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Council for Education Policy,
Research and Improvement

**Proposed
Constitutional
Amendment:**

**VOLUNTARY
UNIVERSAL
PRE-KINDERGARTEN**

An Impact Analysis

July 2002

The recurring cost of this amendment would be an estimated \$425 million—\$650 million, although research does not consistently show a long-term benefit from a one-year program.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Ballot Summary

Every four-year-old in Florida shall be offered a high quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunity by the state no later than the 2005 school year. This voluntary early childhood development and education program shall be established according to high quality standards and shall be free for all Florida four-year-olds without taking away funds used for existing education, health and development programs.

Explanation of Amendment:

- ◇ Free universal Pre-K is to be provided to all four-year-olds
- ◇ Participation is voluntary
- ◇ Amendment proposes that the Legislature have discretion to determine basic and other skills that would be entailed in programs
- ◇ Program is to be implemented no later than 2005 school year
- ◇ Amendment language does not specify source of funds. However,

it does state that funds will not be taken from existing education, health and development programs.

CURRENT STATUS

In 1999, the Florida Legislature created the School Readiness Act to ensure that children were ready to enter kindergarten. Prior to that time, there had been three distinct programs for at-risk children: (1) the federal Head Start program that provided funds directly to local communities; (2) the federally subsidized Child Care program administered by the state Department of Children and Families; and (3) the state Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program administered by the Florida Department of Education. With the passage of the School Readiness Act, the child care and Pre-K programs were to come under the guidance of the newly created state Partnership for School Readiness; readiness coalitions were created at the local level to ensure that all three programs were more cohesive, efficient, and integrated. In 2001, the Legislature repealed the statutory authority for the Pre-Kindergarten programs, effective January 2002. While the Pre-K program is no longer in the Florida statutes, the opportunity exists for school boards to provide readiness programs.

IMPACT OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Projected Cost

On June 27, 2002, the Revenue Estimating Conference determined that the recurring cost of this

amendment would be an estimated \$425 million - \$650 million. This would provide services to 70% of the 2005 population of four-year-olds.

The proposed amendment states that the program is to be funded "through funds generated in addition to those used for existing education, health, and development programs." The Legislature would have to determine the revenue sources to fund this amendment. Possible sources of revenue would include:

∞ **Sales tax increases**

If Pre-K were funded solely through an increase in sales tax, the tax would increase from 6¢ to 6.17¢, an increase of 2.8%.

∞ **Corporate income tax increases**

If Pre-K were funded solely through an increase in corporate income and excise tax, the tax would need to increase by 1.9%, from 5.5% to 7.4%.

∞ **The elimination or reduction of other government services**

The minimal funding would require more than all of the General Revenue operating dollars currently being used to fund the following programs: the Department of Law Enforcement (\$104.9 million), the Parole Commission (\$8.9 million), the Department of Agriculture (\$138.4 million), the Department of Military Affairs (\$12.9 million), and the

Department of Environmental Protection (\$88.9 million) — and that would just fund the minimum, not the maximum, amount estimated for Pre-Kindergarten. In addition, the loss of this level of General Revenue dollars in the above departments would cause a significant loss of federal funds received by the State.

Research on Early Childhood Programs

Hundreds of studies have been conducted on early childhood programs. Most of these are short-term studies and do not have data that extend much beyond the length of the program. There are, though, a few long-term studies that are frequently cited in the literature. In these studies, measures of long-term effects are primarily standardized intelligence tests and school achievement and placement:

Standardized Intelligence Tests:

Children who experience early childhood education show an immediate increase in IQ, but studies show a subsequent drop in IQ at age eight. This may suggest a need for similar intervention programs in elementary school.

School Achievement and Placement:

While there is a drop in IQ, the experimental groups in most studies continued to perform better than children who did not attend preschool programs. This was true for performance on school achievement tests, grade-point averages, and non-retention in grade; there was also

reduced placement in special education.

In addition to results on these measures, researchers frequently cite results from other long-term studies. The most often-cited research on the long-term effects of early childhood programs relates to the Perry Preschool Program, a program for African-American children from poor families in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

High Scope/Perry Preschool

Project: Researchers tracked the children who were in this program from 1962-1967, as well as those in the control group who did not attend preschool. At age 27, the program participants had:

- * Higher monthly earnings (29% vs. 7% earning \$2,000 or more per month)
- * Higher percentages owning their own homes (36% vs. 13%)
- * A higher level of schooling completed (71% vs. 54% completing 12th grade or GED)
- * A lower percentage receiving welfare or other social services as adults (59% vs. 80%)
- * Fewer arrests (7% vs. 35% having 5 or more arrests)

A benefit cost analysis conducted on the program showed that for every \$1.00 originally invested, the public's return was \$7.16. Society was saved the cost of expenditures for welfare, prison and unemployment.

Some have argued that it would have been difficult for the researchers to maintain their objectivity; the research was conducted by the same group that

developed the program, the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (the phase of the study which followed up on the participants at age 27 was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Ford Foundation). Also, the Perry Preschool Program used a small sample from a narrowly defined population, making it questionable that the results would apply to the population as a whole. In addition, the detractors argue that since the program placed students in a highly controlled academic environment using professional educators, heavily involved parents, and had instructors visiting children's homes each week, it was questionable whether such conditions would or could be duplicated in other programs.

Head Start: Head Start is the largest and most well-known of the early childhood programs. Hundreds of studies have been conducted on Head Start, and they produce mixed results. Almost all measure only immediate results, with about equal numbers showing a positive impact or no impact, and a smaller number showing a negative impact.

For more information regarding this amendment, a full report is available on CEPRI's website:

<http://www.cepri.state.fl.us>