Annual Report

2023-2024



Early Learning Coalition
OF MANATEE COUNTY

Working for the success of Manatee County's children

As we reflect on the 2023-24 fiscal year, I am proud to share the incredible strides the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County (ELC) has made in supporting children, families, and providers across our community. With a budget exceeding $36 million, we have experienced tremendous growth, further solidifying our role as the cornerstone of early education in Manatee County.

Our continued expansion reflects the trust families place in us and the strength of our partnerships. The growth of the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program stands out, driven by the flourishing East County area. As more families join our community, VPK enrollment continues to rise, highlighting its importance in preparing children for kindergarten.

This year, we directed over $6.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act to bolster early learning. We allocated $650,000 for retention bonuses to our dedicated VPK teachers and staff, ensuring stability and consistency for the children—an essential aspect of their development. These funds also enabled us to provide curriculum resources, books, and innovative technology like HATCH learning systems to enhance classroom experiences.

We also launched the Sleep Baby Safely initiative, a vital campaign that reduces sleep-related infant deaths in Manatee County. I deeply appreciate our staff for their dedication to this life-saving program. Even during an already demanding year, they embraced this new challenge with resolve, ensuring seamless implementation. You'll find more details about this program on the following page.

Our efforts to prepare children for school included December's Transition to Kindergarten Breakfast, where 150 child care providers and elementary school teachers built collaborative relationships. This partnership-focused event strengthens transitions for young learners—a crucial step in their educational journey.

In April, we hosted the annual Manatee Conference on Young Children at Manatee Technical College, which brought together over 300 providers. The conference showcased our latest curriculums, technology, and innovative programs, equipping educators with the tools and training they need to maximize their impact.

Alongside state, federal, and county funding, the ELC continues to generate its own revenue to support essential programs. In December, our annual Golf Tournament brought together over 100 players for a day of camaraderie and competition,



raising critical funds for initiatives like ReadingPals and Spot On. And in June, the Stand for Children Gala celebrated the power of community while supporting vital programs. This year, we proudly presented Vernon DeSear with the Paul Sharff Children's Champion Award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to children, families, and early learning. The evening brought together nearly 300 guests and sponsors, further strengthening the relationships that sustain our mission.

I would like to extend my gratitude to our Board of Directors for their steadfast commitment, as well as to our remarkable staff. Their dedication drives our vision of ensuring every child has access to quality early learning opportunities. By implementing innovative programs and navigating the demands of a growing community, our team rises to every challenge with passion and resilience.

This year has been one of growth, achievement, and profound impact. Together, we are shaping the future of Manatee County—one child, one family, and one community at a time.

Sincerely,

Darrell King
Chief Executive Officer

(941) 757-2900 | elc-manatee.org
600 8th Avenue West, Suite 100
Palmetto, Florida 34221

The information contained in this annual report is based on data collected from **July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024**

SLEEP BABY SAFELY

In partnership with the Manatee County Government, the ELC leads the Sleep Baby Safely initiative, a vital public health campaign aimed at reducing sleep-related infant deaths. Funded by the Children's Services Advisory Board, this program emphasizes the importance of safe sleep practices to prevent tragic, yet preventable, sleep-related suffocations, which remain a leading cause of infant fatalities in the county. Since 2013, over 30 infant deaths have occurred in Manatee County due to unsafe sleep environments, a sobering reminder of the critical need for community-wide education.

The Sleep Baby Safely program educates parents, caregivers, and community members on safe sleep guidelines: babies should sleep alone, on their backs, and in an empty crib with only a firm mattress and tight-fitting sheet.



This simple yet impactful message is shared through widespread community training, train-the-trainer workshops, and specialized sessions for professionals who work with infants and parents. From pediatricians to child care providers, these trainings empower individuals across the community to advocate for safe sleep environments, ensuring more children reach their first birthdays. ELC's commitment to this life-saving initiative reflects its broader mission to improve child welfare throughout Manatee County.

The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County (ELC) is dedicated to preparing children for success in today's digital world through HATCH, a forward-thinking early learning technology initiative. This program introduces interactive learning tools specifically designed for children aged three to five, focusing on technology as a complement to traditional classroom experiences. Developed by The Early Learning Experts, HATCH tools are preloaded with educational content that is both engaging and age-appropriate, offering activities that promote literacy, math, motor skills, and social-emotional growth.



HATCH also brings advanced tools like TeachSmart®, a solution for pre-K teachers to create collaborative and small-group learning experiences. With more than 1,100 research-backed activities available in both English and Spanish, TeachSmart® helps teachers seamlessly integrate interactive learning into lesson plans while fostering skills essential for academic success.

To ensure effective implementation, ELC offers comprehensive professional development for educators in 52 child care centers across Manatee County. By providing young learners with hands-on experiences and teachers with flexible instructional resources, HATCH sets the stage for digital literacy and kindergarten readiness, equipping children with foundational skills for lifelong learning.

