

# Preparing Children For Their Future, Today



**EARLY  
LEARNING  
COALITION**  
*Putnam & St. Johns Counties*



# INTRODUCTION BY THE BOARD CHAIR



## HISTORY

The Early Learning Coalition of Putnam merged with the St. Johns Early Learning Coalition on July 1, 2005. The merger created The Early Learning Coalition of Putnam and St. Johns Counties with the following mission and vision.

## MISSION

To serve parents, caregivers and educators of children ages birth to pre-kindergarten by managing and evaluating early child care and early childhood education programs through a quality School Readiness delivery system in Putnam & St. Johns Counties.

## VISION

Coordinate services that allow all children to enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

The 2012-2013 fiscal year was one filled yet again with great challenges, hard work and exciting results.

Our Coalition continues its push for early learning child care quality as we strive to offer numerous provider trainings through our quarterly regional training schedule as well as being able to serve nearly 2,000 children each and every month. Our biggest success came this year when we merged with the ELC of Clay, Nassau, Baker and Bradford to become the ELC of North Florida. This merger will allow us to serve nearly 4,000 children each month. Although current School Readiness funding levels do not meet the entire needs of eligible children and families in Florida, we will be working locally to make our budget have a large impact with slot dollars and Gold Seal allocation at 78 percent of the budget. Of course, to serve the 68,000 children on the state-wide waiting list and those on our local wait lists, we still need nearly \$300 million in additional state-wide funding.

Although we have been challenged with another year of budget restrictions, our forward-thinking ELC Board and proactive staff and generous community partners have teamed up to achieve astounding outcomes to the goals we set for fiscal year 2012-2013. With all of these outcome accomplishments, it is understandable that I say happily that this past year has continued to be non-stop busy serving as Board Chair for the ELC of Putnam and St. Johns Counties. Non-stop busy has included over 100 volunteers literacy volunteers in our area, coordinated by Joan Whitson, our Early Literacy Coordinator, to assure we are providing literacy outreach to the community, our children and our providers. Joan's work includes having Reading Pals available to our children who may need a 'reading pal' as well as themed story times, book distribution and building community partnerships.

As Board Chair, I have the privilege of leading an inspired local board and working with an incredibly committed staff. With Joan's outreach and engagement of community partners, the other staff members, in addition to their administrative work, are engaged in outreach as well. Our Grants and Operations Manager, Tajaro Dixon, stays consistently busy with monitoring and mandatory state reviews. However, she continues to make enormous amounts of time to work with both outreach in the community to include books provided to at-risk children and serving as a volunteer to areas needing her expertise. She is working closely with the Putnam Academy of Arts and Sciences to help their board learn some of our board management practices. Our Executive Director, Dawn Bell, works to assure the ELC is represented in all community venues to include working with the local commissioners to build awareness of the impact our work has on the local economy in terms of assuring the workforce needed has access to quality early learning for their children. She stayed on the forefront for the merger and never gave up to make this a reality for both ELCs and has worked to assure administration stays streamlined yet effective. In addition to the strides we make for improving child services at the local level, we work in cooperation with state and regional entities. As local Board Chair, I also serve on the state Early Learning Advisory Council. This state-level council consists of 31 state board chair persons as well as governor appointed council leaders and Florida's Office of Early Learning (OEL) directors and staff.

Our commitment to building partnerships allows us to maximize expertise and resources within our community, eliminate duplication of services and work toward the common goal of educational success for our children. I continue to be both thrilled and honored to be serving as Chair of this organization.

Sincerely,

Nancy R. Pearson  
Board Chair



## **The Coalition contracted with the following agencies during 2012-2013:**

### **Episcopal Children's Services, Inc.**

Episcopal Children's Services (ECS) serves as the Coalition's Primary Services Provider and offers program support services for School Readiness and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten providers in the entire service delivery area. This agency also provides Child Care Resource and Referral services, Inclusion services and Quality Initiatives.

