



## NEWS

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### **The Children's Movement of Florida Visits Local Education Center to Discuss 2012 Legislative Agenda**

*State Representative Frank Artiles and Early Learning Coalition join in discussing The Children's Movement of Florida's Five-Point Legislative Agenda; One of Eleven "Books and Cookies" events being held statewide*

MIAMI – The second of 11 statewide "Books and Cookies" events, The Children's Movement of Florida on Tuesday discussed its five-point 2012 legislative agenda.

Joining David Lawrence Jr., chair of the non-partisan Children's Movement was House Representative Frank Artiles, R-Miami, District 119 and Evelio Torres, President/CEO Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe.

The Children's Movement's legislative agenda was formed following a summer "listening tour," which carried Movement leaders back to the 17 cities that hosted the group's hugely popular 2010 "Milk Party" rallies. During these latest meetings, children's advocates from every corner of the state contributed to The Movement's 2012 agenda.

The five main agenda items remain consistent with the group's 2011 agenda – high-quality parent skill-building programs; developmental screening, diagnosis and treatment for children who may have special needs; the use of research-based curricula as well as pre-and-post assessments for voluntary pre-kindergarten; health care for Florida's uninsured children; and support for high-quality mentoring initiatives.

But, importantly, the price tag has been scaled down and a public education component has been added – one that ties together all five points, working to ensure that all children can meet appropriate reading standards by the third grade. Total cost: About \$28.5 million, a fraction of the state's \$69 billion budget.

"Children don't vote, don't have lobbyists, don't make campaign contributions," said Dave Lawrence, one of the nation's leading children's advocates and retired publisher of The Miami Herald. "Our objective is to raise enough awareness and build enough support -- political and otherwise -- so that we begin to change the way decisions are made in Tallahassee."

Held at the REM Learning Center, an early education learning center serving South Miami for over 25 years, the event highlighted on-the-ground champions such as owner and school director Mrs. Rose Mary Moreno.

"Here at REM Learning Center it has been our mission for the past 29 years to provide quality early childhood education in a cost effective manner," said Moreno. "When we heard that the Children's

Movement was releasing their 2012 legislative agenda which includes the promotion of cost effective quality early childcare and the importance of early screening/assessment (something we here at REM have been doing for years) we had to be a part of anything that would help them spread the word. We were even more excited when we heard the event would be promoting early childhood literacy.”

Evelio Torres, President/CEO Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe also participated in the event, which gave out copies of “Who Took the Cookies from the Cookie Jar” by Bonnie Lass & Philemon Sturges donated by Scholastic.

“We’re very happy to be here today in support of The Children’s Movement and its five-point legislative agenda because we’re addressing important items that directly affect the chances of our children achieving future educational success,” said Torres. “At the Early Learning Coalition we strive every day to improve our early childcare and education systems throughout Miami-Dade and Monroe counties, and it’s by working with organizations like The Children’s Movement that we increase the number of people talking and doing something about the major issues that will ultimately ensure the future of our children.”

State Representative Frank Artiles, R-Miami, shared book reading duties to the children with both leaders.

“It was truly an honor to participate in the *Books and Cookies* event today,” said Rep. Artiles. “Our children deserve a voice and The Children’s Movement is essentially holding the microphone for them to be heard in Tallahassee.”

Lawrence and others will sweep through the state during the next six weeks, holding other call-to-action reading events that demonstrate the importance of The Movement’s agenda. They also will introduce the agenda to business and community groups, and meet with newspaper editorial boards, education writers, and other media figures.

This dramatic, on-the-ground approach to legislative action mirrors the unprecedented attention generated last fall by The Children’s Movement, which drew more than 15,000 supporters to its Milk Party rallies.

Now backed by more than 300,000 supporters around the state, led by 17 regional committees willing to engage at a moment’s notice, the non-partisan Children’s Movement of Florida approaches the upcoming legislative session confident that its message – that healthy children, engaged families and high-quality early childhood programs create the foundation for a strong and prosperous state – is resonating with legislators and other leaders.

“The Children’s Movement knows that time and pressure are necessary to change the priorities of our state,” said Lawrence. “Now needs to be the time when Florida’s children become a much higher priority. Their future and Florida’s will depend on this.”

## **The 2012 Children's Movement of Florida agenda**

### **Parent Skill-Building:**

- Implement a public awareness campaign and provide information to families on the importance of early development, nurturing parenting and parental involvement; provide and publicize "parent portals" – a statewide phone line and website in three languages. \$10 million.

### **Developmental screening, diagnosis and treatment for children with special needs:**

- Provide on-line screening and referral tools for families: This would be accompanied by a statewide public awareness campaign in conjunction with the above-mentioned "parent portals," providing screening tools for parents and referral resources through on-line, telephone and community portals: \$5 million.
- Conduct an inventory of currently available treatment program for children with special needs and develop a statewide implementation plan to ensure timely screening, diagnosis and treatment: \$500,000.

### **Voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK):**

- Require an evidence-based curriculum in every classroom. On the state Department of Education website, there are 14 such curricula from which to choose. A parent deserves to know his or her child is learning via a curriculum that we know works because of research. \$8.7 million.
- Require pre- and post-assessments in every VPK classroom. The cost of the assessment is less than \$25 per child. The assessments would be given at the beginning of the "school year," and would let the teacher and the parents know where the child stands cognitively, socially and emotionally. The lead teacher, thus informed, would be better able to help each child – and all this would be shared with the parent, too: \$4.2 million, assuming 170,000 4 year olds in the program.

### **Health care:**

- Engage in cost-effective targeted enrollment efforts in the Florida KidCare program, particularly through school-based efforts and a local grassroots outreach campaign.

### **Mentoring**

- Working with partners from around the state, implement an early learning and mentoring initiative focused on reading by grade 3. This would be fully focused on the private sector. The goal: Provide a reading mentor to every possible child who needs help – from VPK through the third grade. We would push this call for volunteers vigorously through our 17 regional committees and the almost 300,000 Floridians we communicate with weekly. We would seek community volunteers throughout this state – from the faith community, the business executives, civic leaders, legislators, et al.

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More details and background information about the origins, objectives and leaders of the non-partisan, grassroots Children's Movement of Florida and its 2012 legislative agenda can be found at [www.childrensmovementflorida.org](http://www.childrensmovementflorida.org)