

Success in life begins much earlier than a child's first report card – it begins at birth. Children who start kindergarten behind their peers tend to fall further behind as they grow up. JWB believes every child deserves to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

In 2011, JWB began a strategic shift from simply funding child care slots to investing in high quality early learning. This was based on state and national research that cites quality early learning as one of the most cost-effective ways to ensure the healthy development of children while offering the greatest returns to society.

Florida TaxWatch, for example, reports that for every \$1 invested now in quality early education for Florida's children, \$7 is saved in taxpayer burden later, demonstrating the economic value and societal gains of quality early learning.

JWB led a series of community conversations and utilized research to create the Eight Components of High Quality Early Learning. These include bachelor's-level teachers, low teacher-to-student ratios, research-based curriculum and an emphasis on parent engagement.

In 2012, JWB designed an innovative program model called the Quality Early Learning Initiative (QELI) that features the eight quality components. Through a competitive bid process, UMCM Suncoast was selected to operate the QELI program model at three centers across Pinellas County. In addition, JWB joined other partners to invest in the Lew Williams Center for Early Learning which opened in August 2014 and has adopted JWB's quality components. These four centers serve children of lowest means and greatest need, from birth through entry into kindergarten.

Children in QELI centers are referred by home visiting programs where their families also

receive services, and collaboration and communication between program staff is key.

Every QELI classroom is led by a teacher with a bachelor's degree or higher and supported by an assistant with no less than a Child Development Associate (CDA) or equivalent credential, ensuring the highest quality, best-trained staff possible.

The QELI program also features a unique family engagement component that guides and encourages parents to be part of their child's learning process. Each center employs a family engagement specialist who works to involve families in their child's education.

The QELI program is intended to serve the child multiple years, up until they enter kindergarten, and each of the three centers have the capacity to serve approximately 60 children each.

Quality Early Learning Matters

Through awareness and influence, JWB has led a movement around quality early learning, helping build capacity and changing the conversation from child care to school readiness.

In FY17, JWB invested \$9.9M in School Readiness programs that helped nearly 7,000 young children gain the basic skills they needed to start school ready to learn. As a result, 86% of children served by JWB's Quality Early Learning Initiative were on target when they entered kindergarten.

High quality early learning is making a difference. More children are mastering the skills they need to start school ready to learn. More parents are engaged early in their child's learning process. More capacity is being built in the community to ensure children have a solid foundation for a lifetime of learning.

Eight Components of High Quality Early Learning

JWB has identified Eight Components of High Quality Early Learning that are central to the success of children in early learning environments:

1 - Licensed Facility

2 - National Accreditation

Accreditation by NAEYC (National Association for Education of Young Children); Gold Seal; or other nationally-recognized accrediting body.

3 - Staff Qualifications

Each classroom or group of children must be led by bachelor's degree level staff and supported by assistants with a Child Development Associate (CDA) or equivalent certification. Both lead teacher and assistants should have specific coursework in child development and/or emerging literacy.

4 - Ratios and Group Size

Consistent with recommendations of "Zero to Three" and NAEYC:

Infants	1:3	Maximum group size of 6
Toddlers	1:4	Maximum group size of 8
2 year olds	1:5	Maximum group size of 10
3 year olds	1:8	Maximum group size of 16
4 year olds	1:9	Maximum group size of 18

5 - Family Engagement

Research studies indicate when parents become effective partners in their child's education, performance in school improves. Family engagement is building a positive working relationship between the parent(s) and the childcare staff and is more extensive than hosting events. Centers will commit to provide evidence-based curricula and best practices for family engagement.

6 - Evidence-Based Curriculum

Sites must implement an evidence-based curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging and engaging and that is developmentally appropriate, comprehensive and likely to promote positive outcomes for children and youth. The curriculum is organized around child development and learning principles. Children should be actively engaged. Curriculum goals should be clearly defined, shared and understood by all. The curriculum, related activities and teaching strategies are designed to help achieve these goals in a unified coherent way. Content is learned through investigation, play and focused, intentional teaching and programming. Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences and intentionally aligns with school instruction to help children who are failing or falling behind. Curriculum is comprehensive, encompassing critical development areas including children's physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language development, approaches to learning, cognition and general knowledge of subject matter areas such as science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies and the arts. A purposeful curriculum will benefit children and achieve a wide range of outcomes including school readiness and school success.

7 - Quality Environments

An effectively designed classroom and/or setting (including an outside learning environment) has the potential to positively influence all areas of child development: physical, social-emotional and cognitive. The environment can support the development of behaviors that are valued in our society, such as cooperation and persistence.

8 - Cultural Competence

Staff should be trained in the specific issues that arise when working with at-risk and minority populations including English language learners. Using the basic principles of self-awareness, respect for diversity, and sensitivity in communication as a premise for cultural competency, professional development should not just include racial and ethnic considerations, but also the vulnerabilities of children growing up in generational poverty and children with disabilities and special needs.