## **School Readiness**

In 1999, the Florida Legislature established a statewide School Readiness program to target the at-risk birth to kindergarten population, to streamline the service delivery system for all publicly funded early education and child care. School Readiness programs include School Based Pre-K, Even Start, Head Start, Migrant Pre-K, and subsidized child care programs. The year-to-date numbers of children waiting to be served were 339 children on the wait list for child care assistance in Putnam County and 367 on the wait list for child care assistance in St. Johns County. These numbers have decreased over last years average since we were able to enroll due to attrition but have begun to climb up again since March, 2013 when we once again needed to stop enrollments due to funding. This certainly serves as a sign that additional funds are needed in these challenging economic times to serve more children who are priority in accordance with CS/HB 7165. As of June 2013, of all children ages birth through 12 receiving subsidized care in the Early

Learning Coalition of Putnam and St. Johns Counties, 6% were infants. There is still a shortage of providers that accept infants into care as well.

### **Number of Children Served in SR:**

The Coalition served an average of 1,024 children throughout the year in Putnam County and 832 children in St. Johns County.

## **Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten**

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programs were implemented by the Early Learning Coalition of Putnam and St. Johns Counties in August 2005. The Florida Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Education Standards were formally adopted by the State Board of Education in March 2005 and updated in 2011 by the Department of Education (DOE). This early learning guide describes what 4-year-old children should know and be able to do by the end of their pre-kindergarten year and is designed to guide instructors in developing and implementing appropriate early learning environments. It is of utmost importance that all VPK providers receive training on these standards. Therefore, on-going training on the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten standards continues to be a Coalition priority. During 2012-13, a total of 112 providers attended the VPK Standards training; 154 attended DOE Standards for Four-Year-Olds; 152 providers attended VPK Assessment training; 35 providers attended ITS:PA (DOE Integrating the Standards: Phonological Awareness).

### **Number of Children Served in VPK:**

Putnam County: 569, St Johns County: 1,889

# PROGRAMS

## Best Practices/Quality Initiatives

**Meetings** - Committee and Board meeting schedules are kept current on the Coalition website ([www.elcpsj.org](http://www.elcpsj.org)) for easy access by the community. The Annual meeting normally consists of a board lunch combined with an annual board workshop. Board membership includes representatives from Faith Based and Private Child Care Centers. These representatives attend both board and committee meetings to assure childcare businesses provide feedback, input and address their concerns to the entire Board, Coalition and Primary Service Provider(s).

**Annual Kids Rally** - During Kids Week, providers are encouraged to participate in the annual hanging of the hands by sending in children's hand artwork to Tallahassee serving as a symbolic reminder to the legislators of the children in Florida. ECS has encouraged providers to participate in our annual local Children's Week events and by participating with the "Hanging of the Hands" ceremony that is an integral part of making the state legislators aware of the needs of our youngest citizens. ECS conducted two community-wide events on behalf of the Coalition relating to School Readiness and child care awareness. During these events, local 4 and 5 year old child care students were invited to enjoy story time with every child's favorite red head, Ronald McDonald. Children were also given the opportunity to decorate pre-cut paper hands to be hung in the Capitol Rotunda during the entire week of Children's Week as a reminder to Legislators and advocates that we must take care of our children.

**Reading Pals** - A volunteer reading pal program was instituted in the fall of 2010, which matches up reading volunteers with children in child care centers. A reading pal visits once a week for an hour to read one on one or in small groups to children who may desire additional reading attention. As of August 2012 there are 34 centers and six Head Start classrooms hosting Reading Pal volunteers.

**Three Year Old Book Bag Project** - The ELC kicked off a new book distribution program Fall 2011 which was highlighted by 700 local three year olds receiving a book bag filled with one dozen age appropriate books along with educational materials for their parents on the importance of reading to their child. The bags were distributed at local child care centers and included a special visit by Clifford the Big Red Dog.

**Special Literacy Outreach** - ELC staff and volunteers conduct literacy related theme programs in child care centers for both the families and often, just children in both St. Johns and Putnam Counties. Each program includes storytelling, music, puppets, crafts and other activities. Each child receives a free book and each classroom receives a bag of books and activity ideas. Family night programs are conducted in partnership with Head Start and offered to child care centers as a way to promote early literacy

with their families. The ELC participates in the annual national Read for the Record event sponsored by Jumpstart.

**Read To Me** - This program focuses on parents and shows the how-to by modeling the importance of reading to their child. The ELC partnered with the St. Gerard's house for young and pregnant teenage moms and the St. Johns County School District pregnant teens group to host several of these workshops.

**Toddler Fest** - A community wide event with 180 parents and children in attendance. Each child received a free book and bicycle helmet and was done in partnership with a local Kiwanis group.

