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for review

Herald
paper

Me

Melanne Verveer
c/o The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Melanne:

When the First Lady was in Miami to speak at the Spirit of Excellence dinner, we talked about early childhood education, obviously a topic that interests her a great deal.

I thought, then, that she would appreciate seeing this.

Thanks.

Sincerely,

Dave

Dave Lawrence

Jan - This is a
fabulous series

Worth looking at.

Noelle



FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST READY OR NOT?



Never before have parents and teachers better understood how lifelong patterns for learning and achievement are set in the earliest years of childhood. In **Ready or Not**, we explain how infant brains develop, what small children need to thrive, the obstacles of poverty, the dearth of quality child care, and how the futures of nearly a million Florida children under five depend on everyone — educators, lawmakers, business leaders and families.

■ March 15 - 21, 1998

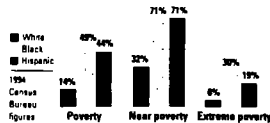
The Miami Herald

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST: READY OR NOT?

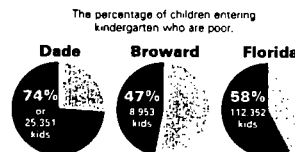
What it means to be a young child

Poverty rates for young children have been rising nationally ...

The rate of young children — those under the age of 6 — living in poverty has doubled in the last two decades.

**... Poverty rates** for children in Florida are high, too ...

Census figures released last month for Florida show there are an estimated 281,526 children under 5 whose parents are living under the poverty level.



Hopping about with a plastic doll she calls Miss L, Dolores Pasarin makes learning enjoyable for pre-kindergartners at Toussaint Louverture Elementary School in Little Haiti. Sounding out letters, like L, is one indicator of a child's readiness to begin formal schooling.



KURU YALLBONA / Herald Staff

Many preschoolers lacking in basic skills

READY, FROM 1A

Look, a lion dancing in leotards. Laugh with me. Ha, ha, ha.

It's all play for the tiny dancers. But for Pasarin, who closely observes how each child responds, it is a revealing moment.

For her students, kindergarten is only six months away. The ability to jump and sway to music, the sounding out of letters, the ability to follow directions without fidgeting or fighting — all are indicators of a child's readiness to begin formal schooling.

It may seem natural. Yet many children in Miami-Dade and Broward counties are clearly struggling with even these simple requirements. Teachers talk about children who start school without knowing how to hold a crayon, recognize their names in print or speak in complete sentences.

With the first few years of school a proven indicator of how well a child will perform later in his academic career, the importance of starting kindergarten with the basics is stressed. And when it comes to education, underachievement is not limited to the poor or other people's kids. The fact is, two out of three high school dropouts in the United States are not poor at the time they leave school, and most children who drop out have never been poor, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

No one has a firm grasp on how many children need help, due

South Florida teachers talk about children who start school without knowing how to hold a crayon, recognize their names in print or speak in complete sentences.

partly to different notions of how to define "readiness." Nation-wide, kindergarten teachers report that one-third of children entering elementary school — about one million a year — lack basic school-readiness skills, according to an unscientific survey in *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation*, a report by the late author Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

In Florida, a state survey based on a cursory checklist of skills for every child shows that one in five children who enter kindergarten are not ready to begin school.

But many teachers and researchers question the way readiness is assessed and believe the problem is far bigger than current numbers indicate. Early-childhood advocates and teachers in South Florida are incredulous at the region's statistics.

Miami-Dade, which has the state's highest concentration of children living in poverty and its lowest test scores, reported in 1996-97 that 81.4 percent of kindergartners came to school ready

to learn, according to the state's checklist — a claim higher than those of 41 of Florida's 67 counties.

Broward's readiness rate — 81.9 percent — also was remarkably high and above the state average of 80.4 percent.

A RIPPLE EFFECT IS FELT
Prepared kids impeded

The problems of children who are not ready touch the lives of those who are, particularly in South Florida's crowded classrooms, where teachers are forced to divide their attention too many ways, and the pace of learning slows with even minor distractions.

What is most important in a 5-year-old's preparation for school? The answers may surprise you.

In 1993, the National Center for Education Statistics asked 1,400 kindergarten teachers to rate the importance of 15 qualities for school readiness.

The No. 1 ranking: a child's

physical health.

A child's ability to communicate ranked second; enthusiasm was third.

The two qualities most kindergarten teachers rated as not important: the ability to count to 20 or more and the ability to recite the letters of the alphabet.

"Everyone says kids need to know the alphabet, but I don't think it's all that necessary," said Norman Heimgartner of the Gesell Institute of Child Development, a research firm in New Haven, Conn., that designed a kindergarten test used in some Broward public schools.

"I think children need to know how to recognize their name and phone number and address," Heimgartner said. "They usually can count up to 3. They need to recognize their own clothing, their own lunch sacks, and learn how to wait in line to get on the right school bus. Most everyone talks about academics. But more important than academics is the child ready to leave home?"

THE STANDARDS VARY
Some traits valued more

A teacher's idea of what makes a child ready often varies with communities and schools. Some teachers have higher academic demands. Others, overwhelmed in crowded classrooms, find such traits as the ability to follow class rules and sit still more important.

"They should definitely know



KURU YALLBONA / Herald Staff

ARE WE HAVING FUN? Jessica Goulbourne's laugh lights up a pre-kindergarten class at Toussaint Louverture Elementary School.

social skills," said Mary Dunn, a kindergarten teacher at Myrtle Grove Elementary School in Opa-locka. The most important things are how to get along with other children, how to share, how to communicate verbally and not hit, kick or push.

"One thing I'm seeing a lot of now is children coming and not knowing how to tie their shoes. They need to be able to take care

of themselves." But the answer to the question, "Is this child ready to learn?" is never a simple yes or no. Toddlers are moving targets when it comes to determining what they know, said Sue Bredekamp, a director with the National Association for the Education of Young Children

PLEASE SEE READY, 17A

THE STATE'S AGENDA ON KIDS:**IN THE LEGISLATURE**

Florida lawmakers are debating a number of proposals for improving the lives of Florida's youngest children. Most of the money will come from \$1 billion in new state tax revenues flowing from existing taxes in a growing economy. Money for health care proposals would come from a combination of federal and state coffers. The federal government is offering states 69 cents for every 31 cents they spend enrolling children currently uninsured in health-care programs. Florida's share of money for health care will come from the state's tobacco settlement, though some legislators have other designs on some of this money.

The following summarizes the major proposals being offered, with proponents' assessments of the benefits and costs of each.

WHAT THE GOVERNOR WANTS
■ HEALTH INSURANCE

Proposal: Expand eligibility for Medicaid. Who benefits: 33,400 more poor children under age 6. Cost: \$22 million. There are 823,500 uninsured children in Florida. For children from birth to age 1 — whose health

care costs five to six times that of older children — Medicaid coverage would extend to families living at up to 235 percent of the federal poverty level; for 1- to 6-year-olds, families at up to 200 percent of poverty level would be covered. The federal poverty level, for a family of four, is an annual income of \$16,050.

Most of the governor's proposals are contained in a \$45 billion state budget that the House and Senate start debating this week.

Proposal: Expand Healthy Kids, a low-cost insurance plan for children.

Who benefits: More than 100,000 school-age children, and their younger siblings. Cost: More than \$100 million, much of it from the federal

Healthy Kids, started in 1992 in one county, has expanded to 23, including Miami-Dade and Broward. Under the nationally acclaimed program, families pay a minimal premium for each child in Miami-Dade and Broward, a sliding scale ranges from \$10 to \$60 a month. Of 48,500 children enrolled today, 3,500 are 1 through 5. Typically, as new school-age children in lower-income families are enrolled, their younger siblings are identified as eligible for Medicaid.

■ PRENATAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH CARE

Proposal: Expand Healthy Start, a state-run program of health screenings for unwed teenage mothers and impoverished pregnant women.

Who benefits: 100,000 women a year. Cost: \$187.7 million, up \$16.7 million from last year.

The program is credited with helping curtail Florida's infant mortality rate. Last year, 93,181 women got health screenings. The share of women who received no prenatal care in Florida has dropped from 5.8 percent in 1991 to 3.3 percent in 1996. The share of infants in "high-risk" families getting immunizations has risen to 94 percent.

■ COORDINATION OF PROGRAMS

Proposal: Integrate policy-making and programming efforts aimed at early childhood. Would create a Children's Policy Council (the governor, legislative leaders, and leaders from private business, community organizations and social services) and a Children's Cabinet (leaders of state agencies for children, health and education). The system would provide incentives to counties that create their own children's services councils to coordinate

local services for children from birth through age 5.

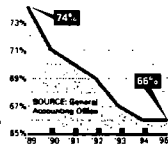
Who benefits: Children in need of services.

Cost: Unknown.

The Readiness Committee of the Governor's Commission on Education, an assembly of business leaders, legislators and educators, has offered model legislation on coordinating initiatives. Some legislators have picked parts of it to advance. Sen. George Kirkpatrick, D-Gainesville, is sponsoring a bill (S 182) that creates a School Readiness Commission, a 12-member group that would be governor-appointed. The bill provides no money for the local children's services councils. In the House, Rep. Tom Warner, R-Stuart, is advancing a bill (H 2131) that creates a State Board of Governance to oversee early childhood education and child-care programs in the state, including the departments of Education and of Children and Family Services.

PLEASE SEE AGENDA, 17A

The percentage of children with private health insurance has been dropping nationally ...



... Many Florida children are uninsured

823,500 of Florida's children lack health insurance
580,000 are 12 or younger

Total number of children in Florida: 3 million
 SOURCE: Florida Department of Health



'When my oldest started school, I helped her,' said Yvonne Kent, a Lauderdale mother who is in the HIPPY program with daughter Shanelle, 3. 'I used to work with her just by guessing what I needed to do. Now I have a set pattern. I'm more consistent.'

Parents train parents to help their children

READY, FROM 18A in Washington, D.C.

"Parents understand that what young kids can't do today, they can do tomorrow, and what they can do today, they won't perform tomorrow," Bredekamp said. "Every parent has said, 'Oh, show grandma how you can say your ABCs,' and they don't do it. Yet when they're at home or in the car, they don't shut up."

STATE HAS BENCHMARKS Checklist is controversial

Two years ago, the Florida Department of Education gave schools the state's checklist of 16 benchmarks to gauge the scope of the readiness problem. The list's items range from the specific (whether a child's immunizations are current) to the very general (whether a child "engages successfully in kindergarten tasks").

A child who earns a "yes" response to 12 or more of the 16 checklist items is "ready."

The checklist has been widely criticized as overly broad and subjective. Teachers complain that the three-week reporting period isn't enough time to assess each child and that some are labeled "unready" even though they later make remarkable strides.

Experts say a better screening would allow longer observations, include interviews with parents and indicate whether the child

attended any type of preschool, something that would enable the state to conclude whether preschool is making a difference. A more detailed evaluation also would make it easier for teachers to address students' specific deficiencies.

To add to the criticism, the state survey was skewed when many school systems added items to the checklist or completely supplanted it with one of their own. Palm Beach County delineated eight different areas, including one called "demonstrates experience with mathematical concepts," which required children to show an understanding of ideas such as "big and more." About 76 percent of Palm Beach kindergarten teachers were rated ready when they passed at least six of the customized benchmarks.

In a dozen other counties, the checklist was replaced by a professional assessment called Dial-R, which has teachers count the number of times a child can jump and the number of body parts a child can identify, among other things.

ADDRESSING READINESS Parents can get training

Referring to the state list, which is used by Miami-Dade and Broward, Shari Iba, coordinator of child development services for Broward public schools, said: "Even if everybody did that



LOOK LIVELY: Yvonne Kent, right, is trained at home by Nancy Harden as part of the HIPPY program — and learns that she should animate her expressions when she reads to her daughter.

checklist as is, it still would be apples and oranges. Teachers make it subjective."

A bill sponsored by Sen. Betty Helander, D-Jacksonville, in the Florida Legislature this session would create a state School Readiness Commission, whose mission, in part, would be to devise a better way of measuring readiness for use by all counties.

Miami-Dade and Broward school systems offer free lessons to a small number of parents on how to prepare their kids for kindergarten. In one of the programs — Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, or HIPPY for short — parents are trained to go into other parents' homes to increase their involvement with

their children, ages 3 to 5.

The program targets parents who have little formal education themselves. A total of 435 parents in both counties are visited once a week.

In the one-hour visits, the parents are given five daily lesson plans, along with glue, crayons and other supplies. The home visitor works through each lesson in the role of the child.

"When my oldest started school, I helped her," said Yvonne Kent, a Lauderdale mother who is in the program with daughter Shanelle, 3. "I used to work with her just by guessing what I needed to do. Now I have a set pattern. I'm more consistent. I have more ideas instead of wondering, 'What

can I do today?'"

Last month, Kent and her home visitor, Nancy Harden, jumped in and out of a rope circle together for a lesson on forward and backward, inside and outside, and other opposites. Shanelle's projects covered the apartment's dining room walls and table: a pair of binoculars made from toilet-paper rolls, a robot made of cookie boxes, a chart showing the concept of big versus small.

GETTING AN EARLY START 4-year-olds in classroom

In classes like Pasarin's at Tossaint-Louverture Elementary, 4-year-olds from low-income families get an early start in the classroom with free prekindergarten classes provided by the state lottery. In Pasarin's class, where a curriculum called HighScope is used, every developmental milestone is recorded in a 20-page evaluation that goes into each child's file.

The report covers everything from making friends (Does the child refer to classmates by their names?) to following music (Does the child respond to the beat of songs with simple movement, like patting knees?).

The day has a rigid schedule so the children become familiar with following a daily plan, from their Good Morning song to circle time to story time.

"Come over here and let me kiss your brain," Pasarin says to one 4-year-old who answers a question correctly, planting her lips on the little girl's head of braids.

"My goal is to make them enjoy learning," Pasarin says simply. "Then they will be ready."

MEASURING READINESS

What teachers, researchers and others say needs to be done to better assess children's readiness for school:

- Instead of the state's current mandated readiness checklist, require a comprehensive review that includes interviews with parents, former caregivers or teachers, and the child.
- Give kindergarten teachers longer than a current three-week requirement to determine whether a child is "ready to learn."
- Include in the state-mandated readiness screening whether the child has been enrolled in pre-kindergarten, preschool or child care. This will give the kindergarten teacher a better idea of whether the child has had experiences with group learning and social skills.
- Create better communication between kindergarten teachers and prekindergarten and preschool workers. Schools should partner with child-care providers in their attendance zones to provide additional training for workers and familiarize them with the kindergarten curriculum.
- Increase programs designed to help low-income parents with little formal education learn how to prepare children for school. These home-visit programs, such as First Start and HIPPY, have grown but still affect few families: 347 parents in Broward and 888 in Miami-Dade.

STATE'S CHECKLIST

Key elements that teachers in Miami-Dade and Broward currently use to measure readiness:

- Appropriate physical development. (Moves with balance and control, holds crayon/pencil in mature grasp.)
- Complies with appropriate rules and routines. (Follows simple rules such as "wait, don't run," moves from one activity to another with guidance and minimal protest.)
- Engages successfully in kindergarten tasks. (Observes and explores to learn new concepts; adapts to class and becomes part of the action.)
- Demonstrates appropriate interactions with adults. (Says "my," listens when adult is speaking.)
- Demonstrates appropriate interactions with other children. (Prefers playing with others to playing alone; begins to use words to resolve conflicts; helps peers.)
- Copes with challenges and frustration. (Separates from parent without crying; uses words instead of physical aggression to solve a problem.)
- Demonstrates appropriate self-help skills. (Uses toilet and eats independently; uses materials without breaking.)
- Expresses needs. (Has basic vocabulary to express needs/wants; goes over to peer who is hurt and comforts.)
- Demonstrates interest in printed materials. (Selects materials to read for pleasure; enjoys pleasure when read to.)
- Participates in artistic and musical activities. (Moves to sounds and music; uses art materials to depict experiences, observations or imagination.)
- Appropriate problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. (Puts graduated sizes in order; begins to use comparative words: sorts.)

WHERE TO GET HELP

- For more information on programs to help your child: Call the Miami-Dade school system's Early Childhood Program office at (305) 895-7533 or the Broward school system's Child Development Services office at (954) 386-8958 between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays.
- For a guide on how parents can help ready their children for school, see Friday's *Living & Learning* section of The Herald.

