

Stranahan Early Learning

The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning has developed one of the nation's most innovative early childhood professional development systems. With the invaluable support of the founding grant provided by the Stranahan Foundation, the Lastinger Center has leveraged an additional \$2.4 million in other private funds and \$6 million in public investment, developed 180 hours of professional development content, and by the end of June 2016 will have provided 30,000 hours of training to 3,000 early childhood professionals throughout Florida. In addition, the Lastinger Center has trained 282 Community of Practice Facilitators and certified 207 Early Childhood Coaches through a rigorous, 8-day training process over six months that culminates in review of a coaching video to certify high quality coaching practice. There are currently 82 more participants in training for the Community of Practice Facilitator and TA Coaching certifications. Not only are early childhood professionals improving their practice, but directors are improving their leadership skills through using communities of practice protocols and more effective coaching techniques, collectively improving the quality of early childhood programs in Florida.

Electrifying feedback has emerged from the roll-out of Early Learning Florida that has early learning practitioners energized across the state. Two strong themes have emerged from this feedback: request to use Early Learning Florida courses to complete the full requirement of the Child Development Credential (CDA) and to additionally have a mechanism for access to the course content in smaller segments to be used quickly in the classroom.

The Lastinger Center requests Stranahan Foundation to build on the strong foundation in two ways:

- Course development to ensure professionals can complete CDA requirements: Funds are requested to develop four courses to ensure practitioners can complete all CDA credential training requirements through Early Learning Florida
- Development of the Early Learning Florida SANDBOX: Funding is requested to utilize existing content in new ways so users can access hundreds of videos, pictures, examples of lesson plans and other tools, and short 5-10 minute mini-learning opportunities on focused topics to enhance their immediate practice and lesson planning

Course development to ensure professionals can complete CDA requirements: The Lastinger Center is committed to ensuring courses support the professional development and career advancement of early childhood professionals. The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is both a significant accomplishment as well as the first step toward formal education for the vast majority of early childhood professionals in Florida (and most other states). Among other requirements practitioners must complete 120 hours of training in eight subject areas; at this time the Lastinger Center has developed 180 hours of training in six of eight subject areas. To ensure providers can meet all CDA training requirements with Early Learning Florida courses we need to develop 40 additional hours of focused content:

- (1) Professionalism (covering CDA requirements of Advocacy, ethical practices, work force issues, professional development, goal setting, networking);
- (2) Preschool Guidance: (covering CDA requirements related to adult modeling, self-esteem, self-regulation, socialization, cultural identity, conflict resolution);

- (3) Infant-Toddler: Health, Safety and Nutrition; and
- (4) Preschool: Health, Safety and Nutrition (each health, safety and nutrition course covering age appropriate content related to safety, first aid, health, nutrition, space planning, materials and equipment, and play).

When early childhood professionals have the ability to complete all CDA-required training through Early Learning Florida they will be better positioned to improve not only their skills but also advance professionally.

Enhancement of course content and development of the ELFL SANDBOX: The 10 hour Early Learning Florida courses contain a wealth of content; however, this content can currently only be accessed as part of a course. Additionally, we have hundreds of hours of B-roll footage that has many examples of excellent practice that is currently not being used unless it is integrated into a course. Early childhood professionals tell us repeatedly that they love the Early Learning Florida courses and that they wish they could access smaller, focused pieces of information in the form of examples of specific practice (e.g., effective circle time strategies, pictures of specific areas of a classroom to get ideas on how to arrange materials, examples of strong lesson plans, and video of effective practice on behavior guidance as well as a variety of other topics,). By developing a collection of hundreds of resources on a variety of topics, we will also enhance and enrich the information placed within courses by providing more options for their learning style as well as opportunities to go deeper into specific topics. Creating these smaller learning opportunities will keep early childhood professionals coming back to the Early Learning Florida site more frequently and, combined with the career planning tool and connections to the training opportunities and scholarship information, help to make Early Learning Florida the go-to spot for early childhood professional development. The ELFL SANDBOX has the potential to reach thousands of children daily with immediate impact.

The early childhood professionals will build knowledge, confidence, and improve their daily practice as they care for and educate young children. Because Early Learning Florida participants must work in a program that is serving children at high risk of school failure, they will improve program quality and therefore the development and outcomes of the children they care for and education daily. In addition, Early Learning Florida will continue to advance the professionalism of the field as perceived by both early learning professionals as well as those outside of the field.

Early Learning Florida was carefully designed in partnership with teachers, directors, quality improvement coaches, higher education faculty, trainers, and leadership from the state's early learning coalitions, the Office of Early Learning, the legislature, and Governor's Office.

The state's 30 early learning coalitions are particularly crucial to implementing Early Learning Florida. The coalitions work directly with centers and family child care homes and implement a variety of quality improvement and training projects. Therefore, they are well positioned to both select courses that will support their quality improvement goals as well as select directors and teachers who will most benefit from taking Early Learning Florida courses.

The United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics shows data for Preschool Teachers that is alarming, yet not new information. The median pay for these valuable

professionals was only \$28,120 per year (or \$13.52/hour) in 2014. While it is reported that the entry-level education typically reported across the nation is an Associate's degree, in Florida this does not hold true. The demand for the CDA is most often the entry-level education, if not a high school diploma. The Department reports that there is typically no on-the-job training, but that the field is yet growing.

In research conducted by Lastinger, the results are even more staggering. Early learning professionals who took an ELFL course in fall 2015, reported they work 40-50 hours per week with 35% reporting only a high school degree and almost 40% reporting some college credit, but no college degree. Of the over 80% reporting they have earned a credential in the field, only 30% of those have a CDA.

Early childhood professionals must work with children birth to age five and work in programs that are either in a high poverty zip code or have an active contract to provide care to children who receive child care subsidies. Strong preference is provided to programs that serve at least 30% subsidized children. To receive child care subsidies children must be from families under 200% of the federal poverty limit, receiving temporary cash assistance, meet federal work requirements, or are at risk of abuse/abandonment/neglect. Other vulnerable characteristics for eligibility include parents who are verified to be homeless, parents who are victims of domestic violence, teenage parents, migrant families and farm workers, and families of children with disabilities and special healthcare needs.