



**“PROGRESS REPORT ON FLORIDA’S CHILDREN” JUNE 26, 2012  
FLORIDA CHILDREN AND YOUTH CABINET CHAIRMAN DAVID WILKINS**

1. **Graduation Rate:** Florida's graduation rate has risen to its highest level ever. Hispanic and African-American students continue to graduate at higher levels, with Hispanic students' graduation rates increasing 13 percentage points and African-American students increasing 12 percentage points in the past few years.
2. **Dropout Rate Falls:** This is the first year that Florida's dropout rate has fallen below 2 percent. The current dropout rate is 1.9 percent, a decline of 0.1 percentage points from last year.
3. **Teen Births:** Births to teenage children in Florida has dropped 25 percent over the past five years due in part to the Department of Health's programs and practices.
4. **Teacher Quality:** The National Council for Teacher Quality has rated Florida #1 in the nation in educator quality, evaluating teacher effectiveness and retention of effective teachers.
5. **Improvements in Early Learning:** In the past two years, the number of four-year olds who are enrolled in the state's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program has increased by 18 percent.
6. **Fostering Florida's Future:** We launched a new recruiting effort to work with community-based care agencies to recruit 1,200 more foster parents and better support and retain those who are already fostering. This is an increase of 20 percent from last year's recruitment effort and will also allow us to reduce the number of teens in group homes.
7. **Child Protection Transformation:** We are revamping our child protective investigations process to better assess safety and risk to children. We are implementing a new methodology and organization for our investigators. We have reduced caseloads for investigators by half (from 21 to 11) in the past year. We are implementing new technology in our child welfare system.
8. **Letting Kids in Foster Care be Kids:** Our children should be able to safely experience what every other child experiences- school proms, date nights, slumber parties with friends, learning how to drive a car. We approved a Bill of Rights for foster children that reduces the bureaucratic processes that hinder child normalcy and allows foster children to be just like other kids across our state.
9. **Decline in Juvenile Delinquency:** Implementation of the new civil citation process and DJJ's work with law enforcement has resulted in a 21 percent decline in the number of delinquency cases for juveniles. The number of youth committed to a DJJ program has also declined 39 percent.
10. **Fewer Juvenile Arrests:** In the past two years, the number of children arrested in Florida's public schools has declined by 28 percent. The number of admissions to detention facilities has decreased by 12 percent.
11. **Adoption Success:** We are on track to have more than 3,000 adoptions from foster care for the third year in a row. We have also reduced the average number of children available for adoption without an identified family by 13 percent.



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**12. Background Screening for Volunteers:** A new law passed this year simplified the process for volunteering at state agencies. A new Background Screening Clearinghouse is being developed so volunteers will only have to have one background check in order to volunteer at any state agency related to health and human services.

**13. New Project for Children with Disabilities:** APD is working with other state agencies to integrate care and services for children with developmental disabilities and autism who also need mental health or substance abuse services, or children whose parents are neglecting them or are unable to care for them. APD has reorganized and streamlined to reduce costs and allow us to serve more children effectively.

**14. Partners for Promise:** The goal of this DCF initiative is to link up people in local communities who can offer their time, talent and resources to help children and families in need. In the six months since we kicked off this campaign, more than 1,500 individuals, groups and businesses across the state have volunteered assistance to their communities at no cost to the state.

**15. Early Learning Fraud Detection:** In the past three years, the number of fraud referrals and investigations in the state’s Office of Early Learning has tripled. Fraudulent payments have been reduced by almost 300 percent. The office, which is dedicated to ensuring the accessibility, affordability and quality of early learning services, works to eradicate fraud so that more children can be served.

**16. VPK Improvements:** The Office of Early Learning and DCF have worked together to simplify the licensing and inspection process of these facilities. In addition, Florida is the first state to launch a new pre- and post-testing initiative for students in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten.

**17. Human Trafficking:** This year, Florida became a pioneer in the battle against human trafficking. Gov. Rick Scott signed House Bill 99, The Safe Harbor Act, which provides services to help victims who have been sexually exploited. In addition, Gov. Scott also signed House Bill 7049, which gives prosecutors the ability to impose tougher penalties.

**18. Children’s Medical Services:** Last year, the Department of Health’s CMS group, which provides care for children with special health care needs and their families, increased the number of children they are assisting by 13 percent.

**19. Supporting Guardian ad Litem:** The Guardian ad Litem program, which provides an advocate for children in the court system, has increased its number of volunteers by 14 percent and is serving an additional 1,115 children. In addition, a law was passed to allow guardians to transport children who are in the program.

**20. Educational Surrogates:** The Guardian ad Litem program also has doubled the number of trained educational surrogates who help at-risk children acquire educational services to 1,077.



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- 21. Foster Care Educational Success and Well-being:** We became the first state in the nation to track the medical and dental access and educational success of children in foster care. In addition, we recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Education to share educational information so that foster children’s progress can be tracked more efficiently.
- 22. Insurance for Children Expanded:** KidCare, the health insurance program for children, was extended to state workers whose income makes them eligible. The number of children who are receiving Medicaid in Florida has increased 4 percent in the past year. Medicaid now covers 1.9 million children.
- 23. Increased Domestic Violence Services:** In the past year, we have been able to serve 6 percent more families in domestic violence shelters across the state. We have also been able to increase the number of domestic violence awareness events across the state by 50 percent.
- 24. Delinquency Services:** DJJ is establishing respite beds to provide services instead of detention to nearly 2,600 youth who are arrested for domestic violence-related incidents.
- 25. Mental Health Care for Children:** We have served an additional 5 percent more children with mental health care services in the past year.
- 26. Child Death Review Programs:** We have designed solutions to improve transparency and simplify the review process and improve prevention recommendations for this program. In the past two years, the number of child abuse death allegations reported to the state Hotline has declined by 7 percent.
- 27. Child Welfare Performance:** Florida was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> overall on a recent survey of child welfare systems. In addition, our agency progress and scorecard focus on outcomes has shown performance improvement of 14 percent in both case management and child protective investigations since we launched the scorecards last year.
- 28. Toughest Child Abuse Reporting Laws in the Nation:** Florida’s new law says that anyone who suspects a crime against a child must report that to the Florida Abuse Hotline.
- 29. Newborn Prescription Drug Task Force:** Attorney General Bondi launched the first task force on statewide prescription drug abuse and newborns. This group is studying the effects of prescription drug abuse on newborns and babies, considering effective prevention and treatment strategies, and developing a plan of action to submit to the Legislature.
- 30. Legislature, Governor Scott Help Kids across Florida:** This year, 30 key initiatives passed, totaling more than \$3 billion for children. This administration's commitment to children was most evident in the Legislature's approval of Gov. Scott's demand for \$1 billion in increased K-12 funding.