**Helping Hands** - A monthly newsletter is published and distributed to providers with articles and best practice information related to the environment, accreditation, transitions, inclusion, early literacy and infant/toddler development.

**Elder Options Grant** - Partnering with Elder Options funding is available for a limited number of grandparents caring for grandchildren to receive assistance with their child care costs even when they do not qualify for state School Readiness funds.

**Blackboard** - Alert Now has merged into BlackBoard an upgraded automated dialing/e-mailing technology which enables the ELC to communicate even more quickly, effectively and at a low cost with child care providers participating in VPK and the School Readiness programs. This initiative is now being considered by other ELC's across the state.

**ELC Advocates** - This group is comprised of a committed team of ELC volunteers whose mission it is to promote early literacy and spread the word about the importance of early learning in our community. These volunteers speak publicly on behalf of the Coalition to promote the importance of Early Literacy as well as conducting reading events, coordinating book programs and being part of the pal's team to read to local young children.

## Program Changes

### VPK

We utilized several venues to promote and implement the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program last year. Many VPK provider meetings were held to recruit and inform providers about program requirements. VPK potential provider packets were created and distributed to providers showing interest in the program. One of the best concepts for both our providers and parents is allowing some VPK providers to also do 'on-site' registration. This allows for convenience for our stakeholders and cost savings to VPK administration.

DOE Standards for Four-Year-Olds 2011 was formally adopted in October, 2011 (3-hour: Instructor-led). The professional development "Standards for Four-Year-Olds" is based on the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds. This training opportunity provides an overview of the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds and examples of developmentally appropriate instructional techniques for four-year old children. The training addresses the history and development of the Standards through a PowerPoint presentation, video clips, and hands-on activities to illustrate the Standards for Four-Year-Olds.

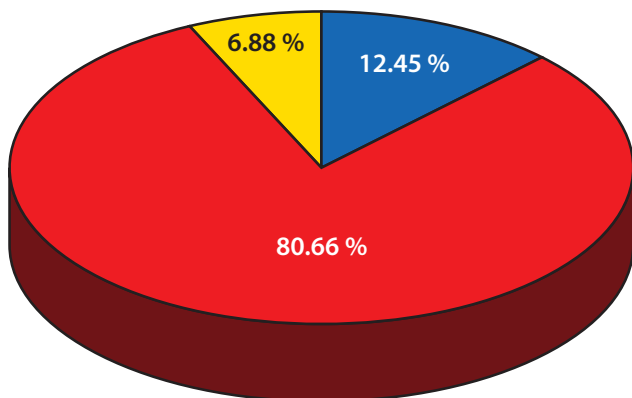
## Single Point of Entry/ Unified Wait List

The Primary Service Provider's Family Service Specialists engage parents in their child's education, making sure that parents understand the vital role they play. Information is provided to parents on childcare licensing, and how to contact their local licensing office. They are given assistance in understanding what school readiness is and what it means regarding the education of their child.

Parents using the web based Simplified Point of Entry are contacted for follow-up informational interviews. Each parent is also mailed a parent packet which is a model for the state that includes brochures describing how to choose child care, how to contact the Department of Children and Families Licensing Division, how to get help for special needs children, Kid Care insurance information, earned income credit information, and information pertaining to services available in the parents immediate area. Much of this information is available in both Spanish and English. Contact information is also included in a cover letter in the parent packet. The contact information for CCR&R is readily accessible to providers and employers by being advertised in the online yellow pages and in the Chamber of Commerce membership directory. Brochures and posters are circulated throughout the year and are posted in healthcare offices, school-based, faith-based and private provider offices, real estate offices, libraries, and local businesses.

