

Message from the President & CEO

Evelio C. Torres

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It's all about the economy these days. Even those of us who have not followed economic indicators in the past have now turned into amateur economists. We watch everything from the stock market to the price of commodities in the hopes of being the first to spot a trend that would signal the economic recovery we desperately anticipate. We also listen attentively to the analysts who have started to report that investors have been more optimistic in recent weeks due to increasingly positive news about the nation's economy. While Wall Street rallies are shortlived, the optimism that we share about our children, our community, our families and our country continues. We know that sooner or later we will see the light at the end of what has been a long, dark economic tunnel.

In the meantime, Florida is waiting to receive approximately \$105 million in early learning dollars as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, also known as the Stimulus Package. The investment of these dollars will support the state's efforts to stimulate the economy by allowing working families to place or maintain their children in high quality early learning programs while they work.

Our state partner, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, is committed to allocating stimulus dollars to local communities as quickly as possible after they are received by the state. In Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, every dollar received will be spent on supporting the children and families of our community and the work of early care and education providers. The number one priority will continue to be funding child care slots.

As you can well imagine, balancing the checkbook at the ELC is no easy feat and we, like everyone else, are concerned about sustainability after the stimulus dollars are gone. While we have the ability to open and close enrollment for the income eligible category (BG8), we do not have the same flexibility with the other categories. One example is the TANF category (BG3). To illustrate the balancing act that we must constantly perform to balance our budget: since the beginning of our fiscal year we have added almost 1,000 new TANF children to our rolls at a cost of over \$2.6 million additional dollars for that category.

The numbers continue to increase daily. We are anticipating that the additional children and the less-than-average attrition rate in the School Readiness program will result in more children being served this year than last year. That is the good news, but now we have the challenge of paying for all these additional children.

To address the great need in our community and to continue to generate as many dollars as possible to serve the children and families of Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, the following steps have been taken:

- Additional dollars have been requested from the state for utilization in the current fiscal year
- Ongoing advocacy at the state level to ensure that the distribution of federal economic stimulus dollars to coalitions be expedited once received by the state
- Deferred expenditures in support areas to fund child care slots
- Sustained legislative advocacy efforts in Tallahassee to ensure that early learning dollars are protected from further reductions

Providing a high quality early education to the children and families of Miami- Dade and Monroe Counties and supporting the work of our early care and education providers continues to be our number one priority. We are grateful to our many partners and sincerely thank you for working side-by-side with the Coalition as we weather the economic storm and look forward to better times ahead.

Our partnership is: 1) making it possible for children to receive a high quality early education; 2) making it possible for parents to work with the reassurance and comfort that their children are in the good hands of our community's early care and education professionals; and 3) adding significant value to our state's economic development.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything I can do to support your important work.

I remain at your service.

Sincerely,

Evelio C. Torres

President & CEO

Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe

