

ROADMAP FOR CHILD SUCCESS



ABOUT THE MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

Dear residents, advocates, and community members,

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Children's Commission was inspired by the late Dr. Wil Blechman, a dear friend of mine and tireless early childhood advocate. Inspired by his legacy, I created the Commission in April 2022 to build upon the dedication and hard work of organizations such as The Children's Trust, The Children's Movement of Florida, the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, United Way Center for Excellence, the Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade, the Head Start and Early Head Start Programs, Juvenile Justice Services, the Department of Children and Families, and the Fatherhood Task Force of South Florida.

These organizations know that the right early start for a child is essential to lead a healthy and productive life. Together with our partners, the Blue Ribbon Children's Commission is eager to build upon our community's existing work and further transform the lives of children in Miami-Dade. By eliminating remaining disparities in education, health care, and income levels, the Commission is building pathways for children to thrive.

Access to a high-quality early childhood education is limited, especially in the areas of our County with the greatest socioeconomic needs. Extreme stress during pregnancy is linked to poor birth outcomes, including preterm labor, and manifests into challenges that prevent babies from thriving. Additionally, tens of thousands of the children under eighteen (18) years of age living in Miami-Dade County have already experienced one (1) or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Previous studies have found that approximately sixteen percent (16%) of the general population has experienced four (4) or more ACEs. When factoring in the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, these estimates are likely to be higher.

Skills and risks that develop during the early years of a child's life are cumulative and form the foundation of their future. That's why it's important to prioritize policies that support pre-natal and post-natal care, high-quality early childhood education, health care, and expanding support-service infrastructure for new and expecting parents. For Miami-Dade County to have peace, prosperity, and a sustainable social and economic future, we must demonstrate leadership and develop a culture that does more of what is known to work, promotes resources that benefit our communities, further leverage existing resources for the benefit of our children, their families, and all those who support them, and align policy agendas to address unmet needs. We must use a community driven and collective impact model to utilize proven best practices, so families have the tools they need to ensure their children are born healthy, are nurtured, and receive high-quality early care and education.

The Children's Commission functions through a number of Advisory committees comprised of specialists and experts, including practitioners, obstetricians and pediatricians who worked for many months to develop priority recommendations as a start to building broader community-wide consensus. We've laid out strategic steps for accomplishing the Children's Commission's goal of creating a comprehensive Roadmap for Child Success.

To all who read this roadmap, thank you for your work on behalf of our county's children as we continue to make Miami-Dade County the most child friendly county in the nation.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniella Levine Cava". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Daniella Levine Cava
Mayor, Miami-Dade County

ABOUT THIS ROADMAP

This Roadmap for Child Success was created to provide clear, actionable recommendations to ensure that all children in Miami-Dade County are nurtured and educated in an environment that fosters opportunity for long-term success. The Roadmap was created with input from mothers, fathers, and caregivers throughout our county and recommends the tools, resources, and engagement opportunities necessary to raise resilient children. It also acknowledges the critical support network of professionals, including early

learning educators, who help to build stronger families and communities.

These recommendations were developed through collaboration with community partners, subject matter experts, mothers, fathers and caregivers at the Mayor's Children's Summit hosted in late 2022. The Roadmap was further refined by The Children's Commission Advisory Committee members in early 2023.

Navigating The Roadmap

1. The Roadmap builds on the success of child-focused organizations, creates a unified platform, and increases community awareness of best practices and available programming and resources.
2. The Roadmap focuses on the “**whole child**” and promotes building stronger foundations for families, community equity, and public-private partnerships.
3. The Roadmap provides guidance to local, state, and federal leaders on effective policy decisions and economic investments to ensure all children thrive from the start (ages zero to 5).
4. The Roadmap is a guide developed by the Mayor's Children's Commission to make Miami-Dade County the best county in which to raise children and ensure their long-term success.



EARLY LEARNING

CHILD WELFARE & JUVENILE SERVICES



SUMMARIZED RECOMMENDATIONS



Promote early learning
through quality child care

- Public awareness campaign targeted to parents and caregivers on importance of high quality child care to lifelong success
- State legislative update to income threshold for School Readiness program/subsidized child care slots based on minimum wage
- Seek local/corporate matches for The Children's Trust early learning scholarship program for families marginally over income for school readiness
- Seek corporate matches to revamp the Child Care Executive Partnership Child Care Program
- Apply for increased slots in the Early Head Start program
- Incentivize the addition of extended hours at existing child care centers and for the expansion of overnight/evening child care centers in the downtown and hospital areas of Miami-Dade County



Strengthen the workforce for
child care educators

- Appreciation/recognition of important role early childhood educators play in preparing and teaching young children
- Development and promotion of career pathway
- State legislative change to increase provider reimbursement rates



