



# Miami-Dade, Florida

## Using Evidence to Improve Infant and Toddler Child Care

### OVERVIEW

In 2002, Miami-Dade County voters authorized a local property tax to establish The Children's Trust to fund programs for children and families. Using new data and perspective built over sixteen years of managing the funds, The Children's Trust refocused the county's strategic efforts in 2018 to target those most in need within the birth to five age range: infants and toddlers. This new approach in Miami-Dade, known as the Thrive by 5 Early Learning Quality Improvement System (QIS), uses a tiered reimbursement payment system to incentivize early care and education providers to serve at-risk populations in the highest need areas of the community. The funding stream for Miami-Dade's initiative complements and leverages funding allocated in 2018 by the Florida State Legislature to subsidize high-quality programs.

### THE PURPOSE

Thrive by 5 aims to subsidize high-quality early care and education in centers and homes for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in neighborhoods with concentrated high need. The Children's Trust has built considerable local support since its inception in 2002. Despite the difficult economic climate in 2008, 86% of voters reauthorized The Children's Trust when a sunset provision threatened to end the program. Around the same time, The Trust launched a Quality Counts initiative, which set out to improve not just the quantity but also the quality of children's services in Miami-Dade.

Despite the successes of The Children's Trust program, a 2017 workforce study highlighted persistent issues, including:

- Approximately 76% of Miami-Dade's early care and education programs served children from low-income neighborhoods and families, and early care and education services in low-income neighborhoods were lower quality than those in other areas in the county.
- Parents were not demanding higher quality, and there was an over-saturation of providers in low income neighborhoods, driving market prices even lower.
- Subsidy rates from the state were low across the county (\$123 per week for toddlers, which is well below the market rate).
- The median annual salary of an educator in the Quality Counts program was only \$19,032 (comparatively, the Florida Department of Education reports the average PK-12 teacher salary in Florida as \$48,486).

In 2018, after the Quality Counts initiative had operated for ten years, the Children's Trust announced a refocusing of their program to address these persistent problems with child care, particularly for infants and toddlers in low-income neighborhoods. The new targeted approach allows The Children's Trust to emphasize equity rather than equality, which helps them prioritize investment in infants and toddlers, a population often neglected by efforts to expand early care and education due to their different needs.



## THE MODEL

The Children's Trust designed a multifaceted approach to address the early care and education problems in Miami-Dade County, especially as they relate to the care of infants and toddlers.

- 1. Differential payments based on quality.** Qualifying center-based programs and licensed family child care homes will receive payment differentials for all children attending their program—even those not eligible for a publicly-funded subsidy. Programs serving low-income infants and toddlers in priority neighborhoods automatically qualify. Programs assessed as Tier 5 (the highest rating in the QIS) receive an additional 15% per child on top of the standard subsidy or private-pay rate. Payment differentials are reduced for lower tiers of quality.
- 2. Early care and education scholarships.** Florida's child care subsidy program is available only to families at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Many parents reach a point in their income levels where they lose their child care subsidy but are still not be able to afford the full cost of care. These new scholarships allow families who earn under 300% of the FPL to continue working without losing child care subsidies for their infants and toddlers.
- 3. Wage supplements for infant and toddler caregivers.** With an average salary of \$8.50/hour, many early childhood educators in the county do not earn a living wage. The new program doubles funding previously allocated for teacher salary supplements. The QIS also supports an Early Learning Career Center, which supports administrators and educators with educational scholarships to pursue high-quality professional development and early childhood degrees. This strategy builds on the success of the Quality Counts program; data indicated that educators who used scholarships and wage supplements to obtain degrees earned about \$3.76 more per hour than those without a degree (an increase of \$8,000 in their median annual salaries).

- 4. Training and on-site coaching for providers.** This year, 320 educators will receive specialized support to effectively integrate the Teaching Strategies GOLD® assessment system, which includes training on effective teaching strategies for young children, how to document children's progress, and how to individualize instruction for the needs of each child. The United Way of Miami-Dade, a funded partner of The Children's Trust, will use \$1 million per year to implement the cohort-based training program.
- 5. Mental health consultation.** The University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development has trained 26 consultants using the "Georgetown Model" developed at Georgetown University. Consultants visit programs (and homes, if necessary) to ensure healthy and nurturing social emotional environments are maintained for Miami-Dade infants and toddlers.