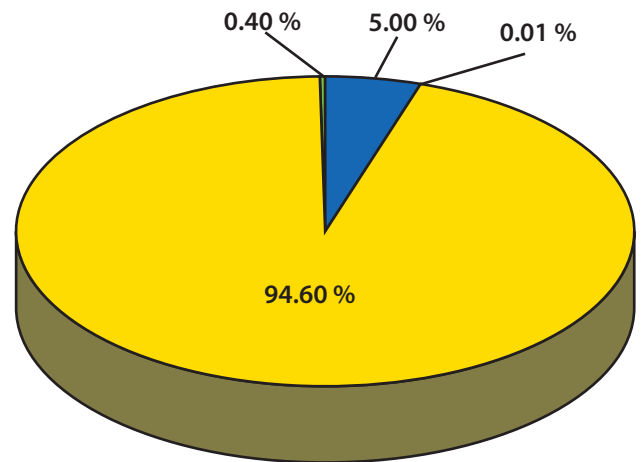
## School Readiness Provider Types

Putnam



- Family Day Care Home
- Private Center/School
- Public School

St. Johns



- Family Day Care Home
- Informal
- Private Center/School
- Public School

# PROGRAMS

The Primary Service Provider currently maintains and updates all school readiness providers through CMS/EFS. The Primary School Readiness Services Provider maintains a resource and referral specialist responsible for childcare provider database maintenance upon notification by DCF. The Primary Services Provider compares its EFS data to the list of DCF's existing licensed school readiness providers on a monthly basis and compiles a report on a semi-annual basis. Parents are surveyed to assure they are satisfied with the CCR&R process. For those children receiving childcare assistance, a parent may choose any provider complying with licensing requirements, registered and/or licensed exempt, and school readiness standards or an informal provider.

Once a parent has chosen a provider, the parent informs the Family Service Specialist of their choice. A certificate/voucher is then printed and signed by the Specialist, the Provider and the Parent. The voucher packet includes the signed application, voucher certificate and fee agreement. It also includes a parent letter, the document checklist, the Parent Fee Notification, Proof of Parental Identity, Terms and Conditions and the income worksheet. In order for the voucher payment for childcare services to be made the following is required: a) The voucher packet with all required forms has been completed and received by the Service Provider, b) The caregiver, if an informal caregiver, has completed the Family Day Care Course within 90 days of enrollment, c) The parent has called the Service Provider to notify them of the parent's choice of childcare program, d) The attendance roster has been received by the second working day of the following month of service and has been approved by the Service Provider.

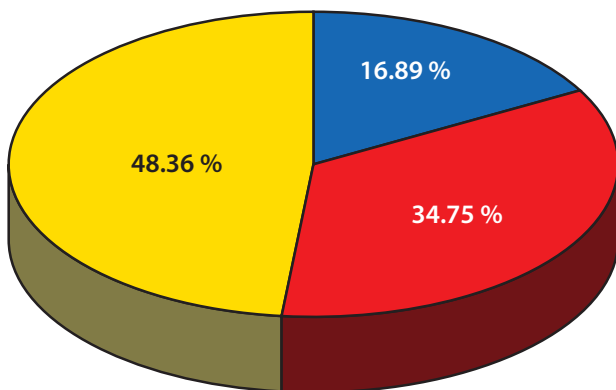
## Child Care Resource and Referral Service (CCR&R)

The Coalition's primary service provider provides Child Care Resource and Referral services and ensures that parents are offered information about a choice of settings in legally operating programs: licensed, registered, religious-exempt, school-based and informal programs, including access through certificate options, regardless of the family's income. For those families who are income-eligible, health or behavioral assessment referrals, childcare tuition assistance, and childcare teacher assistance is provided. All children in publicly funded programs are screened for physical development, and for vision, hearing and speech problems as needed.

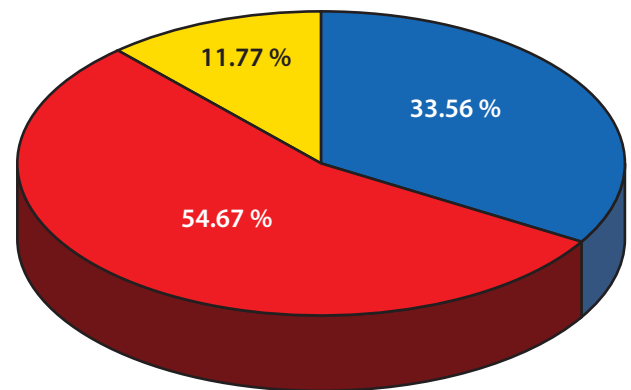
Screenings are available to children ineligible for school readiness services or on the wait list, but only by parent request. Locally, the majority of our CCR&R calls fall under parent education. The second most frequent call comes from parents looking for help, other than childcare. To aid in this second request, our contractor has compiled a comprehensive community resource guide. Our staff utilizes United Way's online Resource Directories as well as an ECS produced resource guide that is available for both counties online as well as a printed booklet. In an effort to assure our Coalition board members understand the Early Childhood community first-hand, they are asked to participate in early care and education provider site visits which are coordinated by coalition staff.

