services to more than 1,400 infants and toddlers through Early Head Start Childcare Partnerships. The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, the Community Action Agency and the United Way of Miami-Dade each administer Early Head Start Partnership programs. Despite the hefty federal investment, hundreds of children remain on the Early Head Start services waiting list.

**While more than 22,000 Miami-Dade children living at or below 150% of the federal poverty level receive daily child care services, nearly 4,000 children remain on waiting lists.**

✓ Bridge the Word Gap or the Word Gap Opportunity

Research has demonstrated that children living in poverty are exposed to 30 million fewer words than more affluent peers by the age of 3. Stanford University recently reported that the word gap is present as early as the age of 18 months.<sup>8</sup> Early literacy is critical to school readiness and reading on grade level by the 3rd grade.

The Early Learning Coalition is partnering with the Opportunity Institute and the Clinton Foundation on a parent-centered campaign to promote talking, reading and singing to children every day, and with Stanford University on a texting program available to all 24,000 Voluntary Pre-K families to promote literacy awareness and phonological skills.

The Children's Trust also funds the following programs to improve child literacy:

Read to Learn Book Club: \$350,000

The Read to Learn Book Club distributes free books monthly in English or Spanish to 3-year-old children. Books are mailed to homes with a supplemental guide for parents, derived from the Florida Birth to Five Standards, to support children's language, cognitive development and emergent literacy. The program also offers countywide early literacy workshops to 200 families whose children have turned 4 years old.

Reach Out and Read: \$320,000

The Miami-Dade Family Learning Partnership implements the Reach Out and Read program, an evidence-based pediatric literacy intervention. The program provides families with children ages 6 months to 5 years with anticipatory guidance about the importance of emergent literacy and reading aloud. The services are provided through 58 medical facilities distributing approximately 100,000 new developmentally age-appropriate books in English, Spanish and Creole.

Read to Learn Books for Free: \$187,000

The Miami Book Fair at Miami Dade College implements the Read to Learn Books for Free program, an initiative designed to ensure that children have access to books in certain public places. The Book Fair maintains 40 bookshelves in communities throughout the County.

✓ Break the preschool-to-prison pipeline through anti-expulsion policies and practices

The term "school-to-prison pipeline" has become a powerful metaphor to capture the processes by which children — typically low-income children of color — are pushed out of school and into the criminal justice system. While exact definitions of suspension and expulsion vary across states and school districts, what were intended to be last resort and occasional disciplinary tools have become overused and disproportionately applied to children of color, resulting in dramatically negative long-term effects<sup>9</sup>.

**Three-year-old children living in poverty are exposed to 30 million fewer words than more affluent peers.**

On December 10, 2014, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education released a “Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings” that urges state and local education agencies to take action<sup>10</sup>. Suggestions include:

- ✓ Focus on prevention
- ✓ Develop and communicate clear behavioral expectations
- ✓ Ensure fairness and equity
- ✓ Encourage state and local policy development
- ✓ Invest in professional development
- ✓ Identify children’s educational needs in a timely manner by utilizing already existing resources through child support enforcement to provide referrals to affordable early learning opportunities.

**Overarching Principles:**

- Parent engagement from cradle to career
- Positive youth engagement to ensure youth involvement

**MBK Actions for Transformation:**

- 1) Advance a community dialogue supporting the importance of high quality early learning opportunities, and the critical nature of access to high quality learning opportunities, especially for children of color living in poverty.
  - a. Miami became a ‘Talk, Read, Sing’ city in June of 2016 through a joint initiative between the Early Learning Coalition, the non-partisan Too Small to Fail, and the Clinton Foundation. Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing is a campaign that emphasizes the importance of early learning for children from birth through age two and aims to empower parents and guardians to make everyday moments big learning opportunities for their children. Among our partners are the Jackson Health System and Miami-Dade County Public Library System. More than 18,000 children and families have been impacted since June of 2016 Steps taken: More than 30 diverse leaders from early childhood, health, mental health, special needs and family support agencies have been engaged, including those in non-profit and faith based, higher education, public and private hospitals and judicial sectors. A select group of leaders have agreed to serve on an MBK Early Childhood Task Force. Once the report is finalized, it will be presented to the larger group.
  - b. The Early Learning Coalition joined forces with Together for Children in 2017. Together for Children is a county-wide, community-based initiative to end gun violence and support families to support parent engagement and early literacy for preschoolers.
  - c. The Early Learning Coalition launched ‘Unplug and Connect’ in 2017. Through this initiative, parents and families are urged to unplug from their technology and connect with their children by engaging in conversations with them during meal times. To date, 1,722 families have signed a pledge to Unplug and Connect.
  - d. Community Asset mapping and community assessment completed in January of 2018.
  - e. Photographic exhibit, Starting Ahead, photographed by Pulitzer Prize award winner Carl Juste and Iris Photo, unveiled in Miami International Airport in March of 2017. The exhibit, curated by the Early Learning Coalition, detailed the strengths and challenges of children of color living in poverty. More than 70,000 people a month viewed the exhibit until its sunset in March of 2018.
  - f. Early Childhood Workgroup, convened by The Children’s Trust, met throughout the summer of 2016 to develop strategic recommendations regarding targeted funding for evidence-based interventions in early learning classrooms in marginalized neighborhoods. The successfully funded programs completed their first year of programming in June of 2018.