THE STATE'S AGENDA ON KIDS (continued)

AGENDA, FROM 18A

■ DAY CARE

Proposal: Expand state subsidies to child-care centers already serving 42,000 low-income children. Who benefits: 28,500 children on waiting lists, most of them children of "working poor" families; officials expect waiting lists will fill again, once the current coverage is provided for.

Cost: \$80 million.

Proposal: Expand the Gold Seal of Approval special accreditation program.

Who benefits: Children in state-subsidized day care who could go to better centers.

Cost: \$4 million.

Of the state's more than 6,000 licensed day-care centers, only 472 have met the higher standards for staff training and lower child-to-staff ratios that come with a Gold Seal certification. This would increase the number of Gold Seal centers by about 300, and provide money to steer more kids receiving state subsidies into higher-quality programs.

■ FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Proposal: Expand the Healthy Families program now operating in Pinellas, Orange, Hillsborough, Duval and Polk counties.

Who benefits: 7,200 families statewide.

Cost: \$21.3 million.

Proposal: This program, started in 1992, pairs parents of infants considered "at risk" of abuse or neglect with paraprofessionals who make home visits and offer parenting education and child development guidance for the first five years. Legislators are advancing plans to expand the program.

■ PROTECTING ABUSED CHILDREN

Proposal: Add 200 child protection workers.

Who benefits: Children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Cost: \$34 million.

Abuse or neglect was blamed for the deaths of 82 Florida children last year, compared with 38 the year before. Chronic turnover of low-paid workers in children's protective services has plagued the state's efforts for years.

■ WHAT OTHER LAWMAKERS PROPOSE

■ PRESCHOOL

Sponsor: House Speaker Dan Webster, R-Orlando.

Proposal: Move Florida's pre-K classes from the jurisdiction of the public schools to the state's Department of Children and Families. The state spends more than \$100 million a year on pre-K

classes for 28,688 4- and 3-year-olds from impoverished families.

Who benefits: Public schools can remain focused on K-12 education; pre-K children become the focus of community-based organizations hired by the state Department of Children and Families.

■ CLASSICAL MUSIC

Sponsor: Sen. Bill Turner, D-Miami Shores.

Proposal: Music — that's what day care needs.

Drawing on research showing that stimulation of children's brains early in life pays off in IQ later, all facilities serving children between ages 2 and 5 would be required to provide a half-hour a day of exposure to music and directed reading of books and current events led by teachers and day-care workers.

Who benefits: Children.

Cost: Unknown.

■ STREAMLINING BUREAUCRACY

Sponsor: Sen. Tom Roasin, D-West Palm Beach.

Proposal: Requires Department of Children and Families to narrow its focus to prevention and investigation of child abuse; the agency's current responsibilities for food stamps, mental health and substance abuse services would go to other state agencies.

Who benefits: Abused and neglected children.

Cost: Limited administrative costs for reorganization of agencies.

■ MORE CONTROL TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Sponsor: Sen. Ginny Brown-Waite, R-Spring Hill.

Proposal: Hand over child-abuse prevention responsibility to nonprofit community-based agencies and local sheriff's departments. Republican Job Bush points to Sarasota County, where local nonprofit organizations are handling protection of children under contract with the state, and Manatee County, where the sheriff sends a deputy out on every complaint of child abuse or neglect.

Brown-Waite's bill (S-362) takes the theory in Pinellas and Pasco counties. Statewide phase-in would take place over three years.

Who benefits: Abused and neglected children.

Cost: Minimal; private agencies and sheriffs contracted to handle work now performed by state agency.

To learn the status of any legislation or request copies of any bills filed, call the Legislature's toll-free phone line, 1-800-362-1827. Anyone with computer access to the Internet can find copies of legislation at: <http://leg.state.fl.us>

— MARK SILVA

What it means to be the parent of a young child ...

Child care eats up a chunk of monthly income

In a recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau, poor families paid about one third less (\$50 vs. \$70) than families who were not poor. But child care consumed a large share of the poor family's budget.

Percentage of monthly family income spent on child care



The middle class is feeling the squeeze, too

According to New York-based Families and Work Institute:

• 11% of middle-class kids — those in families with annual household incomes of \$30,000 to \$70,000 — have lost health

insurance in the last 20 years.

These children do not qualify for any kind of public aid. They often go without checkups and other medical care.

• Middle-class kids are often at a higher risk of getting poor care in day-care centers. They do not qualify for programs like Head Start, which have high licensing standards, and often can't afford to be in first-rate day care centers.



WORDS AND PICTURES FOR TOTS: Sanda Gruskin, above, reads to kids 9 to 12 months old in a child development class at Nova Southeastern University. She holds up a plastic spider, left, as an attention-getter.

Read the complete package on early childhood along with some extras.

www.herald.com

HOW TO CONTACT US

To comment on this series, address letters to Ready or Not? The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132-1693, or email us at features@herald.com

State's baby boom, money windfall fuel debate

CHILDREN, FROM 1A

says Matthew Melmed, director of the Zero to Three child advocacy organization in Arlington, Va.

Evidence of the movement's momentum is widespread:

■ States' initiatives ranging from a \$90 million children's services network in North Carolina to a \$14 million program in Missouri to help parents prepare their babies for school success.

■ A \$10 million "I Am Your Child" campaign spearheaded by filmmaker Rob Reiner, featuring TV ads on parenting skills and a one-hour TV special on infant brain development broadcast twice by ABC last year. The 30-year-old father of two young boys has set up his own foundation to crusade for the issue.

■ Kellogg's decision to put information encouraging parents to sing and read to their babies on 25 million boxes of Rice Krispies and explaining how such activities stimulate learning.

■ Personal advocacy by Hillary Rodham Clinton, who held a White House conference on infant brain development last year.

NOW FLORIDA FARES

Growing needs are cited

In Florida, experts convey an urgency in terms of worsening needs:

■ A demographic shift that has made the million children in Florida under age 5 the state's fastest-growing group of kids. That number includes 154,000 kids in Miami-Dade and 91,000 in Broward. (Every month, 1,000 unwed mothers in Dade and 500 in Broward give birth.)

■ A growing population of adults who lack job skills and the

POSSIBLE GAINS: Advocates hold out these tantalizing potential benefits of a greater focus on early childhood development:

- For every dollar invested in preschools, there could be a \$7 saving in spending on special education, crime and welfare.
- Special-education placements could be cut in half.
- Juvenile arrests could be cut in half. (Florida spends \$15,978 per teenager in detention vs. \$2,975 per child in subsidized child care.)

ability to read and write on a ninth-grade level, but are raising one of every three children. (Researchers say parents' education is the No. 1 at-risk indicator in child development.)

■ More women who work and a growth in single-parent households, which put two of every three babies and toddlers in child care. Sixty percent of that child care is minimal or inadequate, according to a new Families and Work Institute survey of 150 Florida child-care centers.

■ A fragmented, underfunded early-childhood system of services that impacts every family — rich or poor — but is ranked 47th in the country by Kids Count, another child advocacy group.

'THE YEAR TO CATCH UP'

Climate called favorable

Politically, there is a sense among advocates that a better time for strengthening efforts on behalf of children won't come again. Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, said during a recent visit to Miami that in states like Florida — flush with booming sales-tax collections, savings from shrinking welfare rolls, and a tobacco lawsuit settlement windfall — "this is the year to catch up."

The marriage of brain science and child-rearing has caused both parents and politicians to discover, however, that the leap from laboratory to nursery is a long one. And it is adding to parental worries.

A Zero to Three poll last year found that the more parents learn about the importance of the early years, the higher their anxiety. Only two in five parents surveyed said they felt sure they could tell if their baby's development was on track.

Liza Dias of Coconut Creek, who attends a weekly baby class at Nova Southeastern University in Davie with her year-old daughter Abigail, says she's learned a great deal from researching Internet sites, but that knowledge has reinforced her concern that "the biggest problem for mothers is having enough time."

Policy-makers are wrestling with these complexities, too.

"How do we move from research labs to school rooms and living rooms in ways that make a difference?" asks Frank Newman, president of the Denver-based Education Commission of the States. "If it doesn't end up changing how moms and dads interact with their children, it isn't going to make a difference."

The debate involves more than just parents, experts say. It involves teachers, caregivers in

child-care centers, health officials, politicians, corporations and the community at large.

FLORIDA'S BABY STEPS

State addressing issues

Florida is beginning to address the issue with baby steps. The debate over early childhood is shaping a large part of the Florida Legislature's agenda this session as Gov. Lawton Chiles seeks to leave behind a legacy of children's advocacy.

"My dream is to see a bidding war over who can spend the most money for children the way there was a bidding war for prisons," Chiles said last month.

But Daniela Levine, executive director of the Human Services Coalition of Miami-Dade County, notes that there are other forces competing for the money windfall. They include proposals for a middle-class tax break and more money for school construction.

Chiles' budget targets young children notably with initiatives dealing with health care and seeking to eliminate one of the state's chronic waiting lists for social services — 25,000 children of "working poor" families waiting for state-subsidized day care. Money will come partly from the state's \$11.3 billion settlement of a lawsuit with the tobacco industry and partly from a federal program that is supporting a combination of Medicaid and private health-insurance expansion.

Altogether, the governor is looking at spending \$600 million for early-childhood improvements.

If the Legislature passes the bulk of Chiles' proposals, it will have accomplished more for its youngest children than at any time in

state history, "a massive, wonderful change," says Susan Muenchow, director of the Florida Children's Forum.

Still, Muenchow adds: "In the context of making children ready for school, it's just a drop in the bucket."

PRE-K FUNDING LIMITED

Few employers involved

State spending on prekindergarten intervention accounts for just one-half of 1 percent of the education budget, for example — and none of the proposals on deck this year will increase that.

Finding quality child care where children get the requisite mental nourishment and stimulation remains costly and hard to find. Few employers in Miami-Dade and Broward are contributing to employee needs in this area. (When Florida offered to match dollar-for-dollar all corporate contributions to a Child Care Purchasing Pool, only two Dade businesses responded. In Broward, only one.)

And the overarching problems of poverty and stressed families remain.

Newman, of the Education Commission of the States, told Florida early-childhood advocates recently: "Prevention isn't the American way. We're not terribly good until we have a Pearl Harbor."

Yet in recent years, several states have launched ambitious efforts to focus more resources on developing children in the early years.

Georgia is using its lottery money to provide prekindergarten

to every 4-year-old whose parents want it. Kentucky's far-reaching 1990 Education Reform Act — aimed partly at stronger preschool programs — caused achievement scores in reading and math among fourth-graders to soar by 1996. North Carolina has pioneered model public-private early-childhood partnerships.

WHY FLORIDA LAGS

Other priorities prevail

The reasons that Florida isn't among those leaders are many:

- The state hasn't increased its 6 percent sales tax in 10 years and has no income tax.

■ The Legislature gave priority in the early 1990s to new prisons, and now that they are built, welfare reform has emerged as the next must-do project.

■ The state already is struggling with overwhelming demands placed on public schools.

Offering prekindergarten to every Florida 4-year-old alone would cost \$600 million. Chiles' total budget for a host of children's programs this year.

Most early-childhood experts say that in a state with overwhelming needs like Florida, providing more health insurance and regulated care for kids, plus attacking child abuse, isn't a bad place to start.

But what this year's debate really represents, the experts say, is the beginning of a long soul-searching process.

"My experience with policy initiatives is that they never proceed in a way you would prefer," says Melmed, of the Zero to Three child advocacy organization. "They're always messy. But what's encouraging is they've started."

THE STATE'S AGENDA ON KIDS: WHAT'S MISSING

Many early-childhood needs are not covered, or are barely covered, by proposals before the Florida Legislature. Here are some of the missing components of an effective system:

■ AN ALL-OUT EFFORT

The early-childhood movement is a global one, with many nations far ahead of the United States. In France and Belgium, for example, almost 100 percent of children are enrolled in preschool by age 3.

Public demand for major spending to help young children and their parents is relatively recent, and still not overwhelming, experts say.

University of Miami psychologist Peter Mundy, an expert in early-childhood intervention, says comprehensive change "would require a redirection of resources that hasn't been seen since the '60s when the Russians' Sputnik program led to major improvements in U.S. science education."

■ IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

Current proposals for expanded children's health care leaves out thousands of South Florida's immigrant children.

Federal money for the coverage is linked to citizenship. Foreign-born children, even those legally here and those with permanent-resident status, are excluded.

Local agencies are trying to determine how many children would be affected. President Clinton has asked Congress to remove the restriction.

■ TWO-GENERATION PROGRAMS

Parents remain the biggest influences on the well-being of children. "Two-generation" programs that teach parents how to nurture are considered essential.

However, the governor's proposal for a \$21 million pilot program to provide home visits by paraprofessionals to at-risk families with babies would reach only 20 percent of targeted

■ CHILD-CARE WORKERS

"A North Carolina program called TEACH pools state and corporate money for teaching scholars, and he has been successful in getting the state to agree to return to their jobs for at least a year. Florida has pilot TEACH programs in Pinellas, Hillsborough, Palm Beach and Orange counties. The Florida Legislature will consider a \$1.5 million expansion this year for a similar program, affecting 1,000 early-childhood teachers and child-care workers."

Congress will consider programs offering billions of dollars in block grants to states to pay for training scholars, even pay supplements, much of it paid for by new taxes on tobacco. About 40 bills are pending.

■ CHILD-CARE LICENSING

Hundreds of child-care providers get without license in Dade and Broward because of red tape and virtually no penalties for noncompliance. Standards for licensing vary widely. No universal curriculum standards exist.

very from county to county and town to town.

Few centers without license or out of compliance with rules get caught or get closed down. The state provides only one inspector for every 75 centers and at-home providers it knows about.

Among the proposed solutions: a single state licensing code, and uniform county codes to simplify the process. A strengthening of enforcement is critical.

■ COORDINATION

Public-school early-childhood programs in South Florida are a patchwork of nearly two dozen programs, each with a different money source and different eligibility rules.

Almost all early-childhood advocates agree a desperately needed, beginning with a central authority in state government and working down through county and city coordinating councils right into neighborhoods, involving churches, clubs and other volunteers in coordinated efforts. The Legislature will consider multiple proposals to begin to address these issues.

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Inside the mind of a child

There's more going on inside your child's brain than you might imagine

CHILD'S MIND, FROM 1A

"This is the period of unprecedented opportunities for children to learn," said Dr. Pablo Rakic, a Yale University researcher regarded as one of the world's top experts on child development. "If you don't use it, you lose it."

Rebecca R. Fewell understands all of this. She is the guiding spirit of the University of Miami's Debbie Institute, which is devoted to the study of how children develop. She has helped parents recognize that their infant's chortle or whimper is communication every bit as meaningful as a full sentence — and that it is owed a response.

She tells this tale of her grandson. When he was 6 months old, he was out for a ride with his mom and dad. They stopped to get something to drink, got back into the car — and were instantly serenaded by the howls of their baby.

"That baby was communicating," Fewell said. "He didn't have the words to say. Hey! You're not sharing. I want my drink, too."

"But that's exactly what he was saying when he fussed. And, believe me, he ended up getting his drink."

Power of nurturing

Fewell has proved the power of nurturing in an academic setting, too.

She and other researchers affiliated with the Debbie Institute wanted to see what would happen to the lives of 50 adolescent mothers and their young children if they were involved in a campaign to help make them better, more nurturing parents. A second cluster of moms got only traditional parenting classes.

The results were dramatic for the moms enrolled in the more elaborate half of the study — mothers who had scarcely known how to play with their children. Their toddlers registered impressive gains: They were better able to perform tasks that reflect brain growth, better able to play with other children.

It was a poignant reminder that little things like interaction can mean a lot.

Dr. Harry Chugani can see the benefits of nurturing on medical snapshots that burn brightly in yellows and deep reds, greens and cobalt blues — pictures that look for all the world like colorized Rorschach inkblots. The Detroit researcher has become internationally renowned for the use of sophisticated cameras to peer into the brains of children.

His favorite tool is a device called a positron emission tomography scanner, known as a PET scan. It produces those multicolored snapshots that measure brain activity. Such technology allows scientists to plumb a chunk of the body that has fiercely guarded its secrets.

With these pictures, doctors can see how the brain looks in a child who has been nurtured, see how it looks in a child who has dwelt in privation.