> "This technology will help our preschool classroom to keep up with today's world learning experience. We believe it is important that schools and young children are kept up to date with our fast-changing world."
>
> **Dafran Gutierrez**
> Top Kids Bilingual Preschool of Bradenton

Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County, Inc.

The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County is a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency that, in the years since its creation, continues to mature and evolve in many aspects: organization, fiscal management, visibility, and strength and involvement of board members.

The growth of the Coalition as the leader in early education and care in Manatee County is reflected in the decisive steps made by the Board: strategic planning to foster goals and objectives, innovative programs, and a continual emphasis on improving the education and care provided to our children.

Our Programs and Services:

- Child Care Resource and Referral
- Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)
- School Readiness
- Early Literacy Initiatives
- Quality Initiatives
- Professional Development
- Developmental Screening & Intervention
- Family Engagement and Parenting
- Inclusive Child Care
- Community Outreach



The ELC utilizes a fleet of Mobile Learning Labs and Educational Buses to take STEAM Education, Childhood Health Programs, and Literacy on the road directly to schools and child care providers across Manatee County. For information regarding Mobile Learning, please contact Community Engagement at (941) 757-2900 ext. 2500.

Find out more about the Early Learning Coalition and its programs and services by picking up our brochure in English or Spanish at the ELC office.

Our Mission

To provide and coordinate the services of School Readiness programs in an efficient manner, in order to help all children develop the skills needed to achieve future educational success; to support the role of parents as their children's first and most important teachers; and to continue to improve the quality of services available in the community.

Our Vision

To provide and support high-quality School Readiness opportunities for all children and their families, understanding that it is in the first years of life that a child's future educational success is determined.



School Readiness - (SR) Child Care Funding Assistance

The School Readiness Program offers financial assistance to low-income families for early education and care so families can work towards becoming financially self-sufficient and their young children can be successful in school.

The program considers a child's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development; involves parents as their child's first teacher; prepares children to be ready for school; and gives parents information about child development and other topics of interest.

During Fiscal Year 23/24, the Coalition offered funding assistance to all families on the school readiness waitlist. 2,333 families received invitations to complete their funding request and enroll their children in the child care providers of their choice, allowing them to continue their efforts towards reaching self-sufficiency.

Florida School Readiness

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County's School Readiness served:

4,292 Children
146 Program Providers

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is a free program designed to prepare four-year-old children for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. VPK is available to all four-year-olds born on or before September 1st that reside in Florida, regardless of family income.

The VPK program is designed to provide four-year-olds access to quality prekindergarten educational experiences and prepare Florida's children for kindergarten by developing the emotional, intellectual, and social skills they need to become successful students. VPK includes standards for literacy skills, strict accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes, and qualified instructors. Parents have the option of enrolling children in a school-year program, consisting of 540 instructional hours, a summer program, consisting of 300 instructional hours, or a Specialized Instructional Services (SIS) program which takes place outside the traditional classroom setting and is designed for four-year-olds with special needs.

FloridaVPK

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County served:

2,932 Children
118 VPK Program Providers

Child Care Resource and Referral

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) is the "front door" to the Early Learning Coalition's services. It is a service available to assist all families seeking quality and affordable child care options and local community resources. CCR&R can also be used as a free marketing tool for legally operating providers in Manatee County, as the information they provide is updated immediately in our database.

Parents are educated on how to identify quality care, informed about different types of care, and are encouraged to continue looking for quality when placing their children in a child care facility. These services are provided at no charge. While CCR&R helps families find child care, it also provides information about other valuable community resources. This information is available in our lobby, on our website, and at NUMEROUS community events in which the ELC participates.

CCR&R
Resources for Families and Providers

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County provided:

311 Child Care Referrals

Developmental Screening and Early Intervention

Early detection of potential developmental delays allows children to reach their fullest potential and enter kindergarten ready to learn.

The ELC helps expand child care options for children with disabilities and their families by supporting the inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood settings. Services are available to early care and education providers to increase staff knowledge and competence in serving children with disabilities or behavioral challenges. These services include training, onsite technical assistance, community resource information, and environmental adaptations.

A toll-free Warm Line is available to parents and early care and education providers needing information related to children's disability or special health care needs, birth to five years of age.

Early Intervention Outcomes

Child Screenings	1,996
Child Assessments	567
Community Referrals	62

Coalition staff participates in the Healthy Start Manatee community meetings, and the ELC Inclusion Specialist is a Certified Passenger Safety Technician and participates in car seat safety checks. An ELC staff member is a member of the Florida Association of Infant Mental Health. The ELC partners with the Manatee County School Board and local agencies to participate in community events.

Screening & Assessment staff completed 1,996 Ages and Stages Questionnaires developmental screenings. Of these screenings, 567 demonstrated potential developmental delays, and families were provided with Individual Early Care Plans, which include age and skill-specific activities for families to use at home. The families of 62 children who were identified as needing further evaluation were aided in coordinating referrals to other community agencies.