### VPK Provider Types

#### Putnam

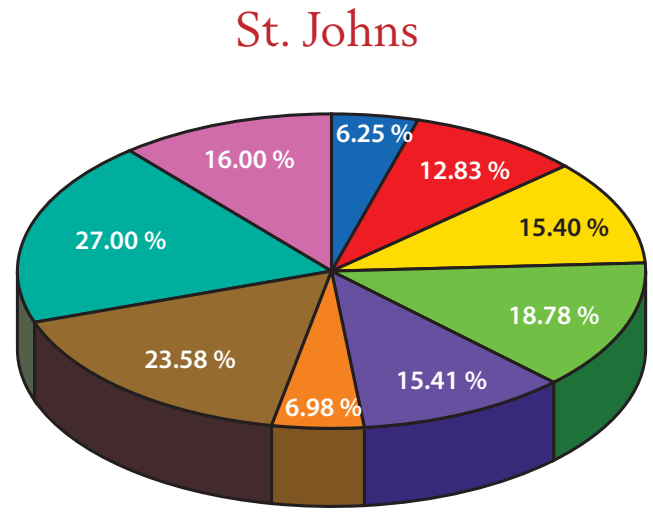
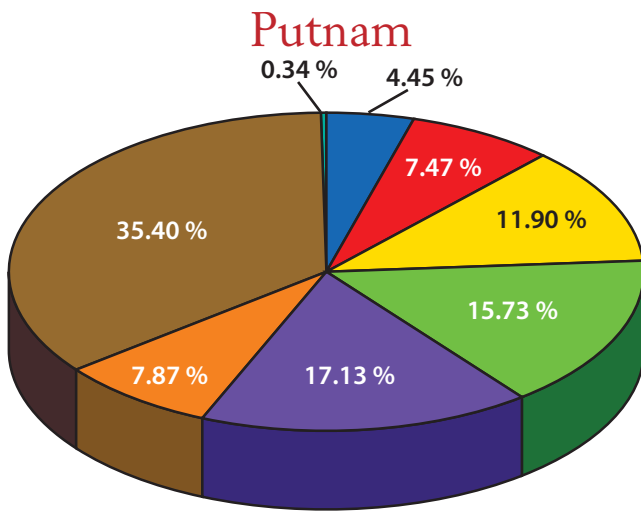


#### St. Johns



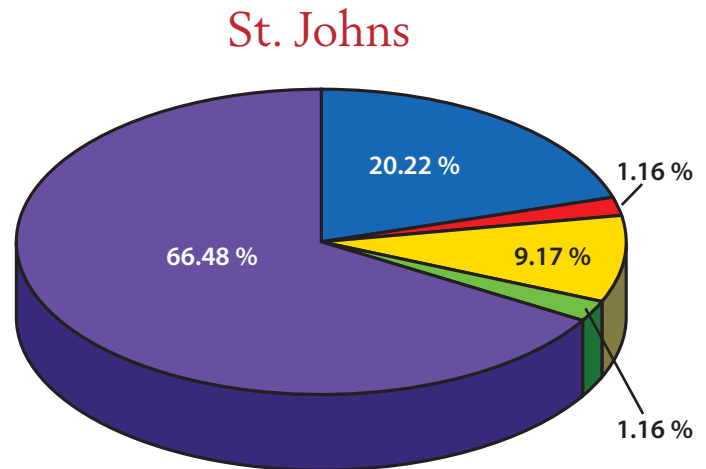
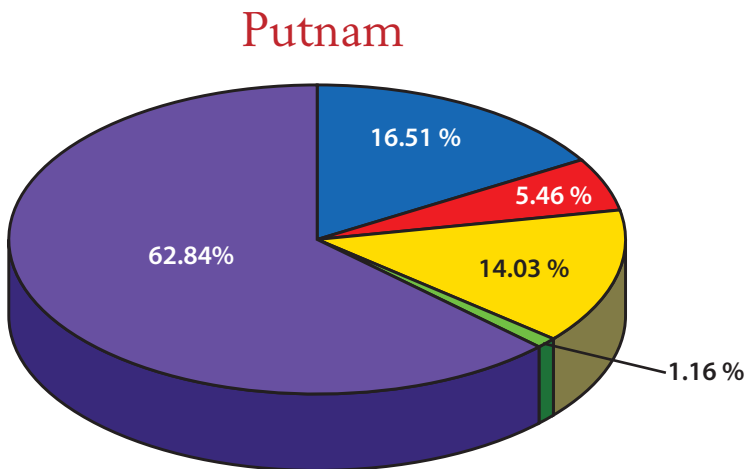
- Faith-Based
- Private Center
- Public School