Pictures like those have confirmed the suspicions of neurologists like Trevor J. Resnick of Miami Children's Hospital: "Your brain is born open — it's like an open book."

And pages are added at an explosive rate.

In the first years of life, the brain looks like Grand Central Station at warp speed, with the number of tracks multiplying at an exponential rate.

What's in the brain

The brain is composed of cells called neurons. Each brain has billions of them. And they are linked by structures known as synapses — there are trillions of those — that form when tiny tentacles from neighboring neurons connect.

To get an idea of the pace of construction inside an infant's brain, consider this: By the age of 2, a healthy child will have a bounty of synapses equal to that of an adult. By age 3, the synapse census has blossomed to 1,000 trillion, twice what mom or dad has.

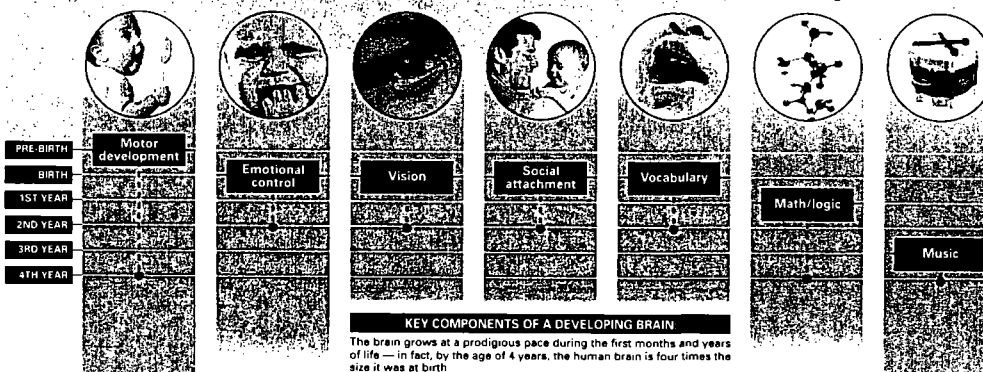
This is where the use-it-or-lose-it part kicks in.

At the same time connections are being made, other tracks are withering away. The more interaction, the more stimulation, the greater the number of connections that survive.

"You just need to spend time with your child, reading, talking, listening, responding to the cues your child is giving you," said pediatrician Charles R. Bauer, of UM/Jackson Children's Hospital. "It's not that you give a pill and have good child development."

The stakes are substantial: One study found that the vocabulary of 2-year-olds whose mothers were

Different parts of the brain mature at different rates. The chart shows the periods of greatest development for a range of brain functions.



KEY COMPONENTS OF A DEVELOPING BRAIN

The brain grows at a prodigious pace during the first months and years of life — in fact, by the age of 4 years, the human brain is four times the size it was at birth.

FRONTAL LOBE:
Guides higher cognitive activity, including speech and reasoning.

CEREBRAL CORTEX:
Controls higher mental functions, such as thinking, planning, remembering, analyzing.

PARIENTAL LOBE:
Plays a role in language and helps child recognize objects and have better eye-hand coordination.

OCCIPITAL LOBE:
Plays a major role in visual perception.

THALAMUS:

Key relay station for sensory information flowing into the brain, filtering information of particular importance from the mass of signals entering the brain.

HIPPOCAMPUS:
Key memory keeper.

TEMPORAL LOBE:
Plays a major role in speech, auditory perception and complex visual perceptions.

TRACKS OF THE BRAIN

Synapses are the bridges between the brain tracks of the brain — the billions of cells clumped in our heads. The synapses go through an explosive period of growth from birth through the first three years.



By age 3, a baby's brain has twice as many of these connections as an adult's, and will remain super-dense through the first decade.



At age 14, the child's brain has pruned away a significant chunk of those connections, wrenching order from the thicket of brain wiring.



MARI VALLBONA / Herald Staff

EARLY INTERACTION: Four-month-old Oscar Sanchez shows fascination with toys at the Centro Mater day-care center in Miami.

talkative was 295 words larger on average than that of a child whose mother wasn't so chatty.

All of which begs the most critical question of all: How does the brain know which tracks to banish, which to preserve?

The research shows that when there is healthy mental stimulation, traffic streaks along the tracks in the brain, and all the synapses along the tracks receive and squirrel away chemical signals. Keep turning on the synapses over and over and they get stronger and stronger — until they cross a threshold that wards off elimination.

They're safe into adulthood. Not everyone embraces this version of events with the same enthusiasm.

Scientists are divided

Two scientific camps have sprung up, and while they agree that experience and genes are essential in how the brain turns out, they differ on the importance of each. One side favors the power of genetics, while the other favors the power of experience.

Still, people like pediatrician

Carmen de Lema and psychologist Vivian M. Umbel have seen enough to commit themselves to instilling in parents the importance of stimulating a baby's brain. Umbel is senior psychologist at South Miami Hospital and Child Development Center, and

de Lema is the medical director. "What's so important in communicating to parents is this: Even though a child may present with a problem at age 12 months, that doesn't mean it's cast in stone," Umbel said. "Children at that age are very malleable."

And it's not just what parents do with them. It's what happens at day-care centers and with sitters, too. In fact, some child experts believe that children are better off if they divide their time between home and a child-care center.

"If mom's at home with Johnny, it's mom and Johnny," Umbel said. "Even if mom is operating as an optimal parent, mom isn't another preschooler."

Quick viewed as mistake

But parents can't assume that kind of socialization is happening in every day-care center. There's little to be gained, Miami Children's Resnick said, if a toddler is put in a rocking seat and left there all day.

All of this, of course, is enough to thrust parents into a guilt-stabbed panic. That, experts say, would be a mistake.

Instead, this is the wisdom that de Lema of South Miami Hospital shares with parents: "First and foremost, enjoy your child, for heaven's sake."

Herald research editor Elisabeth Donovan contributed to this report.

Sources: Caring for Your Baby and Young Child, by Dr. Steven P. Shaffer, Children's Hospital of Michigan and Dr. Harry Chugani; The First Twelve Months of Life, by Theresa Caplan; The Human Brain: A Guided Tour, by Susan A. Greenfield, Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development, by Rita Shure and the Families and Work Institute; The Second Twelve Months of Life, by Frank and Theresa Caplan; Your Child from 0 to Age 6 by Fitzhugh Dodson and Dr. Ann Alexander; Zero to Three, STEPHEN BIRTH, BRUCE BITTER, ELIZABETH DONOVAN, JOE MAGALANES, PAMELA, The Herald

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FIGHTING THE SYSTEM: Dianna Mears of Cooper City, second from right, waits as her snoozing twins undergo checkups. Getting therapy for them has been a struggle.

For ailing kids, a struggle for care

CHILDREN, FROM 1A

Somebody struggling to get Medicaid. Or ask a parent whose insurance will pay for only the most rudimentary therapy.

The early years are the time when children need help the most. In Florida, it's the time when health care often gives them the least.

■ The state's most trumpeted medical plan for children — Healthy Kids — doesn't even cover children from birth to 3.

■ Medicaid has so many built-in barriers that a third of Florida's 800,000 uninsured kids who qualify for help don't get it.

■ And the state plan designed specifically to help the youngest children with the most problems — Children's Medical Services — has absorbed devastating cuts.

Failing to pay up front translates into children sorely unprepared for the start of school, lacking the intellectual and emotional skills to keep up with their peers.

That's true for children born sick and children born healthy. A healthy baby can be pushed behind by something as routine as an ear infection; if left untreated, an earache can result in hearing loss and speech problems. At the same time, premature babies born with brain damage can catch up — if they get enough help.

But in Florida, the systems designed to keep children healthy are not well.

In the days after Markanson Athelus' tumor was excised, his mother began a frantic hunt to get him care to eradicate his cancer.

Nobody told her about a federal program known as COBRA that lets people continue their insurance at their own expense after they lose their job. Nobody told her she could seek care and at the same time begin the process of qualifying for Medicaid.

The battle was Ferdinand's alone — Markanson's father lives in Orlando and has little involvement in his son's life.

"Rob a bank," one doctor advised her.

Weeks, then months, passed. And the tumor came back, bigger than before.

The toll was not just physical. Because it took two months to get help, Markanson missed two months of prekindergarten.

And because the tumor grew back, doctors were forced to treat his case more aggressively, which meant more time in the hospital, less time in school.

"This may be something happening in Third World countries, but should it be happening in the United States?" said Susan R. Toledano, a top oncologist at the University of Miami/Jackson Children's Hospital.

NO EASY ANSWERS

The obstacles are great

What can be done for children

like Markanson?

One thing is sure. Solutions won't come cheap. The needs are broad and deep, the cracks to wide they swallow families whole.

Families like Maria Ruiz's. On a recent day, she clambered aboard a bus for a 90-minute ride to the Memorial Primary Care Center in Hollywood. Daughter Iesha, 2, had an earache.

Ruiz, of Hallandale, used to have Medicaid, but it ran out, and she hasn't been able to work through the mound of paperwork to reapply. So here she is, daughter in tow, \$70 in her pockets that she borrowed from her family to pay for Iesha's care. "What can you do?" Ruiz said. "You've got to take care of your kids."

The story rings familiar to people toiling in the system, who say so many families are caught in an unending cycle — they find a job, but the job doesn't pay for insurance. Then they lose their job because they need to stay home and nurse a critically ill child.

Or they don't get prenatal care that might save a baby from medical disaster, because Medicaid doesn't kick in till birth. Or a toddler loses Medicaid because the poverty threshold for aid rises as a child gets older. Or a woman struggling to hold a job can't get time off to sit for hours at a local agency office every few months to requalify as the law requires.

Critics say it's not enough to make government aid "available." With some health initiatives, it's like telling somebody there's gold in a mountain, but failing to provide a map or a shovel.

"I hear a lot of people say we offer people these things [and] if they don't want to take advantage of them, that's their problem," said Dr. Owen Wurm, director of community pediatrics at UM/Jackson. "You almost get this sense that people want to punish families that don't go through the hoops."

THE HOSPITAL SOLUTION

Using emergency room

Critics believe the state needs to do more to let families know about services. Often, those left out of the system end up in the one place that can't turn them away: the emergency room. The state has saved the cost of a doctor's visit, but local taxpayers who support South Florida's public hospitals pick up a far heavier tab.

We see a lot of patients here who are borderline — they can't get Medicaid, but they can't really afford any medical care either," said Dr. P.M. Alameila, a pediatrician at Jackson Memorial Children's Center. "So a lot of times they put off going to the doctor until it becomes an emergency."

The emergency room is no substitute for routine medical care. It isn't set up to give a kid shots, or do the developmental checks that might catch a toddler with a

speech problem.

Another irony: Florida has a national reputation for innovative health programs, but its record in early childhood is spotty.

In addition to Healthy Kids not covering infants and toddlers, the Healthy Start program of preventive services for pregnant women and babies has never been funded to meet all the needs, health workers say. And the state's network of early intervention programs, designed to help babies and toddlers with developmental problems catch up, suffered more than \$5 million in cuts last year.

That leaves agencies like the Children's Diagnostic and Treatment Center, a public clinic in Fort Lauderdale that specializes in developmentally disabled children from birth to 3, tapping local tax dollars, donations and other grants to cobble together enough to keep going.

"The state has made every effort — to the extent resources were available — to meet the need," said Phyllis Sideris, assistant director of Florida's Children's Medical Services program.

The governor's proposed budget would address some of the critical deficits for young children. It would make more children eligible for Medicaid, allow them to stay on the rolls for a full year, and expand Healthy Start eligibility to age 3. Child advocates say it is only a down payment on what really needs to be done — the governor's initiative would guarantee, for example, \$22 million in additional Medicaid dollars to cover the needs of only 33,000 kids from birth to 6.

Still, Sideris says: "It's an opportunity that we have not had since Medicaid was enacted in the 1960s. It's a phenomenal opportunity for children in Florida."

CLINICS OFFER HELP

They're more affordable

Public health clinics — which charge according to what families can afford — are struggling to help not only those who are uninsured but also the underinsured.

Take Dianna Mears of Cooper City. Though her insurance covered hospital costs for her twins, born five weeks premature, it didn't cover the intensive — and expensive — therapy 7-month-old Korynn needs to compensate for Dandy Walker Syndrome, a neurological condition she was born with that can cause learning problems if not treated.

"It doesn't make sense," Mears said. "They paid for all her hospital care, but they won't pay for this."

Korynn instead gets the therapy she needs from the Children's Diagnostic and Treatment Center. Korynn's healthier sister, Korynn, was cut off last month, however — state budget reductions prevented the clinic from continuing free services because her problems are not considered severe.

BY THE NUMBERS

The bulk of the governor's Children's Health Initiative, some \$201.5 million in federal and state funds, would go to children over 6, who make up a greater share of the population. Here's a look at the initiatives targeted at children in the crucial early years:

	KIDS COVERED	STATE SHARE	TOTAL COST
Medicaid expansion			
■ Birth to age 1:	5,434	\$2.8 million	\$8.9 million
■ Ages 1-4:	27,985	\$4.1 million	\$13.3 million
Healthy Start			
■ Birth to age 3:	Unknown	\$20.7 million*	\$46.8 million
TOTAL:	33,419	\$27.6 million	\$99 million

*This remains at the existing state level of funding, but coverage will be expanded with federal dollars.

Other budget initiatives not targeted to young children specifically but which will benefit them:

	KIDS COVERED	STATE SHARE	TOTAL COST
Automatic 12 months of Medicaid once approved	Affects undetermined number of kids from birth to age 19	\$27.9 million	\$63 million
New kids covered by Medicaid	Affects 80,000 kids from ages 1-19	\$27.8 million**	\$62.9 million

Source: Florida Department of Health

*Because of increased outreach.

A0317

Like so many children at the clinic, Korynn won't be seen after she turns 6 months old. Evaluations the center used to do at one year to check for developmental problems have been cut.

Public clinics also draw people like Luz Enaida Rodriguez, who brings her son Omar Abel Ortiz even though her husband has insurance through his job. In an era of HMOs and pressures to trim costs, Rodriguez frets that her own doctor doesn't spend enough time with her son — born blue from lack of oxygen — to spot subtle developmental delays.

One recent day, a clinic doctor was concerned about Omar's wobbling legs, which could delay his walking. So the physical therapist taught Rodriguez how to build her son's strength with exercises.

"Most doctors, they don't pay that much attention," said Rodriguez, who lives in Pembroke Pines. "Here, I know they'll take the time to tell me what to do. I don't feel like I'm in it alone."

Alone was precisely how Inovia Ferdinand felt in the winter of 1997. There she was, a tumor emerging from her son's ear, and nobody would help.

The tumor was an especially feared spreading, variant of cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma.

"I said, oh, my God, I have no insurance. Where am I going to find \$100,000? I don't even have 100 pennies."

So she kept calling Medicaid. And calling. Finally, she got Medicaid. And an appointment at Jackson Memorial, where she soon got care for her son.

The cost well exceeded her original \$100,000 estimate.

"I was disgusted at the fact that two months had been wasted," said Toledano, Markanson's cancer specialist. "Basically, the child's life was put at jeopardy."

Yes, she said, I think we've won.

For the past year, Markanson, now 5, has received chemotherapy and radiation. He got his last dose of chemo on the first Monday of March, with doctors forecasting that he has a 75 percent chance of vanquishing the cancer.

On that day, in Jackson's raucous cancer ward, Inovia Ferdinand stood as an island of serenity amid children oblivious to the gravity of the enemy they're fighting.

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PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CHANGE

Here's what the experts say could be done to improve children's access to health care:

■ **Automatic eligibility:** Allow children to stay on Medicaid until age 3 or 5 once they have qualified the first time. This would help end the start-and-stop cycle that now has kids losing insurance frequently because of the need to prove eligibility every few months. The governor is proposing automatic eligibility for one year.

■ **One-stop shopping:** Create a single, simple application for all children's health insurance programs. This way, when parents apply for the wrong program, they would automatically be enrolled in one they qualify for instead of just dropping out of the system. It would also separate Medicaid from the onerous welfare application process, removing a serious bureaucratic obstacle as well as some of the stigma.

■ **Advertised:** Improve recruiting efforts for Medicaid and subsidized insurance programs such as Healthy Kids to draw in the more than 500,000 children who now qualify for help but aren't enrolled. Proposals include advertising that targets underserved populations and outreach efforts through local clinics, day-care centers, houses of worship and other community groups. The governor's initiative includes additional money for such a program.