HEALTH & SPECIAL NEEDS

SUMMARIZED RECOMMENDATIONS



Provide mothers, fathers and caregivers with information and improved access to early childhood development and intervention services

- Public awareness of developmental and socio-emotional milestones, including the importance of nurturing relationships, early identification, monitoring and screening
- Roadmap for parents to navigate complexity of early intervention services for children with special needs
- Community resource directory for infant mental health and trauma informed care so mothers, fathers and caregivers can navigate the complex care infrastructure system
- Simplification/streamlining of access to services with integration of early childhood components of 311/211/ other call systems



Mental health supports for parents, caregivers and the mental health workforce

- Public awareness campaign aimed at normalizing mental health care
- Utilization of data-driven and proven tools to help families assess whether they may be undergoing or have experienced depression and/or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- Enhanced training of mental health workforce as well as other professionals in early childhood mental health and trauma informed care.



Breastfeeding support

- Promotion and normalization through awareness campaigns



Doulas for expectant mothers in high need communities

- Identification and enhancement of doula services to expectant parents in need of access to pre- and post natal services, education, and referrals

SUMMARIZED RECOMMENDATIONS



Development of “No Wrong Door” Comprehensive Peace and Prosperity Centers

- Addition of multidisciplinary staff and services at existing neighborhood centers



Development of streamlined trauma informed assessment and intervention process and protocols to prevent and treat Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Development of ACEs process, protocols and trauma informed training





SUMMARIZED RECOMMENDATIONS



Adequate family leave policies

- Development and implementation of new or expanded family leave programs and policies in the business community that adequately allow mothers, fathers, and caregivers to recover and bond with their new family member(s)
- Implementation of an insurance program that allows for paid leave for mothers, fathers, and caregivers to recover from birthing or receiving and caring for their new family member(s)



Inclusive and welcoming programs for mothers, fathers and caregivers

- Development of messaging that specifically includes and welcomes mothers, fathers and caregivers in materials for services for families and children



Develop and promote family-friendly community spaces and events where families can bond

- Prioritization, coordination, development of partnerships, and leveraging of resources for community spaces and events among municipalities and organizations
- Promotion of family-friendly events and development of gratuitous events, particularly for children with special needs

- a. Early brain development and learning through quality child care is critical to success in school and in life. However, quality child care is not affordable for all families, and our early learning educators are often undervalued and consistently underpaid. This misalignment of values threatens the health of the child care industry.

We recommend:

1. Developing an awareness campaign about the importance of early childhood and the role that early childhood educators play in the development of children.
2. Creating a curated repository of resources and information on early childhood career paths.

- b. The transformational power of a quality child care slot for families is clear. A safe, stable, nurturing environment for young children has an impact on both the workforce of today and tomorrow. The private sector has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that working parents and caregivers can secure safe, affordable and stimulating child care to participate in their labor force, while quality child care prepares children to successfully enter the future labor market.

We recommend:

1. **Updating the State School Readiness Subsidized Child Care Program for parents who work or go to school.** Matching income eligibility to the state median income would shield against inflation, improve program access and ensure that the program can work as intended.
2. **Raising provider reimbursement rates for School Readiness at the state level.** Current rates are too low for the services rendered.
3. **Engaging local government and the private sector to develop a philanthropic, corporate match to The Children's Trust early learning scholarships.** Families should be provided the opportunity to receive scholarships that allow access to quality and equitable early learning services across Miami-Dade. For those who do not qualify for the Head Start or School Readiness programs, but continue to face economic challenges, it should be a priority to build on the scholarship program model operated by The Children's Trust. The ever-increasing waiting list of this programs can be cured through cooperation with South Florida's business community.
4. **Incentivizing the Child Care Executive Partnership Program (CCEP) to provide corporate funds for child care for employees.** The CCEP match program through the Early Learning Coalition allows for a corporate match to supplement School Readiness subsidies for parents who qualify. Qualified employers should be incentivized to invest as needed through the CCEP.
5. **Enhancing access to Child care after hours and on weekends, starting with a pilot program around Miami-Dade County's Hospital District, downtown and Brickell areas.** Local funding could be used to incentivize programs that offer longer care hours based on local economic and employee needs.

c. Increase Capacity and Funding for Miami-Dade County's Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

Head Start and Early Head Start are proven, two-generation intervention programs with high-quality comprehensive early childhood programming and integrated, holistic, wrap around social services for families from at risk backgrounds. Due to the increased need for comprehensive high quality early childhood programming across Miami-Dade's communities, the Head Start/Early Head Start programs must be fully funded to face the current workforce challenges and meet the growing need for additional Early Head Start slots in underserved neighborhoods.