## School Readiness Children Served - By Care Level



- 2 INF
- 3 TOD
- 4 2YR
- 5 PR3
- 6 PR4
- 7 PR5
- 8 SCH
- 10 SPCR
- 11 SPTN

## School Readiness Children Served - By Funding Category



- At-Risk
- CCEP
- TCA
- TCC
- Working-Poor

# ANALYSIS

## Staff Development/ Provider Training

**Family Child Care Home Association Scholarships** - We awarded five Family Home Care provider scholarships to attend their State Conference.

## Community Coordination

The Coalition's Primary Service Provider, Episcopal Children's Services, held two accreditation retreats this year, and continues to hold quarterly provider meetings that are accessible to all providers.

**Community Events** - The Coalition participates in at least one community event per quarter. The quarterly events include the Annual Kids Rally and Reading Events, Ancient City Kids Day and Tribute to Kids.

**Books for Bravery** - At the Putnam County Health Department, donated books are given to the immunization nurse to give each child receiving immunizations.

**Florida Transition Project** - A TRACK Team (Transitional Advisory Council for Kids) to ensure that a comprehensive, community-based, community-driven system is in place to transition pregnant women, children and their families from one service provider to another.

The major goals of the project are to address transition issues on a community-wide basis through the formalization of transition policies and procedures, to increase awareness of issues, policies, procedures, laws and regulations that impact infant and early child transitions, to provide technical assistance and support to the community, and to develop an interagency agreement for sharing of information.

**Annual Kid's Rally and Reading Events** - These events are the model for community collaboration. The Coalition and Episcopal Children's Services work with other local groups to promote literacy in a fun-filled, learning environment and often presenting a story time show.

**UWADA (United Way Agency Directors Association)** - A group of community service and United Way funded agencies sharing information and resources, and developing community goals to improve systems. Currently, the St. Johns County UWADA is working on a collaborative economic impact study to demonstrate the level of impact the not-for-profit sector has on the community.

**Putnam County Shared Services Meeting** - A group of community service and United Way funded agencies sharing information and resources, and developing community goals to improve systems. Additionally, ECS updated the St. Johns Community and the Putnam County Resource Guides which are distributed to parents throughout the region. Many other local agencies request copies as well. These resource guides help families locate other needed services such as food pantries, health services and even finding out where to register to vote.

## Enrollment

The ELC has begun to see a decrease in enrollments from children at risk of abuse and neglect. This is probably due to the improved economic client that reduces stress on families as well as Department of Children and Families efforts to place fewer children out of home by working with the families to reduce risk factors.

## Wait List Issues/Specialized Policy/Program at local level to reduce waiting lists

Our year averages were 367 children on the wait list in St. Johns County and 339 in Putnam County.





## Other

Placed ads in the Putnam Chamber Directory and St. Johns County Relocation Guide to notify the community and newcomers that we have quality Child Care Resource and Referral services and preparatory programs for children entering into the educational system. These publications also help to inform the community that there is an active group of citizens who are serving as liaisons to the community through their direct relationship or partnership with the Coalition and ECS to bring resources together to help increase both the professionalism and quality of child care in their community.

## Program Issues

- The Coalition's monitoring staff and Primary Services staff collaborate with the local licensing agents to ensure that local providers offer quality services in a healthy and safe environment.