■ **Living in the privates:** Encourage private insurers to offer affordable, comprehensive child-only health insurance products. Though there is nothing in the law that stops companies from doing this now, both the governor and Sen. Sotelo are proposing to allow insurance plans to offer children's insurance with federally subsidized premiums for low-income families.

■ **Where to get help:** If you suspect your child has a developmental problem or is in need of medical attention, here are some public clinics where you can seek help. These clinics charge according to ability to pay.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

For children with suspected or diagnosed developmental problems. The state has two Children's Medical Services offices in Dade:

■ **Main office:** 1500 NW 12th Ave., Suite 829, Miami 33135-0831 (305) 325-7830

■ **South office:** 5221 SW 31st St., Miami (305) 498-9931

■ **University of Miami:** Miller Center for Child Development, 1601 NW 12th Ave., Miami 33135-0831

■ **Child Development Center at South Miami Hospital:** 8200 SW 73rd St., (305) 663-5080

Primary care

■ **Chile Center clinic:** 1350 NW 14th St., Miami (305) 324-4443

■ **Juanita Mason Center:** Northside Shopping Center, 250 East Plaza, 7900 NW 27th Ave., Miami (305) 694-2844

■ **Little River Clinic:** 350 NE 8th Ter., Miami (305) 574-6821

■ **Looy Street Clinic:** 1600 NW 52nd St., Florida City (305) 241-1951

■ **Martin Luther King Clinic:** 810 W. Morris St., Homestead (305) 248-4334

■ **Miami Beach Center:** 615 Collins Ave., Miami Beach (305) 535-5640

■ **North Miami Health Center:** 14101 NW Eighth Ave., (305) 953-3161

■ **Quail Forest Health Center:** 12300 Quail Forest Dr., (305) 278-1000

■ **Refugee Screening Facility:** 701 SW 27th Ave., Miami (305) 643-7300

■ **Reale Lee Wesley Center:** 6801 SW 62nd Ave., South Miami (305) 683-9509

■ **Miami Children's Hospital and the University of Miami:** Pediatrics department both run mobile clinics that visit schools in Miami-Dade County. To find out when a van is coming to a school near you:

■ **Miami Children's Health Promotion Division:** (305) 683-6863

■ **UM Community Pediatrics Division:** (305) 243-2818

For more information on Medicaid:

■ **Department of Children and Families' Economic Self-Sufficiency office:** (305) 377-7154

The department also has neighborhood offices that are listed in the blue pages of the telephone book.

SEE YOU LATER: Helena Coello of West Kendall deposits daughter Monica, 3, at day care before going on to school and work.



Photos by Nuri Vallbona, The Herald



STUDY AND SNOOZE: School work occupies Coello, above, as she waits for a Metro train to take her to class and her job. At right, she naps on the way home.



Kids of working poor grope for safety net

WORKING POOR, FROM 1A

Census estimates. Nationally, the number could be as high as 40 percent of the population. Many are single women raising children alone.

They all share one thing: They are barely covering the costs of child care, health care, food and rent — in spite of their paychecks. And the safety net for the youngsters of these families is so tattered that many of them are slipping through, say those who toil to help them. By the time they reach middle school, these children are at risk of bottoming out on standardized test rankings, numerous studies have shown. Meanwhile, families struggle to squeeze in quality time — in between working two jobs, bus rides, sleep, layoffs and temporary jobs, and study sessions for classes they hope will help pull them out of poverty.

"I run into a lot of walls," 32-year-old Helena Coello of West Kendall said of her daily schedule, which includes being a full-time radiology student and mother, and a part-time records clerk at Miami-Dade Community College's Medical Center Campus. Twice divorced, she's rearing three daughters — ages 3, 4 and 12 — on her own.

Coello and others say Gov. Lawton Chiles' \$80 million proposal to get some 16,000 children off waiting lists and into quality day care is a good start toward helping them. Lack of sufficient child-care subsidies means their children end up in low-cost baby-sitting services that provide little or none of the interaction needed to stimulate growing brains.

But these families also have other concerns:

- Programs designed to help them are bureaucratic and inefficient.
- Office hours are inconvenient for those who need evening and weekend access to avoid missing work.

In addition, sweeping welfare reforms passed in 1996 have ironically placed those who are already working last in line behind welfare recipients for services.

ENDLESS WAITING LISTS

Welfare rolls come first

Medicaid, priority subsidized child care and child-support enforcement, and job training are all being funded to help thousands move from welfare rolls to pay-rolls in the coming months. The working poor, meanwhile, languish on waiting lists. And when they make incremental steps toward a better living — a 50-cent-an-hour raise, for example — they bump into income eligibility caps and face the loss of whatever little aid they are getting.

Sometimes I think you can't win for losing," says Anika Peguero, a 28-year-old Miami mother of two who works part-time and is studying at Miami-Dade Community College's Wolf-

'I always try to give them a choice.

'Which bubble bath do you want tonight? Which dress do you want to wear?'

I've learned how to be very creative — a quick thinker.'

HELENA COELLO, working mother of three

son Campus for a degree in elementary education.

Black and three of her children live in a two-bedroom duplex with her mother. Black earns \$26,000 a year as a mental-health worker in Coral Springs. When her oldest daughter went off to college last year, she took on extra work. She cleans her church and works three nights a week as a mental-health technician at a center for mentally disturbed children.

"I don't get home until about 7 at night," she said. "I have to rush to feed them, bathe them, give them a few minutes' time to play with them, then they've got to go to bed. . . . I end up not spending enough time with my children."

Jurch earns \$7 an hour as a car dealership warranty service administrator, about \$14,000 a year. A huge chunk of her paycheck goes toward the \$177-a-week child-care tab for Breanna and Jalyne. She remains on a waiting list for subsidized child care, along with more than 1,000 others in Broward and more than 5,000 in Miami-Dade.

An additional \$300 a month is deducted for health insurance for the three of them. Though she works long hours, Jurch barely stays afloat.

Daniella Levine, executive director of the Human Services Coalition of Dade County, and others are lobbying this year for legislative changes to give the working poor access to the same services welfare clients receive. Without that change, Levine said, the working poor today will become tomorrow's welfare case-load and set up a kind of "revolving" door at the bottom.

Levine's group also has helped form the Living Wage Coalition. The grass-roots group is pushing a proposal to require larger companies doing business with Miami-Dade County to pay their workers at least \$8 an hour.

"If you are working a minimum-wage job, you are worse off than if you are on welfare," Levine said.

Child care remains the biggest issue by far.

"If you look hard at what [the working poor] need to live, when

tale from her experience with the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutritional supplement program for her 16-month-old twins. WIC requires parents or someone they designate to go to WIC processing centers every two months to pick up coupon checks for free food. The savings to parents can be as much as \$80 to \$90 every two months.

Jurch was assigned to a WIC center in Broward that closed recently. The new site was too far away, she said, especially since she was trying to fit in doctor and hospital visits for her daughter, Breanna, who was born with a cyst on her forehead.

"It was too much on me with all the other appointments that were going on," said Jurch, 23. "And they don't have enough locations. When you go down there, it's a two- or three-hour ordeal because there are so many people. When they finally get to you, you know, you think, is it worth it?"

A state Health Department spokesman said the recent clinic closings are temporary, but admitted the impact on poor families can be great.

"Through all of this, we're trying to be as efficient as we can and serve our clients as best we can," spokesman David Adams said.

Jurch spends a lot of time worrying about her children.

"I don't get home until about 7 at night," she said. "I have to rush to feed them, bathe them, give them a few minutes' time to play with them, then they've got to go to bed. . . . I end up not spending enough time with my children."

Jurch earns \$7 an hour as a car dealership warranty service administrator, about \$14,000 a year. A huge chunk of her paycheck goes toward the \$177-a-week child-care tab for Breanna and Jalyne. She remains on a waiting list for subsidized child care, along with more than 1,000 others in Broward and more than 5,000 in Miami-Dade.

An additional \$300 a month is deducted for health insurance for the three of them. Though she works long hours, Jurch barely stays afloat.

Daniella Levine, executive director of the Human Services Coalition of Dade County, and others are lobbying this year for legislative changes to give the working poor access to the same services welfare clients receive. Without that change, Levine said, the working poor today will become tomorrow's welfare case-load and set up a kind of "revolving" door at the bottom.

Levine's group also has helped form the Living Wage Coalition. The grass-roots group is pushing a proposal to require larger companies doing business with Miami-Dade County to pay their workers at least \$8 an hour.

"If you are working a minimum-wage job, you are worse off than if you are on welfare," Levine said.

Child care remains the biggest issue by far.

"If you look hard at what [the working poor] need to live, when



TIME FOR TECHNOLOGY: Bob Ripoli explains a new computer program to Coello and other employees at the Medical Center Campus of Miami-Dade Community College.

you consider that child care may cost \$5,000 a year, it's a huge amount if you make only \$10,000," says economist Barbara Bergmann, an American University professor who has studied the working poor in the United States and other countries.

Frequent work changes can make things worse. With job security at the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder almost nonexistent, parents may move in and out of several low-wage jobs in the course of a year. Each time, they have to wade through the bureaucracy again to qualify for subsidized care, even though their new wages may be only marginally more than what they were making before.

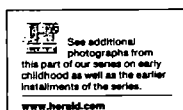
But even those who already get subsidized child care say there aren't enough day-care centers open during the nontraditional hours that low-wage workers typically have — nights and weekends. Efforts are under way across the state to recruit more licensed family child-care providers who can offer flexible hours to working parents.

NOW A BUSY MOM COPE

A quest for quality time

Meantime, parents like Helena Coello make do the best they can. Coello works 20 hours a week on a split shift as a records clerk at MDCC, where she also attends classes. In between, she squeezes in a 16-hour-a-week unpaid internship at Baptist Hospital, which is a class requirement.

How does she manage? Luck, tenacity and energy. She also has a scholarship from a city of Miami program that pays



See additional photographs from this part of our series on early childhood as well as the earlier installments of the series.

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It's the biggest, most important thing."

Early learning lessons are incorporated into their daily home life. "I can fold their clothes, but I give it to them and say, 'You do it,'" Coello said. "I always try to give them a choice. 'Which bubble bath do you want tonight? Which dress do you want to wear? Go and get the hairpieces that match the dress.'"

Thus, getting dressed becomes a primer on comparing and contrasting objects, making choices and choosing colors.

"I've learned how to be very creative — a quick thinker."

ABOUT THE SERIES

■ **SUNDAY:** A million children under 5 are headed for Florida's schools. Will they be ready to learn?

■ **MONDAY:** The lightning growth of brain connections in the early years.

■ **TUESDAY:** Navigating the tattered health-care maze.

■ **TODAY:** Quality time and quality care often elude the working poor.

■ **THURSDAY:** The role of corporate investment in day care.

■ **FRIDAY:** The search for child care that nourishes the mind. Plus: a rip-and-save parents' guide to early learning.

■ **SATURDAY:** The promise of home-based day care.

How to contact us

■ **TO COMMENT ON THIS SERIES,** address letters to Ready or Not? The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132-1693, or email us at features@herald.com



COMING HOME: Helena Coelho carries daughters Alexis, 4, and Monica, 3, while daughter Tiffany Hall, 12, leans on mom for support. The West Kendall mother says she strives for quality time with her children despite a busy schedule at work and school.



QUIET, AND NOT SO QUIET, TIMES: The tranquility of a bubble bath for Coelho is interrupted, above, by playful daughters, from left, Monica, Tiffany Hall and Alexis. At left, Alexis and 5-year-old Dominik Riquelme watch a video while their mothers, Coelho and Etilia Riquelme, study for classes at Miami-Dade Community College.



FAMILY TIME: Coelho asks daughter Monica to raise her hands because she's having a coughing fit while dining with Alexis, right, and Tiffany Hall. Mom prefers to eat dinner afterward so she can concentrate on making sure the kids eat right.

POVERTY THRESHOLDS

The U.S. Census Bureau adjusts the poverty level thresholds each year. Many government assistance programs use this threshold to determine whether a family is eligible for service.

FAMILY SIZE	AVERAGE THRESHOLDS
1 person:	\$2,178
1 person, under 65 years:	\$8,356
1 person, 65 years and over:	\$7,836
2 persons:	\$10,466
2 persons, household under 65:	\$10,806
2 persons, household 65 and over:	\$9,705
3 persons:	\$12,803
4 persons:	\$16,404
5 persons:	\$19,387
6 persons:	\$21,886
7 persons:	\$24,825
8 persons:	\$27,713
9 persons or more:	\$32,706

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
A0318

AID TO THE WORKING POOR

Help that is available for a typical "working poor" family of four:

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME LIMITS
Subsidized child care	Up to \$27,000
Head Start	Up to \$18,050
Free school lunches	Up to \$17,000
Reduced school lunches	Up to \$29,693
Food stamps	Up to \$20,868
Women, Infants and Children (WIC)	Up to \$29,693
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	Up to \$18,066
Public Housing	Very low-income \$22,300
Miami-Hialeah area	Low-income \$35,700
Public Housing	Very low-income \$23,850
Fort Lauderdale area	Low-income \$38,150

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Miami-Dade County Public Schools; Florida Department of Children and Families; Miami-Dade Office of Child Development Services
The Herald

HOW TO HELP THE WORKING POOR

These are suggestions offered by families, social service agencies, economists and child development advocates for helping the working poor.

- Make the working poor eligible for the same child care, transportation and medical services that welfare recipients get, using the money coming from shrinking welfare rolls.
- Make social service agencies more accessible to them by opening during evening and weekend hours.
- Make them more efficient so the working poor don't spend three or four hours waiting for service. Simplify the bureaucracy and paperwork.
- Expand bus routes and times, especially in areas such as deep South Dade and Broward County where getting access to work or vital services is limited for those who can't afford cars.
- Encourage child care centers to open during evening and weekend hours to accommodate working families with non-traditional hours.

The Florida Children's Forum conducted a survey last year that found only a small fraction of centers stay open past 6 p.m. But low-wage earners are more likely to work evening and weekend shifts. Last year, the Department of Children and Families began requiring its child care contract monitors to

recruit more in-home family day care providers; they have more flexible schedules and can offer odd-hours care. The children's forum has also made this a major goal.

- Further strengthen child support enforcement. Custodial parents complain they wait months for appointments and have little success collecting court-ordered payments. Federal laws that took effect in October require a new employee registry in every state and allow child support workers to seize passports or bank accounts of parents who don't pay. One economist suggests making collection of these payments a responsibility of the Internal Revenue Service.
- The working poor, who frequently change jobs, often don't get unemployment benefits when they are laid off because they don't meet the minimum requirements for continuous work during the previous five quarters. Amend the unemployment compensation laws to consider most recent work history and thus help more working poor qualify for the benefits.

■ On the federal level, some economists and policy analysts suggest maintaining the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) at 1996 levels or expand it to include more families. The tax credit benefits poor

working families with children and gives a cash refund — up to \$3,666 — based on income level and number of children. The EITC was the most successful government-sponsored anti-poverty program in 1996, according to a report issued this month by a Washington, D.C. budget and policy research group.

WHO ARE THE WORKING POOR?

- According to U.S. Census data, almost half — 48 percent — of the state's working poor families with children are headed by a married couple, while 47 percent are headed by single women. Only 7 percent are headed by single men.
- About a third of the families are white, one third black and one third Hispanic.
- Nearly one in five families were headed by someone with some college education. Another 26 percent were headed by someone with a high school diploma or equivalent. And 42 percent were headed by someone with less than a high school diploma.

In 1994, the most recent year available, the census estimated there were 519,374 people in Dade and 167,490 in Broward living at or below the poverty level.

WHERE TO GET HELP

■ Need help? Dade and Broward have 24-hour hotlines for information, referral and crisis intervention. They

have lists of agencies and programs designed to help with everything from emergency housing to legal assistance to free food.

In Dade, call Switchboard of Miami Inc. at (305) 358-HELP.

In Broward, call First Call for Help at (954) 467-6333.

■ For questions about eligibility for food stamps, Medicaid and Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), call the Department of Children and Families' economic self-sufficiency districts offices. In Dade, call (305) 377-7154. In Broward, call (954) 327-5000 weekdays 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

■ For information on subsidized child care, call Family Central Inc. in Broward at (954) 720-1000, weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In Dade, call the Miami-Dade Resource and Referral Hotline at (305) 373-8321 weekdays 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

■ For Headstart in Broward, call (954) 768-8356 weekdays 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., and in Dade, call (305) 347-4622 weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

■ For information on the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, call (954) 321-3780 weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Broward and (305) 377-7000 weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Dade.

