

FAU

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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region, state, and nation by preparing students to make meaningful contributions in an increasingly complex society. The mission is accomplished through educational programs at the undergraduate level and linkages to other educational institutions and the community, all within an environment that fosters inclusiveness.

Florida Atlantic University's Strategic Plan correlates with the SUS Strategic Plan with similar goals of:

- a) providing increased access to higher education;
- b) meeting statewide professional and workforce needs; and
- c) meeting community needs and fulfilling unique institutional responsibilities.

Additionally, the Board of Trustees has identified the goal of developing programs designed to address professional shortages that currently exist in teaching, particularly for diverse student populations, including students with disabilities. The proposed BECE degree meets this goal, and represents an inclusive perspective in teacher education, preparing teachers to educate young children with a range of developmental needs and skills. The Board of Trustees has similarly recognized the fulfilling of unique institutional responsibilities through meeting community needs and serving the wider external community. Following this goal, the commitment to effective community partnerships has been demonstrated as a cornerstone in the development of the proposed BECE degree program.

Assessment of Need

Quality early childhood education continues to be a high priority and focal point for educational initiatives at the national, state, and local levels. Based on research conducted throughout the United States, the National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends Bachelor's Degree Programs as a critically important step in the career ladder for teachers in early care and education settings. The Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education frequently publishes research studies highlighting the need for Bachelor's Degree education programs. In greater and greater numbers, researchers are indicating that a positive relationship exists between the educational preparation of early childhood professionals and the quality of early care and education programs (Helburn, 1995; Howes, Galinsky, Shinn, Sibley, Abbot-Shim, & McCarthy, 1998; Early & Winton, 2001; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002). Further, a connection has been made between professional development, quality programming, and positive child outcomes (Helburn, 1995; Dunn, 1993; Early & Winton, 2001).

Resulting from significant research on early brain development, and following the national trend for assessment and educational equity promoted in the No Child Left Behind law, there has been a national trend to develop Statewide Early Learning Standards and Quality Rating Systems for early childhood education. States have identified the need for high quality early childhood education and child care settings due to increasing numbers of women in the workforce, corporations providing child care, and

heightened attention to early literacy correlated with future school success. It has become evident that teachers must be educated to meet these societal needs.

At the state level, early childhood education and care has become a clear priority. In August 2005, Florida established state funded pre-kindergarten programs, known as Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK). Florida Head Start has mandated that by 2010, 50% of their teachers must have degrees and teacher certification. The State of Florida, and its regional Children's Services Councils are currently engaged in a process, "Policy Matters," that reviews the current early childhood policy environment and includes the domain of professional development. Across all constituencies, there is resounding agreement that highly qualified early childhood teachers with bachelor's degrees are essential now and in the future.

At the local level, Palm Beach Community College has conducted a needs assessment that strongly demonstrates the need for Bachelor's level teacher education to improve the quality of early care and education, particularly at the infant/toddler and preschool levels. During the initial planning phases for the development of the BECE degree program, Polk Community College was contacted because they have a similar early childhood A.S. degree that articulates with a Bachelor's Degree at the University of South Florida. Manatee and Hillsborough Community Colleges have a similar articulation with USF. Their programs have been successful in enrolling students and increasing access to Early Childhood Bachelors Degree programs. Polk Community College is not in the FAU service delivery area; therefore FAU's proposed BECE program is definitely needed for graduates of Palm Beach, Broward, and Indian River Community Colleges. In FAU's region, there are no other early childhood bachelors degrees offered representing a "Blended" educational philosophy and curriculum for infants and young children.

It is estimated that at least 50 graduates from Palm Beach Community College are currently interested in enrolling in the proposed BECE program at FAU, and a significant number of students are in the PBCC "pipeline" waiting for the BECE program to become available. There also have been a substantial number of calls from people in the community, indicating an interest in early childhood Bachelor's degrees and the intention to enroll. Broward Community College (BCC) and Indian River Community College (IRCC) similarly provide A.S. degrees in early childhood, representing a large number of potential students. At the time of this writing, numerous expressions of interest are already coming from BCC and IRCC. Not for profit organizations and community providers also are active in expressing the need for bachelor's degree options as part of a career path for their teachers and staff. There is a need for a Bachelor's Degree in Early Care and Education to provide quality experiences for all children across a wide range of abilities and socioeconomic levels. The BECE Degree demonstrates the commitment to young children and to the professional education of their teachers by the FAU College of Education. Even though formal recruitment and outreach has not been initiated, there is a clear need and wide support for the proposed BECE program.