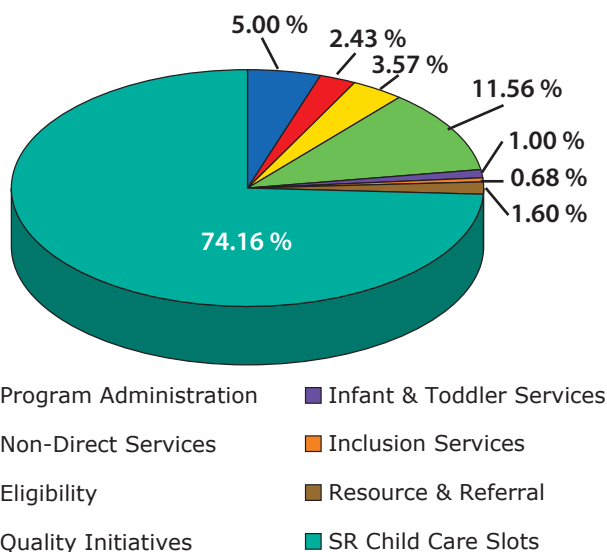
- Issues of providers not in compliance with the provider agreement are reviewed by the Board of Directors/Executive Director and/or given technical assistance or placed on probation.
- The Coalition is experiencing shortages of care in certain care levels (infants) and in certain locations. Provider rates paid by the Coalition have not increased in several years and this is adding to the provider shortage. Even in areas where providers are plentiful, many require parents to pay the difference in the Coalition rate and their private pay rate, making care unaffordable to School Readiness families. However, The Coalition will be exploring increasing the provider rates in the future. This will require serving less children so community input will be sought as we work through this very complex issue.
- The Coalition's plan includes coaching and one-on-one technical assistance with providers to increase positive outcomes for children. We have found this approach very successful where teacher stability is maintained. However, teacher turnover due to low pay continues to be a challenge.



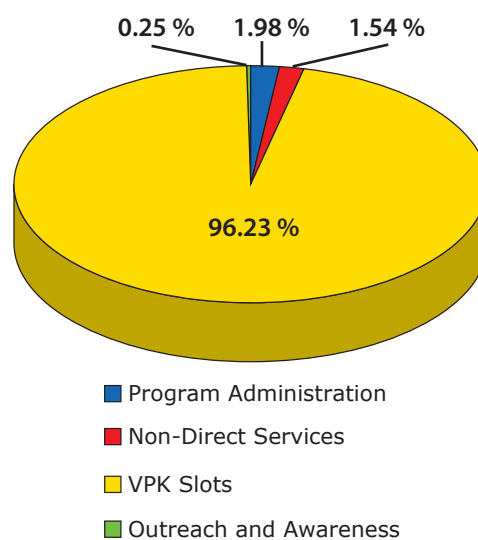
# FINANCIAL REPORT

The Coalition receives funding through the Office of Early Learning, which includes state and federal funds. Local governments and the United Way of St. Johns County also contribute match funding exclusively for slots in the working poor category and the Child Care Purchasing Pool.

### School Readiness (SR) Budget



### Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Budget



## A summary of budget and actual expenditures for fiscal year 2012-2013, is below:

Program Administration expenses capture the costs related to administering the School Readiness and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs in the Coalition’s service area. These included, but were not limited to, costs associated with contracted administrative services vendors, fiscal agent services, CPA audit fees, insurance, operating supplies, equipment costs, and similar items.

Non-Direct Services captures the costs related to services necessary to implement the early learning programs such as eligibility determination and monitoring. These include child care subsidy enrollment eligibility determination and re-determination.

Quality Initiatives budget captures expenses related to providing curriculum support, provider staff development coordination, community outreach, natal bags for both Putnam and St. Johns Counties, and enhancement materials for the resource lab/ lending library and direct enhancements for classrooms. Inclusion Services captures the costs related to services to include children with special needs into the traditional classroom with mainstream children.

Resource and Referral captures costs of services that are dedicated to helping all families find answers to their questions about how to identify quality early learning programs and how to locate a provider that meets each family’s needs when choosing early learning programs.

Infant and Toddler Services captures expenses related to quality initiatives directed to children who are infants through two years of age.

Child Care Slots captures the expenses associated with providing tuition assistance for every child enrolled in the School Readiness program. These expenses were paid to providers in the form of monthly reimbursements once proper documentation was submitted to verify attendance of School Readiness children in their care.