Professional Development

2023-2024 Professional Development Statistics (including annual Conference):

- 62 sessions provided on 40 individual topics
- 836 student contacts
- 153.6 training hours

NEXTGEN Family Magazine

NEXTGEN Family Magazine continues to go from strength to strength and remains the go-to resource for local families.

The magazine continues to showcase all that is good in the local community through articles, interviews, and pictures. Starting with the Spring Issue, it transitioned to being published seasonally. Distribution remains at over 30,000 copies delivered to elementary school children in Manatee County, with an additional 5,000 copies distributed to over 200 child care facilities, libraries, medical offices, hospitals, and other business offices throughout the county.





Promoting Early Literacy

The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County is dedicated to ensuring that every child and their families have access to high-quality educational children's books, resources, and opportunities. Through a number of exciting programs, ELC brought educational continuity and activities related to early learning standards to neighborhoods in the community through its fleet-based programs. Information on all of our programs is on the website – below are just some of the highlights.

ReadingPals

With the help of its 90 plus dedicated volunteers, the ReadingPals program provided mentors to build foundational literacy and social-emotional skills with VPK children. Every week, the children and their mentor bond over a shared book and receive a copy of the featured story to add to their at-home library. ReadingPals celebrated its third year, successfully completing 25-30 weeks of reading sessions in 10 classrooms across nine child care sites. The program served a total of 135 children and distributed an impressive 3,022 books.

Words on the Bus

The Words on the Bus program highlights new vocabulary words, animated read-aloud, and activities that coordinate with the book or targeted vocabulary. This interactive program engaged a total of approximately 180 students.

Early Learning Taskforce / Transition to Kindergarten

The Early Learning Taskforce (ELTF) is a collaborative effort between the ELC, the School District of Manatee County, and Step Up Suncoast/Head Start, aimed at addressing the needs of young learners and their families. This past spring, ELC hosted a Transition to Kindergarten Breakfast in partnership with the ELTF, bringing together pre-K and kindergarten teachers, along with key stakeholders, to celebrate early learning and explore strategies for a smooth transition to kindergarten.

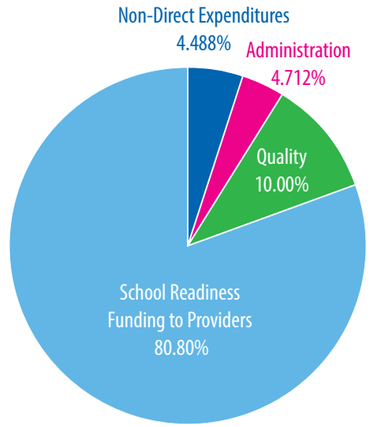
Frame Their Learning/STEAM

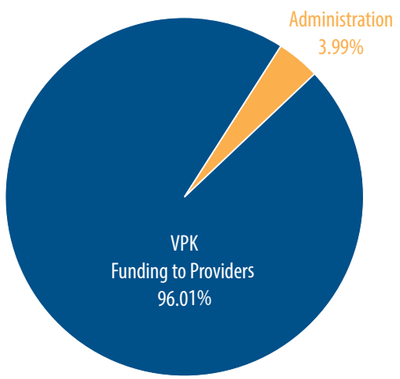
ELC integrates Frame Their Learning with STEAM by providing on-site teacher sessions followed by STEAM bus visits, where students engage in hands-on activities. This year, Frame Their Learning engaged 225 students, while STEAM reached 135 students.

Grant Expenditures

2023-2024 Total Funding

The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County received federal and state funding totaling $26,582,254 in the fiscal year. 80.80% of School Readiness funds and 96.01% of Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) funds were spent directly on child care services. Our administrative costs for these programs were 4.712% and 3.99%, respectively. In addition to the state and federal funding, the ELC also received $5,276,764 in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding. ELC was also awarded an additional $2,652,498 from Manatee County Children's Services Advisory Board.





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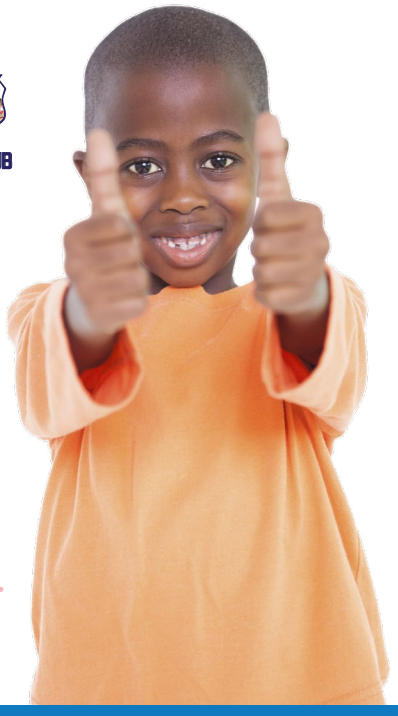

To Donate call (941) 757-2902 or Visit us at elc-manatee.org

Sponsorship by the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County and the State of Florida, Division of Early Learning
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