- g. Early Learning Summit scheduled for November 30, 2018. More than 1,500 will attend.
- h. The Florida Legislature passed an Early Learning Bill in 2018. It will positively impact school readiness.
- i. Preparedness for the 22,500 children in Miami-Dade County who are federally funded and whom all live in poverty. House Bill 1091 calls for early learning classroom assessments and optional child (formative) assessments for funded programs. House Bill 1091 is a coordinated child development and assessment program that will, over time, provide outcomes for all children attending school readiness funded programs.
- j. The Early Head Start Partnership program specifically targets children and families of color living in under-resourced neighborhoods. Miami-Dade County has the highest number of EHS Partnership slots in the country and serves close to 1,600 children. Grantees are: The Community Action Agency (Miami-Dade County), the United Way of Miami, and the Early Learning Coalition.

2) Identify pertinent data points and data gathering protocols to monitor Preschool Expulsion.

- a. The Early Learning Coalition worked with state, local, and national leaders to develop a comprehensive Preschool Expulsion Policy. The statewide Preschool Expulsion policy took effect in July 2017. The Florida Department of Children and Families is charged with monitoring the presence of the policy in all programs that serve School Readiness funded children.
- b. The Early Learning Coalition has instituted a comprehensive anti-expulsion model that includes: training for early learning teachers and directors; parent engagement; technical support; and a coordinated, interdisciplinary panel of experts in the education, medical, and social-emotional fields, as well as families and teachers, to support programs that are working to retain children presenting with challenging behaviors.
- c. The Children's Trust has committed \$3 million dollars to fund mental health consultation, the national solution to combat preschool expulsion, in Miami-Dade County.
- d. The Early Learning Coalition began partnering with Save the Children in September of 2017 to implement two evidence-informed social and emotional support-based curricula to support children and families dealing with stress, toxic stress, and trauma. More than 5,000 children, families and early education teachers will be impacted between September 2017 and June 2020.

3) MBK and children's services presented through a racial equity lens.

- a) The Early Learning Coalition explicitly delivers services, designs programs, and collaborates with community partners through a racial equity lens. With funding, the ELC will provide a residential retreat for MBK partners.

4) Prepare a community asset map that identifies key players and their contributions to policy and programming related to early learning.

- a. Steps/actions: A community asset mapping tool/template has been identified and mapping is underway. More than 30 diverse agencies have been invited to participate.
- b. Timeline: Mapping began November 1, 2016.

- 5) Commit to approaching all MBK work through a race and equity lens to ensure positive outcomes for children and their families.
  - a. Action steps: Authentic conversations about race: All MBK stakeholders convene for a two-day, residential-style retreat surrounding race and equity. Collaboratively develop guidelines for viewing and implementing all MBK work through a race and equity lens. The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe has invested more than seven years in transformative race and equity work and has engaged partners at local and national levels. The Race and Equity Residential Retreat will be held in 2017. The ELC will host but needs funding to implement.
  - b. Utilize the: "Engaging Parents, Developing Leader" self-planning and assessment tool, a product of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which is culturally sensitive and employs a race and equity lens.
- 6) Develop a survey designed to be administered by child support officials for expectant mothers and mothers with children to determine quality child care needs.
  - a. State Attorney's Office child support survey completion and full implementation was completed at the end of 2017.
  - b. Make appropriate referrals based on surveys and parental willingness to receive child care services. Referrals began in 2018.
  - c. Follow up on referrals to ensure families are receiving services. If blocks or barriers exist, provide the proper assistance to address the block or barriers.