#### Administrative

- Approved revisions/updates to policies and procedures in place
- Updated the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)
- Adopted Sliding Fee Scales based on current federal poverty guidelines
- RFQ for External Auditing Services

# SUMMARY

The Early Learning Coalition of Putnam and St. Johns Counties has made great strides in improving outcomes for children. We have made many quality improvements for children, providers, and programs over the past years through quality/program enhancements, professional development training, community outreach and public relations. There is strong and cohesive collaboration among contractors, board members, and community-based organizations in our community. Many civic organizations and local businesses collaborate well with the community and school district to provide needed services, educational award programs, and additional funding to support and enhance current programs. ELC of Putnam and St. Johns Counties has made substantial gains in quality child care

throughout the community with the continued use of the School Readiness provider agreement. Even if a provider only serves one School Readiness child, the quality improvements benefit all the children in the setting, not just those receiving subsidies; therefore, raising the bar of quality care in our community for all children. The Coalition receives many thank you notes and calls throughout the year from providers directly impacted by professional development training, scholarships, and quality initiatives, as well as its community partners. They are thankful for enhancement materials provided by the Coalition. Community partners are thankful for the information and collaboration received, as well as participation in local events and training.

## Putnam

In 2012-2013 there were 78 Contracted School Readiness Providers in Putnam County; 50 Centers, 15 of which were Gold Seal; 28 Family Child Care Homes. There are 4 providers in the process of enrichment.

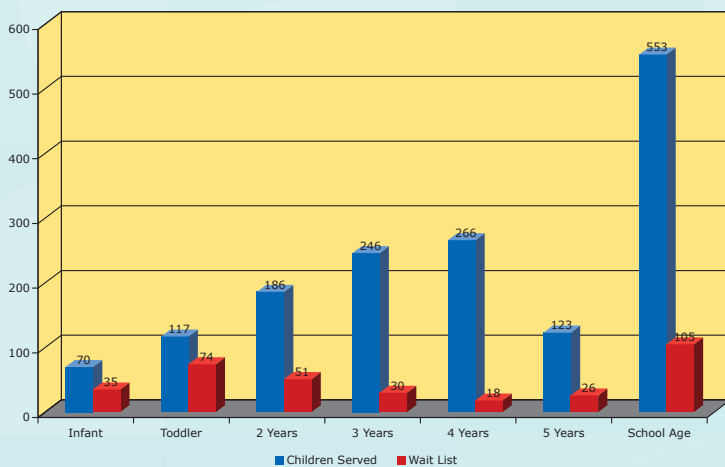
In 2012-2013, there were 36 approved VPK providers serving 569 eligible children. 15 VPK providers were Gold Seal; 0 providers were Family Child Care Homes; and 1 were faith-based exempt.

## St. Johns

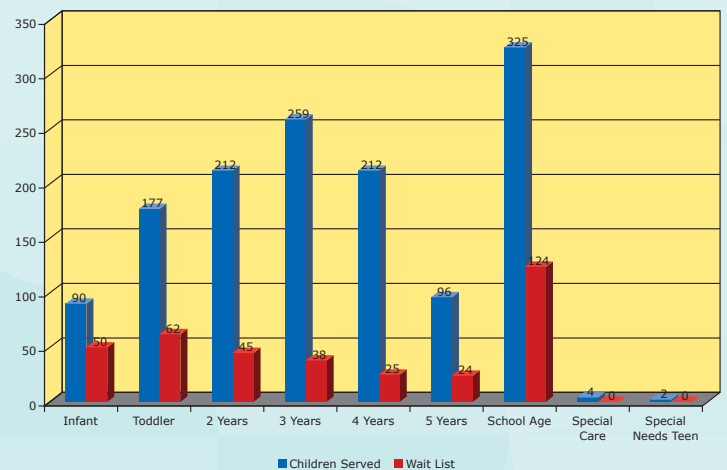
In 2012-2013, there were 90 Contracted School Readiness Providers in St. Johns County; 69 Centers, 21 of which were Gold Seal; 10 Family Child Care Homes, 0 of which were Gold Seal. There are 3 providers in the process of enrichment.

In 2012-2013, there were 64 approved VPK providers serving 1889 eligible children. 21 VPK providers were Gold Seal; 1 providers were family childcare homes; and 4 were faith-based exempt.

### Putnam County School Readiness (SR)



### St. Johns County School Readiness (SR)



# Thank You!

## 2012-2013 Board of Directors

Nancy R. Pearson

Kenneth Forrester

Lucy Brosky

Mary Ann Holanchock

Connie Stophel

Jared Dollar

Melanie Brown

Jeff Kamm

Commissioner Mark Miner

Bridget Van Landingham

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