The Children's Trust has funded the revamped Quality Counts initiative at \$12 million per year, and it is administered by The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe.

Early care and education scholarships and wage supplements are the most expensive parts of the new initiative. These components are further supplemented by a 2018 bill passed in the Florida State Legislature (HB 1091), which provides state funds for local education systems to strengthen accountability and also allows more flexibility in the targeting of resources. This bill helps fund a portion of the tiered subsidies in Miami-Dade so that The Children's Trust can use their resources to broaden support efforts, according to Rachel Spector, who manages the Children's Trust Early Childhood portfolio.

The Trust already has plans to double the number of early care and education programs participating in the system from 185 to 370 in the next contract year (2019-20).



## WHAT THE EFFORT HOPES TO ACHIEVE

The principle goal of Miami-Dade's new early care and education QIS is to level the playing field for the county's less advantaged children, including infants and toddlers. Research shows that high-quality early care and education supports are especially beneficial for low-income infants and toddlers, resulting in a narrowing of the readiness gap by kindergarten. These supports help young children develop basic skills in literacy, math, and science, as well as social and emotional health and behavior. "There are downstream effects as well," Spector said, "as children who are better prepared for kindergarten tend to perform better throughout their school years and have greater stability later in life."

During the planning phase for the new system, The Children's Trust collected data on the capacity and quality levels of every early care and education program in the county serving children from birth to age five, and they will continue to collect data as the initiative is rolled out. To measure the success of the program during the coming years, they will monitor program data using the Web-based Early Learning System (WELS), a data management system centered on assessing quality improvement measures according to different factors.

The county will also continue to use their own Professional Development Registry to track educators' professional development and assess the correlation between training and teacher-child interaction CLASS scores. Additionally, evaluators will continue to follow families in the program to measure the impact of the program on self-sufficiency and stabilization. Learnings from the evaluation will inform continued revisions to the program.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- The Children's Trust Early Learning Portfolio is managed by community-based board membership that was aware of local issues and highly supportive of efforts to target funds where they would be most effective.
- The effort has been very collaborative and built on existing partnerships. Funding is open to all licensed center-based and home-based programs serving infants, toddlers, and preschoolers under age five, including Head Start and the public school system.



## FURTHER READING

- **"Early Learning Quality Improvement System" (brochure), The Children's Trust, 2019:**  
[https://www.thechildrenstrust.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/about\\_us/how\\_we\\_fund/ecd/TB5\\_Brochure\\_u6.pdf](https://www.thechildrenstrust.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/about_us/how_we_fund/ecd/TB5_Brochure_u6.pdf)
- **"Miami-Dade Quality Counts Workforce Study 2017," The Children's Trust:**  
<http://www.qccareers.org/download/miami-dade-county-quality-counts-workforce-study-2017/>
- **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and certification program, Teachstone:**  
<https://teachstone.com/class/>
- **Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System:**  
<https://teachingstrategies.com/solutions/assess/gold/>
- **The Center for Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH), Georgetown University:**  
<https://www.ecmhc.org/>
- **Florida House of Representatives, House Bill 1091:**  
[https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?FileName=\\_h1091er.docx&DocumentType=Bill&BillNumber=1091&Session=2018](https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?FileName=_h1091er.docx&DocumentType=Bill&BillNumber=1091&Session=2018)
- **Web-based Learning System data tools, WELS Foundation:**  
<https://www.welsfoundation.org/>
- **"The Billion-Dollar Bet On A Community's Future," The Children's Trust:**  
[https://www.thechildrenstrust.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/The\\_Childrens\\_Trust\\_Case\\_Study\\_032409b.pdf](https://www.thechildrenstrust.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/The_Childrens_Trust_Case_Study_032409b.pdf)
- **"Two Generational Approach: Focused Policies for Improved Outcomes," Florida Children's Council, 2018:**  
<http://flchildrenscouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Council-2Gen-Report.pdf>
- **Florida's Office of Early Learning:**  
<http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/birth-to-kindergarten>
- **Florida's Early Learning Coalition:**  
<http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/coalitions>
- **ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Florida, 2017 Update, United Way of Florida:**  
[http://www.uwof.org/sites/uwof.org/files/17UW%20ALICE%20Report\\_FL%20Update\\_2.14.17\\_Lowres.pdf](http://www.uwof.org/sites/uwof.org/files/17UW%20ALICE%20Report_FL%20Update_2.14.17_Lowres.pdf)

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