We recommend:

1. **Advocating for a 20-25 percent cash match from Miami-Dade County** to supplement the in-kind, volunteer-based match being provided by program participants.
2. **Advocating to members of Miami-Dade's state legislative delegation**, and the Florida Legislature, to provide funding equal to that of Miami-Dade County's committed resources.
3. **Advocating to members of the Miami-Dade's federal legislative delegation**, and the U.S. Congress, to provide funding increases for the Early Head Start and Head Start Programs.
4. **Applying for additional Head Start and Early Head Start slots** for Miami-Dade County.



We must prioritize public awareness for early intervention services for children with developmental delays or special needs, increase access to these services by investing in an expanded early intervention workforce and advocate for equity in provider reimbursement(s).

a. Develop Early Intervention Identification and Public Service Campaigns

We recommend:

Developing a public service campaign focused on early identification and intervention that contains: (1) the importance of early intervention; (2) developmental and socio-emotional milestones; (3) monitoring/screening.

b. Develop a Roadmap of Early Intervention Services for Families

Currently, families must navigate multiple and competing systems to access needed education and intervention services for their children with special needs.

We recommend:

1. **Providing information and guidance of services and providers for first-time parents** to assist in the navigation of this complex system of resources and support services.
2. **Integrating early childhood service mapping efforts of the 211 system, the 311 system, the Early Learning Coalition Warm Line and Services, and the Young Children with Disabilities and Special Needs Council** to organize services available to families and provide more consolidated access points.

c. Create a Highly Trained Early Intervention Professional Workforce

There are major gaps in early intervention services due to a lack of access to trained professionals, a limited number of providers, and the presence of early intervention deserts across South Florida. These issues are exacerbated by insufficient funding for scholarships and coverage by insurance.

We recommend:

Identifying and pursuing additional funding opportunities for more readily available early intervention services, the enhanced training and accreditation of professionals that work with children in early childhood mental health, and trauma informed care, and also increase access to infant mental health professionals.

d. Develop a Community Resource Directory for Infant Mental Health and Trauma Informed Care

We recommend:

Developing a directory for infant mental health and trauma informed care.



e. Provide Parents and the Workforce with Health Care and Mental Health Services

Expectant parents and adults who care for young children often experience challenges when they express a need for or attempt to access physical or mental health care. There is a persistent stigma surrounding mental health, compounded by limitations in the availability of and access to services, as well as a myriad of ongoing and historical barriers.

We recommend:

1. **Utilizing data-driven and proven tools that help families identify whether they may be undergoing or have experienced depression and/or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** through Patient Health Questionnaires, specialized ACEs Questionnaires, or the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS).
2. **Developing and implementing public awareness and advocacy efforts that focus on normalizing mental health.**

f. Create a Professional and Highly Trained Doula Workforce

Doulas are trained professionals who provide support to expectant families. Evidence shows that doulas can be trusted members of a family's pregnancy care team, and provide continuous labor support that is critical to both positive birth outcomes and patient experiences.

Doula services include childbirth education, relaxation and stress management techniques for labor, physical education, including breastfeeding education, and postpartum support. Modes of services include text, virtual, phone, and in-person support. Doulas should be utilized to address the following:

1. Post-pandemic increases in disparities in preterm births, low-birth weight, stillbirths, postpartum depression, and stressors due to increased negative socioeconomic factors faced by expectant parents.
2. Increased demand for midwifery care and home birth occurrences and a need for autonomy in exercising choice of birthing options.

We recommend:

Identifying and funding both training and mentoring programs for professional doulas to provide care for qualifying expectant mothers and families in need of free access to critical prenatal services, education, and referrals to other supports during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

g. Promote Breastfeeding to Give Infants a Healthy Start

Supporting and normalizing breastfeeding through awareness events and media and digital campaigns. These campaigns should focus target communities where disparities in breastfeeding rates already exist.

We recommend:

Identifying community disparities in breastfeeding rates, meeting with community leaders or organizations with close ties to these communities, and developing messages with related media and digital campaigns, that address: (1) the importance of breastfeeding; (2) supports for parents who cannot breastfeed; and (3) legislation and best practices that support employees who breastfeed.



a. Create “No Wrong Door” Multidisciplinary and Family Centered Comprehensive Peace and Prosperity Centers

We recommend:

Enhancing the current models of Miami-Dade County’s Children’s Neighborhood Resource Centers and creating Comprehensive Peace and Prosperity Centers. These centers, located in neighborhoods affected by violence, would focus on crime and violence prevention and intervention. They would focus on a re-entry approach that incorporates the entirety of a child’s support structure, leveraging collaboration with community-based organizations and governmental agencies to deliver Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava’s “No Wrong Door Approach.” Lastly, these centers would staff professionals across a diversity of disciplines which would explore new opportunities for increased funding and growth. Incorporating a family-centered approach and universal case management system to this model will allow professionals of different disciplines to provide a more coordinated delivery of services and create increasingly effective treatment plans.