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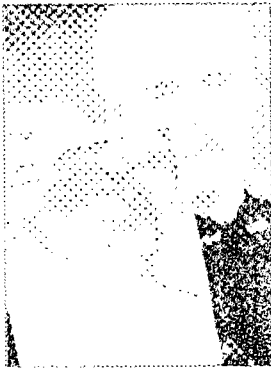
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THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 1998

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AL DIAZ/HERALD
THE SUSPECT: Beach Police Officer Richard Burns in his photo of Michael Dwayne Seibert.

Beach man charged with killing teen

Suspect was released early on gain time

By JIMMYE PRINCE and JIMMYE PRINCE
MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (Herald Staff Writer)

A Miami Beach man charged with the slaying of a 17-year-old girl was released on gain time early Thursday. The man, Michael Dwayne Seibert, 24, was charged with first-degree murder and sexual battery after the girl was found dead in a shallow canal near a beach. Seibert, who is white and has dark hair, was released on a \$100,000 bond. He is currently being held in the Miami-Dade County Jail. The girl, identified as 17-year-old, was found on March 17. The police are still investigating the case.

Pieces of 'Candor' sold at JFK auction

By JIMMYE PRINCE
MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (Herald Staff Writer)

A collection of items from the life of a man known as 'Candor' was sold at a public auction at JFK International Airport. The items, which included a watch, a pair of shoes, and a small box, were sold for a total of \$1,000. The man, who was known for his eccentric behavior, was found dead in a shallow canal near a beach. The police are still investigating the case.

Miami budget flunks again

City has until April 8 to create plan to generate cash

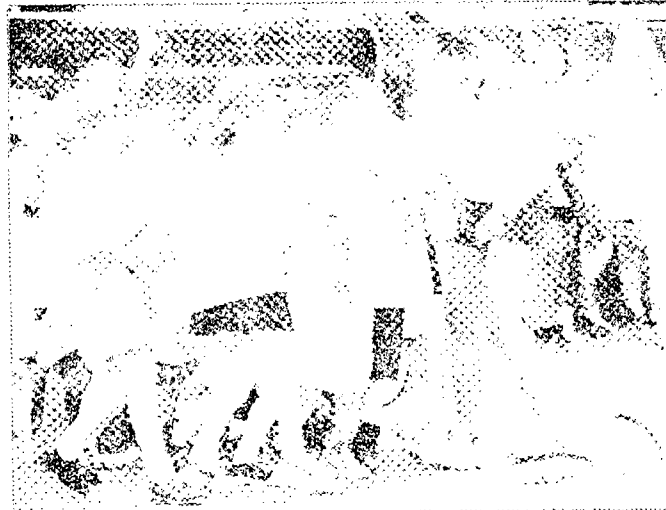
By MARIA A. MORALES
MIAMI, Fla. (Herald Staff Writer)

The Miami City Commission has rejected the city's budget for the fiscal year 1998-1999, forcing the city to come up with a new plan by April 8. The budget, which was presented to the commission on March 17, was rejected because it did not meet the city's financial goals. The commission is now looking for a way to generate cash to cover the city's expenses.

The city's financial situation is dire, with the city's debt reaching \$1.5 billion. The city's revenue is down by \$10 million, and the city's expenses are up by \$20 million. The city's budget for the fiscal year 1998-1999 was rejected because it did not meet the city's financial goals. The commission is now looking for a way to generate cash to cover the city's expenses.

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ADORING VENUS



A young woman, Venus, was found dead in a shallow canal near a beach. The police are still investigating the case. The girl, who was 17 years old, was found on March 17. The police are still investigating the case.



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Dade locks to make all students bilingual

School Board OKs expanded classes

By JIMMYE PRINCE
MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (Herald Staff Writer)

The Miami-Dade County School Board has approved a plan to make all students bilingual. The plan, which was presented to the board on March 17, was approved because it would help students who speak Spanish or other languages. The board is now looking for a way to generate cash to cover the city's expenses.

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST



By DONNA GEMME WHITE
AND HARRIET JOHNSON BRACEY
Herald Staff Writers

A young child, identified as the youngest child in Florida, was found dead in a shallow canal near a beach. The police are still investigating the case. The child, who was 17 years old, was found on March 17. The police are still investigating the case.

A young child, identified as the youngest child in Florida, was found dead in a shallow canal near a beach. The police are still investigating the case. The child, who was 17 years old, was found on March 17. The police are still investigating the case.

Corporate America, kids team up for the future

Louisville's heavy hitters — was the first to commit full funding for one preschool class for three years at a cost of \$147,000. A baker's dozen of other companies followed, including Kentucky Fried Chicken and Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp. "He came into town with this vision," marveled Shirley Topmiller, donations manager of KFC. "He was a Pied Piper."



COMPANY CARE: Frances Wilson, an employee of Royal Caribbean, visits 2-year-old son Keith at her work-site day-care center.

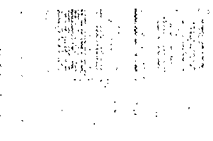


SPORTS
Randy Johnson's
grumpy. He says he's

BANK MERGER
Negotiations work
in sale of insurer

BUSINESS
Stock firm vows
to invest in merger

MODEL
A new model
for the future





STORY TIME: Teacher Zeida Mata cuddles and reads to two of her charges at Royal Caribbean's day-care center.

Choices for working parents grow as firms step forward

By HANNEY JOHNSON BRACKLEY
Herald Staff Writer

If today were March 19, 1992, instead of March 19, 1998, here are the options a South Florida working parent of young children would have had when it was time to go to the office:

- A. Ask family or friends to look after the kids.
- B. Pay a child-care center or a sitter.
- C. Take a job at one of the few hospitals that had on-site child care.
- D. Take a job with American Bankers Insurance Group, which had a corporate child-care center.

That's all there was. Compare that to the options available to a working parent of young children in South Florida today:

- A. Family, friends, sitters, centers.
- B. A slightly longer list of hospitals that have on-site care.
- C. The corporate child-care centers at American Bankers Insurance, Barnett Bank, Florida Power & Light, Royal Caribbean and Ryder headquarters. Employees at several other businesses including the Port of Miami and Blue Cross/Blue Shield can also use those corporate centers.

D. Reimbursements for half the cost of any licensed child-care center for employees of Acer Computec Latino America. Or smaller subsidies or discounts negotiated by a handful of other employers.

E. A public-private subsidy program that cuts the cost of care for low-income workers.

A big change? Of course. Big enough? Now there's a question. Business-supported child-care efforts have been growing, but they don't answer all the needs of employed parents.

Before Hurricane Andrew, in South Florida, the hospitals and American Bankers were it. After the storm, FPL found out that it had to mind the children for its employees to come to work at the Turkey Point nuclear plant.

In the 1990s, several other corporations followed suit.

"Most employees say it's the best benefit they have," said Linda Vann Alvarez, director of children's services at American Bankers.

Broward's first

None of them, so far, are in Broward County. Broward's first major corporate-run center is

scheduled to open in May at Motorola's Plantation campus.

On-site corporate centers generally are quality operations in expensive quarters. They offer such extras as free meals or field trips. Employees pay tuition but usually that's not all it costs to maintain these programs. Corporations generally pick up the tab for all the rest.

Next in line, in terms of corporate generosity, are the subsidiaries. Those are led by Acer's 50 percent child-care reimbursements available to all 160 employees.

'Most employees say it's the best benefit they have.'

LINDA VANN ALVAREZ,
American Bankers' director of
children's services

NationsBank has a sliding scale of financial assistance for its employees according to income. For individuals who have salaries of \$30,000 or less or for families that have a total income of \$60,000 or less, parents can receive \$35 per week per child to offset the cost of care in a licensed center.

Low-income workers at any company can seek aid from the public-private Child Care Pool. They may be put on a waiting list, however, because of limited funds.

Then there are the employers who have deals. For example, Broward County government employees get discounts, from as little as \$5 a month to 10 percent off at about 100 licensed child-care centers.

Information at hand

The most common child-care benefit available to working people is information. Many firms offer referrals or nonfinancial support to their employees. That support includes parenting classes or discussion groups.

Nationally, 86 percent of all businesses offer some kind of child-care assistance, up from 60 percent in 1992, according to the Hay Group, which surveys corporate benefits. Most allow employees to put pre-tax salary into flexible spending accounts for child care. But less common is on-site care (8 percent).



CHECKING UP: Shelley Witak soothes her 17-month-old daughter Krista at company day care at Royal Caribbean.



CHILD'S PLAY: At the Children's Center at All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Stevie White plays carpenter with wood and hammer. The church recruited NationsBank, IBM and a local hospital to help build the center, which is open to anyone.

Corporate America paying for the future with programs, on-site child-care centers

CORPORATIONS, FROM 1A

youngest, the traditional distance between religious government and corporate leaders is disappearing in many states. Churches are recruiting businesses to help fund state-of-the-art child-care centers and governments are actively seeking corporate partnerships.

In South Florida, several companies have started ambitious efforts to help young children. They include Publix, Royal Caribbean, Health Foundation of South Florida and NationsBank (including the merged Banc of America). Gov. Lawton Chiles and Lt. Governor Buddy Mackay recently brought business executives together to focus on the issue of quality day care.

But what's missing in Florida, advocates say, is a major government/private sector team effort.

"On a scale of 10, I'd say we're at five statewide. Six or seven years ago, it would have been two," said Ted Granger, president of the United Way of Florida.

SPURRING PARTNERSHIPS

Panel would pave way

Alan Stonecipher, co-director of the Florida Governor's Commission on Education, said the state needs to be more aggressive.

"It's just beginning to dawn on people how important it is — not only for their own children and families — but also the private sector and their ability to train and retain workers," he said.

Legislation pending in Tallahassee would create a Children's First governing board that would work with businesses, charities and churches to create detailed blueprints for public-private partnerships.

Currently, the most significant new public-private effort in Florida is the Child Care Institute. It was set up by the state Legislature in 1996 to provide money for poor families needing child care. The pool draws on money donated by corporations, local governments and private donors to give subsidies to families. The state matches dollar for dollar.

The pool raised \$2 million the first fiscal year; it has collected \$4 million so far for the fiscal year ending July 30, 1998. In Broward County, more than \$1 million was raised; in Miami-Dade, \$169,800. With the Broward donations, "we've taken 580 kids off the waiting list," said Barbara Weinstein, president and chief executive of Family Central, a Broward-based agency that monitors child-care centers.

However, more than 90 percent of the money in Broward and Miami-Dade came from county government donations or the United Way (Statewide, about 40 companies donated to the pool this year).

'A STRUGGLE'

Fund-raising a challenge

"It's been a struggle," said John



ALL IN A LINE: Children from the Garden Hills Elementary prekindergarten program in Atlanta show their dancing steps during a typical day's activities at their center.

Farie, director of the Miami-Dade Office of Human Development and a member of the countywide task force trying to raise money for the pool.

Added Miami United Way President Harve Mogul, "Some people actually think that the working poor should be able to pay for it. They don't understand the costs."

Joe Chapman, chairman of the Child Care Executive Partnership Board that oversees the fund-raising effort for the pool, notes that Florida lags even Mississippi in per-capita spending on some programs to help infants, toddlers and preschoolers develop.

And Mississippi doesn't even have our state's wealth," said Chapman, chairman of People's First Community Bank in Panama City.

Among corporate initiatives in child care elsewhere:

■ In Atlanta, the All Saints Episcopal Church recruited NationsBank, IBM and a local hospital to help build a child-care center open to all. NationsBank alone put up nearly \$1 million.

■ Pittsburgh is in the second year of a \$3.4 million fund-raising campaign through United Way for early childhood initiatives. The money will train child-care workers as well as upgrade child-care centers. Already collected: \$33 million. The donors include The Heinz Endowment (\$12 million), Allegheny Teledyne (\$1 million), grocery chain Giant Eagle (\$1 million), PPG Industries (\$250,000), United Jewish Federation (\$25,000), Mellon Bank (\$250,000), Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (\$150,000) and many others.

■ In Rochester, N.Y., leaders have pulled together churches, businesses, charities and foundations to expand preschools and improve child-care centers. Local companies, including banks and factories, have "adopted" child-care centers and paid for repairs and staff training.

Elsewhere, governors have used their clout to get corporations

involved:

■ Concerned that many parents weren't vaccinating their babies, Missouri Gov. Mel Carnahan phoned Kansas City-based Hallmark to plead for special cards that he personally could send out to parents of newborns to remind them of immunizing their babies. It proved so popular — moms were sending the governor pictures of their babies along with promises to follow through on immunizations — that Hallmark now supplies the special cards to 33 governors, including 100,000 to Chile, said Hallmark spokeswoman Adrienne Lallo.

■ In five years, North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt has helped raise more than \$18 million for his state's Smart Start program, which is seeking to improve child-care centers and provide more medical screenings and services to young children. Wachovia, NationsBank, First Union and Food Lion have been among the pledging donors. The total of \$7 million. Glaxo Wellcome has donated \$1 million.

■ Colorado Gov. Roy Romer asked Brad Butler, retired board chairman of Procter & Gamble, to head up a statewide campaign in which 700 volunteers help parents of newborns regardless of income. Butler alone donated half a million dollars for the effort. Hewlett-Packard gave \$50,000 worth of computers and Blue Cross/Blue Shield donated \$100,000.

GRATEFUL PARENTS

Kids learning earlier

In Louisville, mom Lequita Brooks is grateful for the corporate support that got 3-year-olds into preschool.

Her son, now 4, has "learned a great deal," she says. "He can count to 20. He knows his ABCs and his phone number."

At Rangeland Elementary, where Kentucky Fried Chicken sponsors its preschool class, 3-year-old toddlers made peanut

butter one recent afternoon. The children howled in laughter as the peanuts whirled around in a blender.

Along the way, they had "lessons" in science, nutrition, math — and even history — from instructor Betty Gibson. The "Peanut Man," after all, was George Washington Carver, who invented hundreds of ways to use peanuts.

"It's really play with a purpose," said Sandra Ferren, who directs the Louisville school system's preschool programs. "They're learning without knowing it."

Preschoolers who go through the two-year program are "at the top of their class" when they reach kindergarten, said Rangeland Principal Carolyn Hayes.

KFC executive Topmiller is amazed at the progress of the 3-year-olds at her corporate-sponsored preschool class.

"Initially, I had trouble conceptualizing what these very young children were going to be doing," she said.

But the company went ahead and committed to paying for the class. KFC had a mandate. The company had just polled its workers and found that they overwhelmingly wanted the company to direct its charitable contributions to help kids.

And so, on one of the coldest days of the year, Topmiller and about 100 employees — including one dressed as Mr. Chicken — walked from their Tara-like corporate headquarters to the nearby school superintendent's office to hand him a poster-sized "check."

THE RESULTS

Test scores increase

Daeschner, the Jefferson County superintendent, laughingly accepted it.

Daeschner has made a career of getting corporate support for innovative programs. Before being chosen for the Louisville spot four years ago, he led the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, school district, which boasted more than 35 business partnerships. During his tenure, the school district won a third of the 47 Governor's Excellence in Education Awards given by the state.

And, although 37 percent of the students were poor, the Cedar Rapids schools had some of the highest test scores in the nation, with the average student scoring at least 30 percent better than the average national scores.

In Louisville, Daeschner has been able to improve test scores to the point that the average student now testing just above the national average — although nearly half the kids are poor.

He attributes part of his success to the emphasis on preschool. "Give me them now and I can do something," he said. "Wait under kindergarten and it might be too late."

At Atlanta, NationsBank also has been impressed by the differ-

PLEASE SEE CORPORATIONS, 15A

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST

How one effort became a S. Florida success story

The largest private-sector effort in South Florida is the United Way's Success by 6 program, which has taken root in Miami-Dade County over the past three years. This early childhood education program has garnered \$2.5 million in donations from corporations.

Among the Success by 6 programs:

■ **Royal Caribbean** last year launched a \$600,000, three-year commitment to fund child development in inner-city Miami. The cruise line has raised money by holding golf tournaments and celebrity cruises and added that to its own contributions. It now has \$700,000 for the program, which provides parenting classes and such basic health services as checkups for the very young at the Overtown Culmer YWCA. Royal Caribbean Vice President Thomas Murrill says 14 community groups are now involved in the effort.

