

## Message from the Board Chair

*Octavio A. Verdeja, Jr.*

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On January 21, 2009, House Bill 501 was filed. This bill proposes to eliminate all Florida early learning coalitions. The powers, duties, and functions of each respective coalition are to be transferred to the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) effective July 1, 2009. As a result, State government will become the only entity responsible for administering school readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) programs.

As parents and providers who are passionate about the future of our children's care and education, it is crucial that we unite with our fellow educators, community partners, and elected officials to prevent the passage of this bill. Allowing the State to fully assume the responsibility of administering our early learning programs and resources discourages an active community role in our children's early care and education. It is for this very reason that the State established local coalitions and an Early Learning Advisory Council; to provide increasingly direct and localized access to Florida families. For the sake of our children, we must not allow this critical connection to be dissolved.

Personal and active involvement is necessary to ensuring the lifelong success of our children; it will be lost if community coalitions are not permitted to administer early learning programs and resources. Over the last three years, the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe has added over \$22,000,000 to the early learning system in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties through the acquisition of federal, local, foundation, and corporate grants and investments.

We have made significant progress in Florida's early learning system with the involvement of the private sector, child care providers, the school system, sustained advocacy efforts, and statewide coordination with our government partners. The drastic change outlined in the proposed legislation will be detrimental to the momentum we have gained and the progress we have made.

We are our children's first teachers. Under the guidance of early learning coalitions, we should be the ones to directly oversee and determine the future of their early care and education. Let us reinforce this important message more than ever by actively joining forces to prevent the passage of House Bill 501. I appreciate your support.

Sincerely,  
Octavio A. Verdeja, Jr.  
ELC Board Chair