b. Develop a Streamlined Trauma Informed Assessment and Intervention Process and Training Protocols to Prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

We recommend:

Implementing a streamlined evidence-based and trauma-informed assessment and intervention process and protocols that focus on addressing and preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) at the prospective Peace and Prosperity Comprehensive Centers and at other County and non-profit programs.

c. Provide Professional Development Training Protocols for Trauma Informed Practices

The implementation of professional development regarding trauma-informed practices throughout Miami-Dade County’s departments would require personnel with experience dealing with the issues of child welfare, juvenile services, and other related subject matter, or whose personnel would interact with victims, at-risk individuals, and affected residents.

We recommend:

Developing and implementing an enhanced training protocol which would include improving personnel’s understanding of ACEs, best practices for cultural responsiveness, and informing participants of the numerous challenges faced by the individuals they would be serving and interacting with.

a. Develop a Family-friendly Community

Parents who are stressed can benefit from more welcoming and inclusive family events with their children. Currently, many families may not be aware of the free or low-cost family-friendly opportunities already available. There is also a need to offer more free or low-cost amenities and services for families with children with disabilities.

We recommend:

Prioritizing the development of a community designed with parents in mind, including a robust schedule of gratuitous family-friendly events and recreation areas.

Coordinating the plans of municipalities and organizations within Miami-Dade County to better plan for public spaces where families can relax and play together.

Ensuring that partnerships are established and leveraged so that services reach children with disabilities and their families, promote evidence-based health and fitness programs through public-private partnerships, and provide environmental literacy programming through awareness, stewardship, and conservation initiatives.

b. Increase Awareness and Access to Free and Low-Cost Family Events and Opportunities

We recommend:

Miami-Dade County and its partners coordinate to ensure that families are made aware of family-friendly opportunities through both print and digital media. Additionally, the feedback of mothers, fathers, and caregivers who participate in these opportunities, should be sought and incorporated into existing or planned initiatives and actions.

Collaborating with existing sponsors and seeking new sponsors to ensure that gratuitous events in Miami-Dade County are adequately provided.

Developing additional financial options that can be offered that result in lowered costs for families with children with a disability for as many public and private events and recreational opportunities as possible.





c. Expand Family Leave Programs and Policies

The transition to parenthood for mothers, fathers, and caregivers brings expectations of joy and wonder. However, the reality of childbirth, the demands of a new baby, and challenges in reconfiguring work relationships can bring mothers, fathers, and caregivers exhaustion, confusion, and stress, sometimes leading to anxiety and depression. Maternal depression affects up to twenty-five percent (25%) of women during pregnancy, ten to fifteen percent (10-15%) during the first postnatal year and has been shown to double the rate of emotional-behavioral difficulties in children at four (4) years of age when compared to children of symptom free women. Mood disorders among fathers have been studied to a lesser degree, but emerging evidence suggests parallels in the extent and impact of paternal perinatal depression and anxiety.

Paid parental leave is a benefit for the whole family - it reduces financial stress, allows parents to focus on bonding with their child, and increases parental equality when fathers have more time to participate in child care duties. It helps retain valuable employees and improves child health and development, as well as maternal and paternal well-being, and it has been linked to boosting workforce productivity and long-term economic growth.

We recommend:

Developing new or expanded family leave programs and policies that allow parents to recover and bond with their new family member(s).

Implementing an insurance program that allows for paid leave for parents to recover from birthing or receiving and caring for their new family member(s).

d. Ensure Inclusive Messaging of Parents and their Children

It is important for healthcare providers to provide prenatal and post-natal support for both mothers and fathers, during and after pregnancy. Encouraging fathers to participate in prenatal classes, ultrasounds, and the birth of their child, and allowing them to discuss their concerns and experiences with professionals, can help promote their involvement in caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, efforts should be made to break down traditional patterns of exclusive maternal care and promote shared parenting and caregiving responsibilities. Employers should provide parental leave and flexible work arrangements for both mothers and fathers to support their transition to parenthood and promote work-life balance.

We recommend:

Promoting a culture that values and prioritizes the well-being of families and children.

Ensuring that mothers, fathers and caregivers all be specifically included and welcomed in the messaging of services for families and children.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the members and associated support staff of the Steering and Advisory Committees for their time and effort in developing the recommendations contained in this Roadmap for Child Success, our Summit Sponsors, and members of our community, including those who attended the Mayor's Children's Summit to provide input and endorse these recommendations.

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