■ **Publix Supermarket** Charities is now developing a \$1 million, three-year program that will be coordinated by the Urban League of Greater Miami and Belafonte-Tacoley Center, a community center in Liberty City. Over three years, 160 families will receive home instruction on parenting and those parents also will get hands-on education at the center. There will be group meetings, home visits, after-school care and a job-referral service. Those parents will then be encouraged to mentor other parents.

■ **Health Foundation of South Florida** has put \$500,000 into pediatric care in neighborhoods. The goal is to continue providing medical services to 2,500 inner-city and rural children by the University of Miami Pediatric Mobile Clinic.

And there are other major private efforts taking place around the state.

One of the biggest is Caring for Kids, a project of NationsBank — including the merged Barnett Bank — and the Florida Children's Forum. The program is designed to combat a shortage of caregivers, particularly for infants, and to improve the number of accredited, high-quality child-care centers. Another goal: To help 1,000 people become licensed in-home child-care providers.

People who want to take on that

Firms paying for the future

CORPORATIONS, FROM 14A

ence it has made by helping the All Saints Episcopal Church start a Children's Center. On one recent afternoon, two 4-year-olds in the public preschool class "composed" music on computers while other classmates painted a mural, played board games or put together a puzzle.

The homey center is so popular that it has a waiting list.

"We have a lot of pride in the center," said Kim Hains, director of NationsBank work and family programs in Atlanta.

Georgia Gov. Zell Miller was so impressed that he recently invited All Saints' 4-year-old preschoolers to the statehouse for his annual State of the Union message.

He got freshly scrubbed children who could sign their names, count and even read a little.

Among the children was Morgan Borden, who has blossomed into a precocious preschooler.

Recently, Morgan nestled with a picture book just before taking a nap. She painstakingly fingered every word and mouthed it.

"I like dinosaurs," Morgan said. "I want to be a paleontologist."

Miller himself has learned a few things along the way.

At first, state legislators chortled — and many taxpayers phoned in, fuming — when he suggested in January that Georgia spend \$105,000 a year to send a classical music tape to every newborn in the state. Said Miller: "Having that infant listen to soothing music helps those trillions of brain connections to develop."

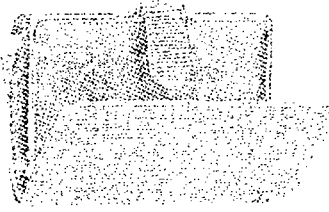
He — and the babies — had the last laugh.

So many corporations phoned in volunteering to pay that Miller now has to pick which offers to accept for his latest effort to stimulate young children.

"I can do this and not even involve taxpayer money," he boasted to reporters.

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job are paired with experienced business people who can advise them on business planning, training and even home renovations that might be required. They can receive small loans to get started. If they get a child-care license, the loans may not have to be repaid.

So far, Caring for Kids has helped create 550 new licensed family child-care homes.

— Harriet Johnson Brackey

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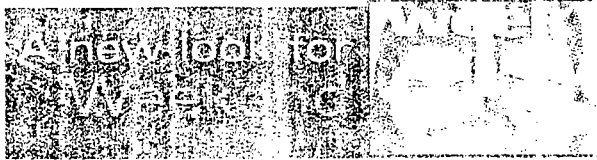
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U.S. to ease Cuba restrictions
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Judge has
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of aviation

Pan Am
Judge has
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of aviation

Kids need child care that nurtures, teaches

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST



READY

■ Sixth in a series

By **BRUCE TAYLOR BEEMAN, KARLA BRUNER, DONNA GIERKE WHITE and JOHN BARRY**
Herald Staff Writers

Too many kids and not enough teachers. Days filled with too little learning. For many of South Florida's thousands in child care, the early days of awakening are flawed.

They face some of the worst teacher/child ratios in the country. Two out of three child-care centers in Miami-Dade and Broward counties are not held to any curriculum standards.

"We need an uprising," says Barbara Weinstein, president of Family Central, a company that monitors centers in Miami-Dade and Broward.

Research has proved how pivotal child care can be. Children in good hands develop better language skills, learn the fundamentals of trust, and navigate the twists and turns of life with reason, not aggression.

While many providers labor to help children flourish, Florida's system is fraught with problems:

■ A revolving door of teachers and aides earning under \$12,000 a year — prompting a turnover rate of 30 percent annually. Without continuity, critical nur-

PLEASE SEE CHILD CARE, 11A



MIMI VALLBONA / Herald Staff

WORKING MOM: Aldis Lopez feeds her son Tommy at preschool, where she helps out when the center is short-handed.

BRINGING UP BABY: BASIC BONDING STILL RULES

■ When it comes to raising a happy, healthy and smart kid, nothing beats the primal bond between parent and child — not even eight hours a day of child care. A guide for parents, 1F.

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST: READY OR NOT?

Kids need care that nurtures and teaches, too

CHILD CARE, FROM 1A

turing relationships fail to develop.

At the South Miami Lutheran School, owner Yolanda Borroto says she depends on loyalty and dedication to keep staff. Her center is one of only 16 centers in Dade to win national accreditation, but starting pay remains at \$6 an hour; it's all she can afford.

At the Family Center on Sunset Drive, owner Karen Kerr achieved a 98 percent score on quality assessments by Miami-Dade inspectors last year but reported a net income of just \$7,083. Her top teachers — those with degrees in early education and 10 years of experience — make \$11 an hour. She needed to lend the center \$7,500 to get by. "I started this center 18 years ago because I wanted to save the world," Kerr says. "But I've learned that all we give our kids is lip service. We pay more to take care of our cars."

Teachers/child ratios in Florida lag behind professional standards. For example, the state's ratio for children 2 to 3 years old is 1:11, childhood experts recommend 1:6. For children 3 to 4 years old, Florida is 1:15, experts recommend 1:8.

A recent state survey of 150 centers in four counties, including Broward, found that compliance with ratios is steadily declining.

"God forbid there is an accident," says Weinstein. "How can you take four infants, pick them up, and take them out of the room?"

The study, released this month by the Families and Work Institute, shows that children in centers with low teacher-to-child ratios spend more time in learning activities. In addition, the researchers found that the incidence of yelling, hitting, threatening or scolding was reduced by more than half among teachers. The study is based on data collected in 1992, 1994 and 1996.

Of the approximately 2,000 licensed child-care centers and homes in Miami-Dade and Broward, only one in three is evaluated for its plans to nurture kids' development and learning. These centers have state contracts to enroll subsidized children from low-income families and are therefore mandated by the state to have a learning curriculum. The rest of Dade's and Broward's facilities receive operating licenses merely by showing they meet minimums on basics such as staffing ratios, safety and health.

In addition, there are estimates of hundreds of unlicensed mom-and-pop providers in Dade and Broward that get no oversight at all. In Broward, regulators estimate there may be as many as 800. In Dade, regulators haven't tried to measure the problem, but estimate it is larger.

The system also creeps under the weight of other demands: ■ One-third of South Florida families are poor, and two-thirds have kids in child care. Only the poorest qualify for subsidies, while the rest struggle to pay at least \$400 a month per child. This often means cash-flow problems for the centers.

At the same time, welfare reform is flooding centers with more infants, who are the most expensive to care for. This is especially true in Miami-Dade.

Making the situation in Dade even worse is the fact that the state gives \$1,200 a year less for each subsidized infant in Dade than in Broward. The disparity is

the result of market surveys that reflect depressed rates for child-care services in Dade.

Funding shortages have prevented the state from eliminating its waiting list of nearly 26,000 children needing care. Nearly 7,000 of those children are in Dade and Broward counties.

Child-care advocates say requiring mandatory curriculum standards at all these centers without investing more money could make things worse.

MONEY'S A PROBLEM

Quality care expensive

"The real problem is that this is a system primarily financed by parents who can't afford quality care," says Susan Muenchow, director of the Florida Children's Forum, a child-care watchdog. "You can require more assessments, but the bottom line is these centers aren't going to be able to make many improvements without better financing."

While there is little investment in Florida's child-care system for children up to 3 years old, "more than 50 percent of moms [in the state] are back at work within a year of their child's birth," Muenchow says. "That's slightly higher than the national average."

A FEW DOZEN BAD APPLES

Dead rats, broken toilets

In addition to these burdens, chronically bad centers — three dozen in Dade alone — continue to stay open year after year, critics say. In Dade and Broward, only four centers were stripped of subsidy contracts last year.

Some of the worst infractions included dead rats, broken toilets, leaking roofs and floors wet with bleach next to sleeping children.

Regulators, aware that many of the problem centers are strapped for cash, say they've decided the best course is to encourage improvements rather than levy fines or shut down centers.

"We generally choose to get them to comply," says Weir. "We're not trying to push them over the edge," said Shawn Lamarche, resource development coordinator of the Broward County Bureau of Children & Family Services.

But a soft touch often means substantial conditions. "It's frustrating," acknowledges Patricia Burke, director of Dade's Division of Child Development Services, the inspection agency for subsidized centers. "You work with them and they do what you

"For the last 25 years we've thought of child care as just baby-sitting. We haven't really looked at the level of care."

MARK FIDELHOLTZ, child advocate whose son died

ask them, then after three or four months they slip back — usually after they've had a complete turnover in staff."

Burke also notes that parents often complain when centers are closed. (Records show parents do report violations, but inspectors don't often show them.)

All of which frustrates activists like Mark Fidelholtz, whose 3-month-old son Jeremy suffo-



MORE THAN BABY-SITTING: Teacher Blanca Rodriguez comforts Tommy Lopez as Grace Frazier watches after a child sat in Tommy's

chair at South Miami Methodist Christian Preschool and Day Care. Tommy's mom wanted a learning environment for her son.

cated and died on his first day at a licensed family day-care home in Plantation in January 1997.

"Parents don't know, they're not educated on how child care works. For the last 25 years we've thought of child care as just baby-sitting. We haven't really looked at the level of care."

County prosecutors have charged Christina Schwartzberg, the home's owner, with neglect for leaving 13 children under 2 in the care of an unlicensed 25-year-old helper while the operator of the facility went grocery shopping. Trial is tentatively set for September.

Fidelholtz is lobbying to increase the penalties for child-care center operators who do not follow the law. A provider who lies or misrepresents the number of children being cared for or who skirts staffing levels could face a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison, under a bill now being considered by the Florida Legislature.

Other steps being taken:

■ In South Florida, the Department of Children and Families has made an enforcement change. In the past, all child-care centers that took subsidized children were monitored by Miami-Dade Child Development Services. But that agency, part of county government, lost 25 percent of its contract this year to Broward's nonprofit Family Central, which now monitors centers in North Dade also.

"I felt we needed some competition," says Anita Bock, director of Children & Families in Dade. "It felt the county didn't have enough focus" on early childhood development.

■ Higher standards are being set for the 600 child-care centers and homes that receive subsidies in Dade and Broward. In the past, they've needed to score 70 out of 100 on a standard inspection to receive state aid. By July, the minimum will rise to 80.

■ Gov. Lawton Chiles is asking the Legislature for \$4 million to reward providers who achieve national accreditation.

NO GUARANTEES

Parents must be vigilant

Fidelholtz says the most important change must involve parents, however. Their vigilance is their children's best protection



EARLY START: Clara Gesni sings with some of the babies at the Centro Mater day-care center.

"Remember that a license isn't a guarantee of anything," he said. Aida Lopez, a lawyer and 29-year-old mother who lives in the Palmetto section of Dade, said she learned the hard way how little some centers do. When Lopez's son, Tommy, was about a year old, she had him enrolled in a home child-care center recommended by a friend.

"It drove me insane when I saw him strapped in a stroller," said Lopez, whose son is now 2 and enrolled at South Miami Methodist Christian Preschool and Day Care. "He was sitting in front of a TV. I don't require a college prep, but come on."

But many parents say developmental curriculum isn't the first thing that comes to mind when they look for child care. "To be honest, no, I didn't really think about it," says Lauderdale resident Sabrina Clayton, 31, a promotions media coordinator, single mother of two sons and full-time student.

She said she looked for safety and cleanliness when she enrolled her son David, 3, in child care. Affordability and teacher/child ratios were other factors.

Vicki Gates, 38, a first-time mom and office manager for an accounting firm, picked the Tutor

"These centers aren't going to be able to make many improvements without better financing."

SUSAN MUENCHOW, Florida Children's Forum director

Time Child Care Learning Center in Fort Lauderdale for her son Kyle, 3, after asking questions about the center's sick-child policy, whether prayers are recited, whether the center offered any gymnastics, how tuition was paid and whether any extra supplies had to be provided by parents. Doreen Brodnax, 32, a waitress who lives in Davie, was primarily concerned with affordability when she was looking for child care. She has two children — Sean, 4, and Amber, 6 — and gets no child support or food stamps.

Modesto Abety, director of the Dade County Children's Services Council, said Dade child advocates tried in 1988 to create consistent funding for child develop-

ment and other programs for youth. At first, the effort looked promising: seven in 10 voters agreed to create a "child welfare bond."

But a second ballot question of whether to fund the bond with a half-mill property tax that would raise \$40 million was trounced by the same margin. Abety said his council has not given up.

"We're waiting for a more favorable climate," he said.

THE Read all the installments of **THE** The Herald's series on childhood development, day care and what Florida needs to do to keep pace www.herald.com

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CHILD-CARE NUMBERS IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Miami-Dade	Centers	Capacity
Child-care (subsidized)	996 (41)	101,336
Family home child-care centers (subsidized)	252 (53)	2,520
Broward	Centers	Capacity
Child-care (subsidized)	445 (97)	54,675
Family home child-care centers (subsidized)	245 (36)	2,450

Source: Florida Department of Children and Families, Broward County Bureau of Children's Services, Family Central, Miami Dade Child Development Services

A0370

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Current Florida law requires the following for a day-care center to be licensed and operating:

■ In the absence of the operator, there must be at least one staff person at least 21 years old and in charge of the center and on the premises at all times.

■ All child-care centers must be in good repair, free from health and safety hazards, clean and free from vermin infestation, must have sink near diaper area for handwashing of attendants

■ All child-care facilities must have 20 square feet per child of usable

indoor space for each child. Minimum of 46 square feet of outdoor space per child one year or older.

■ The child-care center must have scheduled activities posted and the written plan must include activities that:

- Promote emotional, social, intellectual and physical growth

- Include quiet and active play, both indoors and outdoors

- Include meals, snacks and nap times

TEACHER/CHILD RATIOS

Children's ages	Florida's standards	Professionally recommended
0-1 years old	1:4	1:3
1-2 years old	1:8	1:5
2-3 years old	1:11	1:6
3-4 years old	1:15	1:8
4-5 years old	1:20	1:9
5-6 years old	1:25	1:10

Source: Families and Work Institute

HOW FLORIDA RATIOS COMPARE

Child's age	States with same or better ratios than Florida	States with worse ratios than Florida
0-1 years old	33	16
1-2 years old	42	9
2-3 years old	45	6
3-4 years old	51	0
4-5 years old	51	0
5-6 years old	51	0

Source: Florida's Beliefs Fund, The Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education

GETTING A HELPING HAND

Is your family eligible for child-care subsidies? Parents coming off welfare, the working poor and migrant workers are among those who may qualify. Those certified to receive subsidies pay according to income level, while the government picks up the remainder. Due to limited funding, some families are placed on waiting lists. Here are examples of weekly out-of-pocket expenses for families of four who qualify.

(F) - Full-time	(P) - Part-time	Second child
Gross family income	First child (F) (P)	(F) (P)
\$0	\$4	\$2
\$16,050*	\$18	\$6
\$21,402	\$24	\$12
\$28,756	\$48	\$24

*Poverty level

The Herald

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST: READY OR NOT?



IMPORTANT CHOICE: Russ Gates and his son Kyle, 3, tour the Tutor Time Child Care Learning Center in Fort Lauderdale.

More training needed, but cost is a concern

By KARLA BRUNER

Herald Staff Writer

Like flipping burgers, cleaning toilets and bagging groceries, taking care of children in Florida is a minimum-wage industry.

