



## T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program

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**Action Requested: Support the Governor's request to provide \$10 million in scholarships for child care and early learning practitioners through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program. The additional appropriation will enable teachers providing school readiness services to obtain their Staff Credential to improve skills and enhance outcomes for young children. The appropriation will fund approximately 8,200 total scholarships in 2016-17.**

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**Issue:** Brain research makes it clear that early experiences are critical for successful brain development, and making sure these quality early experiences are possible is far more effective than trying to address problems at a later age. It takes a qualified, educated, stable and effective teacher to provide the types of experiences that are needed to build trust and promote learning. Children, particularly those from low-income, vulnerable families, who receive quality early care and education, are more likely to be readers by third grade, graduate high school, pursue secondary education and go on to be contributing members of society. Unfortunately, many of those working in VPK and early learning programs throughout Florida do not have the requisite education and training to ensure that children receive the maximum benefit from their experiences, a fact exacerbated by low wages and high staff turnover<sup>i</sup>. The T.E.A.C.H. program successfully addresses these three key issues (**teacher education, turnover, and compensation**) to improve the outcomes for Florida's children. To increase the supply of well-prepared teachers, an increase in funding is needed to serve practitioners who are eligible and awaiting scholarships.

**Background:** The T.E.A.C.H. program (F.S. Chapter 1002.95), first received statewide funding in 1998 to assist child care and early learning practitioners and has provided scholarships for over 23,243 recipients since that time. The Program consistently produces data-driven, measurable outcomes that address the challenges of the field (**teacher education, turnover, and compensation**) and provides access to a well-trained and qualified counselor through the T.E.A.C.H. office to help recipients navigate the often confusing landscape of professional development and higher education options. The requested appropriation is based on the expectation that lead teachers in school readiness programs will be required to possess, at a minimum, a competency-based Staff Credential. These scholarship funds are expected to reduce the financial hardship that increasing requirements could potentially create for teachers who typically earn low wages.

**How T.E.A.C.H. Works:** The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program is a successful three-way partnership between the employer, the teacher and the T.E.A.C.H. program addressing the problems of **teacher education, turnover, and compensation** in the child care and early learning field. The *employer* agrees to pay a portion of the costs for tuition and books and provides paid release time weekly for the teacher to handle duties such as attending classes and completing homework assignments. The *employer* also agrees to provide at least a 2% raise or bonus at the end of a successful contract. The T.E.A.C.H. *recipient* agrees to pay a portion of the tuition and books, and agrees to remain employed at their sponsoring center for one year beyond the end of the contract. The T.E.A.C.H. *program* agrees to pay a majority of the costs and provides a bonus upon successful completion. The T.E.A.C.H. program, created and licensed by the Child Care Services Association in North Carolina, operates in 24 states and the District of Columbia. The Children's Forum in Tallahassee, FL holds the license to administer the T.E.A.C.H. program in Florida. For additional information, contact the Children's Forum at (850) 681-7002 or visit the website at: <http://www.teach-fl.com>.

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<sup>i</sup> Citations for supporting research are available upon request.