If you think that's an inadequate salary for the people caring for this country's future, consider the state's training requirements: a 30-hour course if you want to work as a teacher at a child-care center and a three-hour course if you want to run a child-care home. Even becoming a beautician requires more: 1,200 hours of training and a state board-administered exam to get a license.

Florida ranks in the middle when it comes to training requirements, says Sheri Azer, a program associate at The Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education at Wheelock College in Boston, which compiled a study on 1997 training requirements nationwide.

By contrast, Minnesota, which considers the top state, requires 24 college credits in child development and two years of experience for teachers working in child-care centers. Louisiana and Michigan, at the other extreme, require no pre-service training and no ongoing training each year for teachers in child-care centers (Florida requires eight hours of ongoing training annually).

sumo costs" during 1992-1996.

"This study at least begins to dispel some of the myths [about raising education requirements]: that no one will be able to use child care, that parents will be hurt," said Ellen Galinsky, project director and co-principal investigator at the Families and Work Institute.

Pintacuda said he doesn't disagree with the results of the study but said he would want more information before seeking a change from the Legislature.

Meanwhile, Pintacuda said his staff is revising the curriculum for the 30 hours to include "more information about safety and age-appropriate child development."

Susan Muenchow, executive director of the Florida Children's Forum, said any solution to improved child development must address the issue of high turnover. The Work and Families Institute study found "high levels of turnover make adherence to the new law [requiring a CDA or CDA equivalency] more difficult."

Turnover rates were 24 percent in 1992, and 30 percent in 1994 and 1996. In fact, the study stated, only a "shocking" 2 percent of teachers observed in 1992 were in the same classrooms or even the same centers in 1996.

Pintacuda says turnover is a "major problem" in establishing a relationship between a child and a provider. He thinks two proposals

Parents can check up on preschools

By KARLA BRUNER
And BRUCE TAYLOR SEEMAN
Herald Staff Writers

In an office tucked away on Third Avenue in Fort Lauderdale sits some of the most crucial information for mothers and fathers looking for child care.

But it's quiet there because few parents ever go — an average of only one a day.

The office belongs to Broward County's Child Care Licensing and Enforcement Section. Its files, an open catalog of recent inspections for licensed child-care centers and homes, are a priceless resource for parents.

A parent reviewing inspection reports for child-care centers might find that his or her top choice has chronic fire hazards or a dirty kitchen. On the other hand, the paper trail might identify another operator as someone with an exceptionally well-trained staff.

Shawn Lamarche, manager of the section, says violations are supposed to be posted at the centers themselves but may not always be prominently displayed — sometimes unwittingly buried under paper decorations or children's drawings. So her office is often the best place to check out a center or home.

Parents who come there can also inspect books on early childhood development, parenting magazines and toys: an interlocking foam puzzle, nesting blocks, a rainbow mobile. The toys are the kinds of brain-maturing playthings parents should look for at the child-care centers they visit.

Licensing consultants who have master's degrees in early childhood development work with child-care homes and centers when they first open — to teach them what toys to buy, how many puzzles they need, what kinds of blocks are better than others. During periodic inspections, monitors will check whether the centers still have these materials.

But parents can't assume that such requirements will just be "taken care of" once an inspection is done. Lamarche said. If they



SHOPPING AROUND: Cindy Brown, director of the Youthland Academy Pre-School in Pompano Beach, shows the center to Vicki Gates. It was the fourth preschool that Gates visited.

notice anything remiss, they should notify her office, she added, noting that parents represent "thousands of pairs of eyes" that visit child-care centers at least twice a day.

In Miami-Dade County, several parents call each day to make sure licenses are current, said Colleen Maurer, a family services specialist for the Department of Children and Families. Four or five a week actually look at the inspections by visiting Children and Families' licensing division.

Two kinds of inspection reports are available in both Dade and Broward. One summarizes a center's basic safety and health qualifications; these are done for all child-care centers. The other, done for centers that have state-subsidized children, measures a center's efforts to nurture childhood development.

Parents rarely look at the latter. "In the past six months, I think we've had two people," said Penella Burke, director of the

Miami-Dade Division of Child Development Services.

Eduardo Rivera, a contractor manager for the Department of Children and Families in Miami-Dade, said he understands why some parents don't devote more time to researching child-care centers.

"If you have two children,

'I don't think [parents] look at this like they look at kindergarten, like "Did [my child] get an F?" They should, because it's critical.'

CINDY BROWN,
preschool director

you've got pressures," Rivera said. "You need to get them dressed in the morning. You need to get to work on time."

But Cindy Rivera, director of Youthland Academy Pre-School in Pompano, which serves middle-class children, says parents need to pay attention to educational curricula.

"I don't think [parents] look at this like they look at kindergarten, like 'Did [my child] get an F?' They should, because it's critical. It's probably more important because this is the foundation for that."

Jack and Jill Nursery Inc., a publicly and privately funded nonprofit agency that provides child care for low-income families in Broward County, agrees. Referring to her clients, she said, "Most of them we draw over and say, 'Here's the lesson plan.' I think they're so overwhelmed by their poverty, their lack of adequate or safe housing, their inability to really provide for their family, that they're just happy to find some place [to care for their kids]."

Becky Cavallo, 36, an administrative assistant who lives in Sunrise, says she would have visited Broward's licensing agency, the parent of every child born in a Broward hospital soon will get a refrigerator magnet with its phone number on it.

Cavallo and her husband work hard to stay involved with Neighborhood Kids, a center they are generally satisfied with.

"It's really the parents, in the end, that make the place good," says Rocco Cavallo, 44. "It's really the parents asking questions that keep the place on its feet. If you see something that's not right and don't say anything, it will stay not right."

Larry Pintacuda, chief of child care for the Florida Department of Children and Families, says increasing the 30 hours of teacher training mandated by the state would mean more cost to parents and child-care providers.

"You'd like it to be higher, but whatever you do, the families will pay for it," he said.

But a study released this month by the Families and Work Institute in New York takes issue with that concern. The study looked at the impact of recent changes in Florida's teacher-to-child ratios and education requirements for child-care providers.

In 1992, the state changed its teacher-to-child ratios for infants from one-to-six to one-to-four, and for toddlers from one-to-eight to one-to-six. And since 1996, Florida has required that for every 20 children in a child-care center, there be at least one staff person with a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or equivalent. The CDA is issued by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, a national agency that conducts assessments. A CDA requires a person to have at least 480 hours of experience working with young children and 120 hours of formal child-care training.

The study found that the changes contributed to gains in the quality of early education and did not "significantly affect con-

Florida requires a 30-hour training course to become a teacher at a child-care center.

might make a difference: The Gold Seal of Approval accreditation program for child-care centers and the TEACH program.

Pintacuda said TEACH decreased turnover in North Carolina from 30 percent to about 7 percent. In return for getting a salary increase or bonus, TEACH participants agree to stay for another year at the center or home where they work. The participants, employers and TEACH pay for the tuition.

Florida has pilot TEACH programs in Pinellas, Hillsborough and Orange counties. Palm Beach County will implement one soon. The Florida Legislature is considering a \$1 million proposal to expand the program statewide.

Also, Gov. Lawton Chiles is seeking \$4 million to encourage centers to raise standards, thereby getting a Gold Seal. The funding would provide a 20 percent rate increase to centers and homes with subsidized child care that get accreditation. As one condition of accreditation, centers or homes must meet higher training requirements.

STEPS TO IMPROVE CHILD CARE: EVALUATIONS, PARTNERSHIPS

Advocates and experts suggest these changes to improve child care:

- Revised inspection procedures so that all child-care centers are evaluated for developmental curricula
- Increased state subsidies for poor children already getting care as well as those on waiting lists
- Financial partnerships between child-care providers and churches, synagogues, business groups and other community organizations
- Special attention to centers in poor neighborhoods, where operators cannot afford to charge high tuition or pay for staff training
- Additional training requirements for child-care workers, rewarded with higher pay and benefits
- Incentives for child-care centers to offer more flexible hours
- Closer regulation of unlicensed family child-care homes
- Partnerships between established centers and nearby family child-care homes whose operators need training

A PARENT'S CHECKLIST FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE

Child advocates in South Florida say there are three ways for parents to investigate the quality of child-care centers and family child-care homes:

1. Centers must have a license. To get the license, operators must pass three inspections a year that show the center or home is safe, poses no health hazards and does not exceed state limits on enrollments.

To review inspection records for centers in Miami-Dade County, visit the Department of Children and Families, 401 NW 2nd Ave., South Tower, Room 312. To set up an appointment, call (305) 377-5484 in the north part of the county or (305) 377-8608 in the south.

To review records in Broward County, visit the county's Child Care Licensing and Enforcement Section, 101 NE Third Ave., Suite 500, Fort Lauderdale, call (954) 537-2800.

These agencies can explain how to review inspection reports, which are open to the public. The reports point out specific problems and a center's efforts to correct them.

2. Many centers and family homes are subject to an additional review because they enroll low-income children whose tuition is subsidized by the state. That extra supervision means the centers must pass two annual assessments that impose state standards for things such as language development, creative expression, classroom environment and nutrition. Here is how parents can review these assessments:

■ In Broward, assessments are conducted by Family Central, a nonprofit company. These assessments are available at the company's main office at 840 SW 81st Ave., North Lauderdale, call (954) 720-1000.

■ In North Dade communities such as Hialeah and Opa-locka, assessments are done by a different Family Central office. It's located at 18204 NW 75th Ave., Miami Lakes, call (305) 898-7200.

■ In the rest of Miami-Dade, assessments are done by Miami-Dade Division of Child Development Services. These assessments are available on the 22nd floor of the Stephen P. Clark building, 111 NW First St., call (305) 375-4670.

3. Parents should not be shy about visiting a center unannounced to ask for a tour. That's a good way to check firsthand on safety, cleanliness and learning environments.

Some important questions:

- Do the children look happy, healthy and alert? The face of a child doesn't lie.
- Are indoor play areas safe? Any open

windows, exposed electrical outlets, sharp objects or small items that could present a choking hazard?

■ In the outdoor play yard, is the fence secure? Are there soft surfaces beneath play structures? Are helmets provided for bike riding?

■ Do teacher-student ratios meet or exceed requirements?

■ Does the staff talk to children and listen to their concerns? When discipline is needed, is the staff gentle but firm?

■ In the classroom, do teachers praise accomplishments? Do activities stress creativity and new experiences? Are children encouraged to solve their own problems and think independently?

■ Are activities balanced between vigorous outdoor play and quiet indoor play? Are children encouraged to work alone and in groups? Does the staff rely too

much on TV to occupy the children?

■ If a child is of an appropriate age, is he or she encouraged to develop self-help skills such as dressing, toileting, washing, eating and resting?

■ Are learning supplies — books, games, tape players, puzzles — in good condition? What about items that foster imagination such as blocks, wheel toys, climbing equipment and dramatic props?

■ Does the center have plants, a fish tank or other animals for children to care for? For effective play, does the center have climbing equipment?

■ Are meals and snacks nutritious, varied and served at appropriate times? Does the staff wash its hands before handling food and before changing diapers?

■ How many staff members are trained in first aid? Are smoke detectors installed in proper locations?

MOVIE REVIEWS, WEEKEND

- *Wild Things* is a thriller with tons of camp and sleaze.
- John Travolta has an uncanny resemblance to the president in *Primary Colors*.

STAY-AT-HOME DADS

If your wife works and you're the one who picks up the kids from school and carts them to soccer and to the doctor, we'd like to hear from you. Write to Stay At Home Dads, Living & Learning, The Herald 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, 33132 or fax us at (305) 376-5287. Please include a daytime phone number.

SECTION

■ John Travolta has an uncanny resemblance to the president in *Primary Colors*.

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LIVING & LEARNING

The Herald

FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1998

The Herald

**FLORIDA'S
YOUNGEST**

READY

■ Summary



bringing
up
baby
...What parents can do

WRITTEN BY JOHN GARRY, ILLUSTRATED BY JIM
LONG BEFORE the invention of brain scans, parenting manuals and web sites, the Galileos, Shakespeares and Einsteins were turning out pretty good books in a not-quite science.

"The bottom line of brain research is the relationship between babies and their parents," says Matthew Belmont, president of the Zero to Three child advocacy organization in Arlington, Va. "The needs of babies haven't changed since the beginning of time. Babies still need someone who has the time to know them, and parents still are their children's first and foremost teachers."

These days, when two of every three babies grow up in child care, when many children enter a formal academic setting at age 3 or 4, when early-childhood books stress the importance of "stimulation," the primal bond between parent and child gets overlooked.

But nothing tops it — not even eight hours a day of child care. "A child knows who mom and dad are," says psychologist Roni Leiderman, director of the Nova Southeastern University Family Center in Davie, which conducts early-childhood classes for 1,000 parents a week.

"We tell parents that they are the most important part of the child-care loop — they're the ones who know their baby's favorite song, and how he or she likes to be rocked."

Intimate awareness of babies' needs occurs through "comforting routines," Leiderman says, which should be part of mealtimes, bathtimes, playtimes and bedtimes — from story-telling to arranging

blocks to a marriage and infancy, as a child falls asleep.

"We also tell parents to be realistic — that sometimes there isn't enough time, and not to feel guilty about that."

In a national survey of parents last year, Zero to Three found that most parents understand that babies begin learning at birth, but fewer parents recognize that a baby's intelligence can be increased or decreased by how parents interact with the child, that having more mother than father caregivers before age 3 is not good, and that the more children are grounded in their

All that explains why parents/baby classes like those offered at the Family Center at Nova are popular no more high-tech than balls and blocks.

We tap parent attitudes on the playing, talking and singing," says Anne Greenham, who teaches a weekly class of a dozen mothers and 9- to 12-month-old babies. "It's not anything we weren't doing all along. It's just that science has finally discovered how important it is."

What's important: perk-a-bon, crinkly paper, beach balls, pots and pans, rocks to crawl and climb, rattles, spoons, songs like *Iry-Bury Spider*, picture books.

"It's not about boys and thank you," says Mahmud. "It's about recognizing what infants and toddlers need. It's the parents' ability to read their babies, not just read to their babies."

MILESTONES YOU CAN MEASURE

These are among the key signposts of healthy physical and emotional development in a child from birth to 4 years old, although every child develops at different levels.

- Begins to make one-syllable sounds such as ooh and ah.
- Responds to and smiles at own image.
- Discriminates parent's image from own.
- Follows an object with eyes and head, from side to side, for at least 10 seconds.
- Laughs while playing; wails if play is disrupted.
- Identifies parent's voice.
- Discriminates faces from patterns.
- Develops capacity to become bored.

- Uses voice to express joy and displeasure.
- Responds to own name.
- Begins putting objects in and out of container.
- Notices cause and effect, i.e., that if a rattle is shaken it makes a noise.

- Responds to simple verbal commands, including "no"
- Tries to imitate words.
- Explores objects by shaking, banging, throwing.
- Begins to use objects such as cups and brushes correctly.
- Groups some objects by shape and color.
- Differentiates among people; fears strangers.
- Displays emotions and recognizes them in other people.
- Enjoys saying bye-bye and understands simple commands.

- Don't worry about "spoiling" your baby. Cuddle and respond to their needs.
- Talk to your baby using simple words.
- Play games such as peekaboo and Five Little Piggies.
- Get regular health checkups, including all immunizations.

- Uses six or seven clear words and can combine two words.
- Identifies two or more objects from a group of familiar objects.
- Identifies simple pictures in books.
- Expresses refusals with bodily response mostly, while occasionally saying "no."

- Vocabulary expands to 12, 15 or more words.
- Labels actions, such as uttering "up" when wants to be carried.
- Attempts to talk in sentences.
- Points to several named body parts.
- Discovers everything has a name.

- Understands another, more, one, many.
- Points to hat, hands, feet, now, eyes, mouth.
- Vocabulary of 50 or more words.
- Imitates adult's words and inflections.
- Constructs two- to four-word sentences.
- May be able to give first and last name.
- Knows where things are up and around the house.

- Uses own name in reference to self
- Uses pronouns — I, me, you — although not always correctly.
- Has rudimentary sense of ownership.
- Starts to challenge parent's desires.
- Begins make-believe play.

- Respond to your child's language. When he says, "outside," you say, "You want to go outside and play?"
- Teach children about their world — point out colors and names of objects.
- Provide lots of picture books to read together or alone.

Sing songs. Play games such as *Simon Says* and *Ring Around the Rosy*.

- Give your child opportunities to play with other children.

- Graduates to four-, five- and six-word sentences.
- Follows a two- or three-component command.
- Says name, age, sex.
- Strangers can understand most of child's words.
- Solves some problems in bed, performing mental trial and error.

- Makes miscellaneous toys work.
- Matches an object in hand to a picture in a book.
- Completes puzzles with three or four pieces.

- Vocabulary grows to 300 to 1,000 words.
- Learns to express desires and feelings verbally.

- If a parent is sad, expresses sympathy or offers to fix problem.
- Understands concepts of same and different.
- Masters some basic rules of grammar.
- Tells stories.
- Sense of time is clearer.

- Language skills blossom: vocabulary expands to 1,500 words.
- Tells elaborate stories.
- Understands morning, afternoon and night and knows seasons.

- Knows some days of the week and that each day is measured in hours and minutes.
- Names at least four colors.
- Encourage independence by allowing your child to dress

- Ask your child to help with simple household chores.
- Give limited choices of things to wear or eat so that your child can choose.
- Continue to read picture books with more complex stories, sing favorite songs, watch appropriate videos and work simple puzzles with your child.
- Encourage pretend play — "Let's have a tea party. I'll cook you a cup of tea."

Sources: *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child*, Dr. Steven Shulov; *The First 12 Months of Life*, Theresa Caplan; *The Second Twelve Months of Life*, Frank and Thelma Caplan; *Your Child Birth to Age 6*, Fitchburg Dedline and Dr. Ann Alexander, Zeno to Three.

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Getting behind a movie with a twist

INSIDE

S. FLORIDIANS HAVE STAKE IN OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY

WEATHER

Partly sunny
a cool night,
73/56
Overcast, 74/58

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T U W T F S S

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 1998

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Albright proposes new view of Cuba

By CHRISTOPHER MARONIS

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright today proposed a new view of Cuba, one that would focus on the human rights of the Cuban people rather than the political system. She said the United States should think beyond the Castro rule, secretary says.

U.S. should think beyond Castro rule, secretary says

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright today proposed a new view of Cuba, one that would focus on the human rights of the Cuban people rather than the political system. She said the United States should think beyond the Castro rule, secretary says.

Better boats give Cubans new ways out

By JENNIFER ZARAGOZA

HAVANA — Cubans are finding new ways to leave their island home, thanks to better boats and more information about the outside world.

CASTANEDA'S FOUR

CASTANEDA'S FOUR — A group of four Cuban men, known as Castaneda's Four, are trying to leave the island.

Democrat Hosting of war with party

WASHINGTON — The Democratic Party is hosting a war with the Republican Party over the issue of Cuba.

TORNADO HITS HARD IN GEORGIA

ATLANTA — A powerful tornado struck the state of Georgia, causing significant damage and loss of life.

The tornado, which was about 1 mile wide, struck the town of ...

... and caused significant damage to the town's infrastructure.

At least ... people were killed and ... were injured.

The damage was estimated at ... million dollars.

Rescue workers are still searching for survivors.

The tornado was the most powerful to hit the state in decades.

It was rated as an F4 on the Fujita scale.

The storm moved from the south to the north.

It was the first time in years that a tornado had hit the state.

The damage was extensive, with many homes destroyed.

The storm was a surprise to many people.

The damage was estimated at ... million dollars.

The storm was a surprise to many people.



SUPERVISED FUN: Myles Gregory, 3, runs from Antreal Gregory, 9, during a game of 'Duck, Duck, Goose' at a Miami day-care center.

Private-home child care drawing closer scrutiny

By BRUCE TAYLOR SEEMAN
And KARLA BRUNER
Herald Staff Writers

In Pompano Beach, three children got child care in a home that looked like this:

A car port cluttered by toys, a toppled plant, a can of lighter fluid. A boarded front door window. A sign on a fence: "Warning: Guard Dog Love At First Bite."

And inside — an operator with no license, who was hiding two of the children from inspection.

"You have to cease operations immediately," says Elizabeth Thomas, an enforcement officer

for the Broward County Bureau of Children and Family Services. In addition, a \$250 fine.

In the complex child-care industry, regulators are trying to get a handle on this huge and sometimes unmeasured form of care the family child-care home.

These mom-and-pop outfits have enormous potential, experts say. When operated properly, their small, homey settings can be a womb for the tiniest lives. Thousands of parents, faced with the daunting task of choosing care,

are looking for a place to put their children.

PLEASE SEE HOME, 14A

FLORIDA'S YOUNGEST



READY
FOR THE
FUTURE



SET STANDARDS: Broward Children and Family Services specialists Elizabeth Thomas, left, Betty Crawford and W. Gail Custode.

Private-home child care drawing closer scrutiny

HOME, FROM 1A

have come away grateful that they chose a neighborhood operator imbued with patience and care. But advocates for reform say this next-door version of care has a long way to go.

■ Hundreds of homes, like the one in Pompano Beach, operate illegally. Without government oversight, they never get inspected for health or safety minimums.

Broward, whose three-person enforcement team is the first in Florida, estimates 800 homes operate without approval. In Miami-Dade, regulators have made no estimate but assume it's higher.

■ For homes recognized as legitimate, oversight is inconsistent. While Miami-Dade and Broward homes are required to get licenses and be inspected, 57 counties require only registration.

■ Many of the legitimate homes follow state regulations and provide quality care. But some dodge the rules by enrolling more children than permitted or by leaving children in the care of unqualified helpers.

■ As in every other segment of child care, training is often inadequate. To open their doors, family child-care home providers are required only to take a three-hour course and training in CPR.

■ Most operations aren't checked for nurturing childhood development. Only about two in 10 licensed homes receive the kind of oversight that evaluates curriculum.

Susan Muenchow, director of the Florida Children's Forum, says corners are often cut for reasons familiar in the child-care industry.

"People who are doing family child care have a difficult time making a living wage unless they have at least five children in their homes," Muenchow said. "The primary problem is one of financing."

Brenda Ives, a Fort Lauderdale family home-care provider for 20 years, is past president and current training coordinator for the Florida Family Child Care Association. Operators with good intentions need help, she says. She travels the state, giving 32-hour seminars on child development and other business techniques. But those who are only in the business for profit need to be weeded out, she says.

"I could put 16 kids in front of a TV," Ives says. "It's not good for our kids, it's not good for our profession. If I'm going to the doctor, I'd prefer one with a license, rather than one in a storefront."

The payoffs of well-regulated family home-care industry would be large, child advocates say. Besides children getting more attention, family homes might fill a growing need for child care at odd hours. Most centers, with their large staff and overhead costs, can't afford to stay open for night nurses, convenience store clerks and others who work through the night.

And this need for flexible care is becoming more urgent.

"We need to recruit more," says Larry Pintacuda, chief of child care for the state Department of Children and Families. "With the onset of welfare reform, we know many of the clients have children, and will be working odd hours."

One problem — the fact that 57 counties don't require inspections of family child-care homes — is unlikely to be solved anytime soon. That would require statewide licensing, an idea not currently on the table.

And some say it wouldn't matter. Mark Fidelholtz, a plantation father who has waged a campaign for reform after his son, Jeremy, suffocated last year in an overcrowded family home, said current licensing requirements are lax.

"These people don't take any exams," he says. "They give

licenses to people who would never get licenses in any other area of health care."

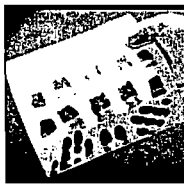
Some initiatives aimed at lifting quality are showing promise.

A statewide improvement program called *Caring for Kids* is intended to encourage informal operators to become licensed, and licensed operators to become accredited for high-quality care.

It works by offering grants and loans — grants for small items, such as cribs, blocks, books, loans for bigger items such as fences, porch repairs or playground improvements. About \$800,000 is available statewide, \$80,000 for each of Miami-Dade and Broward.

At the same time, Miami-Dade has inspired other counties around the state with its "Resource" program, a growing effort to send child development trainers into the homes of family home providers.

The Miami-Dade fleet now has four vans that offer a traveling mock classroom, another that specializes in teaching literacy to youngsters. Forty homes are signed up, many getting one visit



Children and Family Services officials use fingerprints as part of background checks for child-care providers.

a month from trainers. In Broward, the crackdown on unlicensed homes has provided a peek into homes that operate off the books. In the last six months of 1997, the enforcement team investigated 127 tips of unlicensed homes. Of those 12 homes were found to be unlicensed. Twenty-three were forced to close. The rest got licensed or promised to try.

Broward now levies a fine of \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second. Shawn Lamarche, resource development coordinator for the licensing office, said the toll is beginning to work.

"Yes," she said on a recent afternoon, cocking her arm in a trigger motion after hanging up her office phone. "We're celebrating small victories. One of the times just came in."

The shutting down of unlicensed family homes is applauded by many reformers and licensed competitors, say the often-risky operations blemish the industry's reputation. But won't closures just compound the existing shortage of providers?

"Who cares?" says Fidelholtz. "We can't just have nice and sweet mothers with good intentions, but who... don't know to say a child on its back, don't know how to intervene in a crisis. This is a health profession."

But the Pompano Beach operator who lost her license saw the question differently. After inspectors left her home, she predicted negative fallout from her paying customers.

"These parents are going to have a fit," she said. "They're not going to want to leave."

HOW TO CONTACT US

■ To comment on this series, address letters to Ready or Not? The Miami Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132-1693, or email us at features@herald.com



SINGLE MOM, ENTREPRENEUR: Frederica Burden, a city of Miami police officer, is opening a center that will be staffed around the clock.

Child-care centers stretched thin

By BRUCE TAYLOR BEEMAN
And KARLA BRUNER
Herald Staff Writers

At All Angels Episcopal School, a child-care center in Miami Springs, operator Debra Peacock makes budget by being creative.

She holds two jobs — principal and teacher. To raise cash, she sells lunch on Fridays — a hot dog and chips for \$2. And once a year she invites the kids and their families to a schoolyard fund-raiser.

Mrs. Peacock ends up in the dark tank she said. "It's one of our biggest money-makers."

For people in the child-care business, an industry that operates on the thinnest of margins, efforts like these are the necessities of survival.

A typical center that enrolls 30 children might employ four teachers and valet by up a \$100,000 budget. But the small numbers don't mean the business is easy. Most of the operators become experts in the techniques of scrimping and borrowing to make ends meet.

Charlotte Hamilton-Cohen, who has cared for children in her Fort Lauderdale home for 13 years, said her stress rises when enrollment lags.

With six kids in her care, she's "doing really well," said Hamilton-Cohen. Four kids cut it "close." Two kids is "very tense."

"With one, I get to panicking," she said.

The bottom line, said Susan Muenchow, director of the Florida's Children Forum, is the economic model of a child-care center often doesn't work.

In a competitive market, centers can only charge so much. Government subsidies help some centers, but those reimbursements amount to about 75 percent of the market rate. To comply with state mandates, centers spend about three-quarters of their budget on staff.

"We studied what it would cost if you paid schoolteacher wages and met national accreditation standards for staff-child ratios," said Muenchow. "And with what parents were paying, it didn't compute. There was a huge deficit."

The average profit margin for child-care centers is about 3.1 percent, far lower than the 4 percent average of most businesses, according to a 1996 analysis by professors from the Universities of Colorado and California.

For some centers, particularly those in poor neighborhoods, where tuition can only rise so high, quality care is a long shot. Many centers just aim to stay open.

"There is no capital budget that the state provides," said Anita Black, director of the Miami-Dade office of the Department of Children and Families. "There is no way to fix the roof, replace the carpeting."

Hamilton-Cohen said she distributes flyers in coin laundries, stores and beauty shops. To improve her center's appearance, she put white marble rocks in a

plant bed in front of the house to make the house "stand out."

"It was \$7 a bag, and I had even a bit of stress spending that," she said.

The luckiest centers get outside help — from a church or a business or through grants.

Peacock's All Angels center gets assistance from neighboring All Angels Episcopal Church. Even so, the money is tight. She has learned to make repairs around the center.

"I can fix a bicycle now," she said. "I can plunge the hell out of a toilet."

"A lot of [the] parents are financially strapped. Dad doesn't pay his child support — stuff like that."

DARLA MARCH
director of day-care center

plunged the toilet. I added the playground myself."

The same can be said of Karen Kern, who runs the Family Center, a nonprofit center in Kendall. She spent a recent Saturday alone at the center washing carpets, then dragging them outside to dry.

Darla March is the new, interim director of the South Miami Methodist Christian Preschool and Day Care. Because of management problems before she

arrived, enrollment dropped from about 130 to 25.

March is trying to rebuild the center — improvements to classrooms and the playground, a new curriculum, a revamped fee structure. Church volunteers figure prominently in the effort.

"A lot of my parents are financially strapped. Dad doesn't pay his child support — stuff like that," March said. "The first week I was here, I was \$2,000 in the red. We made payroll because the church donated money."

Frederica Burden, a city of Miami police officer and single mother, may be counted among the most courageous newcomers to the child-care field.

Her facility, Kiddie Kop Child Care Center, will open in north-west Miami in early April. In addition to the normal business complications, Burden has invited another 24-hour staffing.

Kiddie Kop, Burden says, will be open day and night — a place for children enrolled by cops, night nurses and other parents who work off-hours.

She acknowledges the financial challenge of around-the-clock overhead. But as a young mother with fresh memories of searching for child care, she's banking on high demand.

"Do you know how many times I had to rush from a meeting because 3:10 was approaching and you have to get your kid at 6?" Burden says. "You end up dragging the kid back to the meeting. That's not a life for a kid."

FACTLINE

The Herald's *Factline* is offering reprints of this series in booklet form for \$10. To purchase by credit card, call 376-3619 in Miami-Dade County or 764-7026, ext. 3719, in Broward County. Pay by check by writing *Factline*, The Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132.

ABOUT THE SERIES

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IMPROVING HOME-BASED CHILD CARE

■ **Less red tape for new homes:** Some local governments require excessive paperwork and expensive permits.

■ **Consistent monitoring:** Some counties require licenses and inspections. Most just require registration, with no inspections.

■ **Additional crackdown on illegal providers:** Unlicensed homes, which are not inspected, can be dangerous.

■ **Wider recognition:** Experts say government and communities have yet to recognize the potential for homes to provide quality care.

■ **More training for providers:** Currently the state calls for only a three-hour training course and instruction in CPR before opening.

FOR PROVIDERS TO LEARN MORE:

The Handbook for Caregivers offers tips for family child-care operators. Topics include health and safety, nutrition, playing and learning, toys, communicating with families and the business of family child care. Call the Florida Children's Forum at 1 (888) 352-4463.

FOR PARENTS TO LEARN MORE:

The Florida Family Child Care Home Association will answer questions about the fundamentals of family home care — how to judge quality, how to interview a provider, how to spot problems. Call (954) 581-1152.

OVERSIGHT:

There are three types of home care permitted in Florida. Each is subject to a different level of oversight.

■ **Licensed:** In 10 Florida counties, including Miami-Dade and Broward, licenses are required. Operators are subject to inspections on fire safety measures, hygiene, first aid, bedding, employee background checks and other basics. Statewide, there are 4,652 licensed homes, 457 in Miami-Dade and Broward.

■ **Registered:** In the other 57 counties, including Monroe, homes are registered. Operators must report the number of children served, submit plans for a substitute in case of illness and keep child immunizations current.

In a registered home, no one verifies the information because they are not inspected. There are about 3,431 registered family homes in Florida, 64 in Monroe.

■ **Informal:** These operations don't meet the legal definition of family child-care homes because the children they supervise come from fewer than two unrelated families. An example: a woman who cares for one neighbor's children.

These homes are not required to register, get a license or be inspected. Operators are not

required to have any training. Yet, these homes are permitted to enroll state-subsidized children. Through a voucher system, parents who qualify as low-income are reimbursed 50 percent of a child's tuition.

It is unknown how many of these operations exist. But there are 2,946 informal family child-care homes that care for subsidized children, including 61 in Broward and 769 in Miami-Dade and Monroe.

WHAT'S LEGAL:

By legal definition, a family child-care home is one that accepts payments for enrolling children from two or more unrelated families.

Size limits say operators may care for:

A. four infants (under the age of 3) and no other children

B. three infants, plus three children between 1 and 13

C. six preschoolers (children between 1 and 5)

D. 10 children if no more than five are preschoolers, and of those five, no more than two are infants

Both licensed and registered homes must comply