

Alachua County

American Rescue Plan

State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

GNV4ALL Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center

(Revised 05032023)

Alachua County American Rescue Plan
Gainesville for All's
Gainesville Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Uses of Funds	4
Promoting Equitable Outcomes	6
Community Engagement	9
Use of Evidence	10
Project Inventory.....	11

Executive Summary

Gainesville for All was created in 2016 to address racial and socio-economic disparities and inequities in Alachua County. Two years later, the report, “Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County” - commissioned by seven local institutions and organizations - reaffirmed the need for our community-based advocacy. The report depicted African-American children and their families as the most disadvantaged and underserved community in terms of economic well-being, education, criminal justice, health access, and transportation.

Covid has wreaked havoc in many communities of color. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), people of color have borne and continue to bear a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 cases, deaths, and hospitalizations. Analyses also suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a larger economic toll on people of color. The KFF report states, “These disparities in COVID-19 reflect and compound longstanding underlying social, economic, and health inequities that stem from structural and systemic barriers across sectors, including racism and discrimination. The health and economic impacts of COVID-19 could further widen racial disparities at a time when there is a growing focus on and call for racial justice and health equity.”¹

Gainesville for All has been instrumental in making positive changes for the African American community in Gainesville. Our health and transportation task force was recently successful in collaborating with the City of Gainesville to offer free bus rides for students and seniors. Our Criminal Justice task force, led by Lawrence Certain, a retired lieutenant from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, created policy changes ending the arrest of children aged 12 and under for misdemeanor offenses. He also played a major role in enacting local bail reforms. Gainesville For All has organized a fatherhood initiative aimed at stepping up father involvement in the early learning years of their children. Our education task force worked with the Alachua County School Board to adopt an equity plan and hire a highly qualified full-time equity director.

The Gainesville Empowerment Zone (approximately 1.78 square miles) has been identified and targeted as the area surrounding two low-performing schools inhabited by mostly black and low-income families. In launching The Gainesville Empowerment Zone’s (GEZ) Family Learning Center, Gainesville for All seeks to empower pregnant women, children from birth to age five, and their families with tools that will enhance their lives through high-quality early childhood education and connections to vital social and community services. The GEZ Family Learning Center will serve as a pilot program to prove that publicly funded early childhood education facilities should be opened on public school campuses throughout Alachua County, particularly at schools primarily serving children from low-income families. Ultimately, our school will function as a model for similar centers to be replicated in school districts statewide and across the nation.

¹ Artiga S., Corallo B., Pham O. (2020) Racial Disparities in COVID-19: Key Findings from Available Data and Analysis. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/racial-disparities-covid-19-key-findings-available-data-analysis/>

With vital assistance from community partners such as the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, our school will demonstrate that the well-documented achievement gap in far too many poor and working-class areas can be overcome through early intervention. Our staff will help connect families to a variety of community services such as parental coaching, employment counseling, mental health, addiction counseling, medical access (including prenatal care), transportation, food assistance, educational and vocational opportunities, and housing assistance.

As part of this plan, Alachua County is using \$350,000.00 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support the operations of the Gainesville Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center (GEZFLC). Generally, funds will be used to pay the Center Director and teacher salaries and fringes as well as administrative related expenses, playground equipment, and classroom furnishings. . These one-time funds along with other financial contributions will support the first year of operations to demonstrate an impact on student achievements and improved outcomes for parents and families.

Use of Funds

According to a statewide survey by United Way, 46% of all households in Florida were already struggling to make ends meet when COVID-19 hit. 51% of respondents with children said that childcare issues impacted household members’ ability to work during the pandemic: 24% said that one or more household members were working reduced hours due to childcare issues. Low-income working families (below the ALICE threshold²) with children were significantly more likely than higher-income families with children (above the ALICE Threshold) to say that one or more household members were working reduced hours (26% vs. 18%) or had to quit a job (17% vs. 4%) due to child care issues since the beginning of the pandemic. In terms of education, these low-income households with young children (0-5) were most concerned with the cost of childcare (37%), finding a provider/school with sufficient hours (22%), and the reliability/availability of care (17%).³ The GEZFLC aims to address all of these issues by offering year-long, full-day care by trained professionals.

ARPA Funds are sought for the purpose of supporting the Gainesville Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center during its first year of operation which requires funding of \$350,000. The breakdown of funds will be as follows:

Personnel, Fringe Benefits and Administrative Services	\$250,000.00
Playground Equipment	\$50,000.00
Classroom Furniture	\$50,000.00
Total ARPA Funding	\$350,000.00

² ALICE households are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). With income above the Federal Poverty Level, ALICE households earn too much to qualify as “poor” but are still unable to cover basic household expenses. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/methodology>

³ United Way. COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY. 2021 Florida Results Report. https://www.uwof.org/sites/uwof.org/files/COVID%20Impact%20Survey_Florida_Results%20Report.pdf

In addition to using ARPA funds to offer competitive salaries and insurances, additional fringe benefits include Paid Time Off, paid holidays, and TEACH professional development scholarships offered.

GEZFLC’s Executive Director (salary range \$73,000-\$75,000 annually) will oversee the administration of the preschool. The Executive Director’s responsibilities include recruitment of staff, property maintenance, marketing and communication, financial management, developing and monitoring curriculum, fundraising efforts, student discipline and other duties. Job qualifications include:

- Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development or Elementary Education
- Minimum of three (3) years of experience in managing an accredited childcare center
- Valid Florida Directors’ Credential with a VPK Endorsement

ARPA funds will also support the wage and fringe benefit expense of administrative positions including a Director (\$60,000 annually), Assistant Director (\$50,000 annually), and a Community Engagement Specialist (\$35,000 annually). All positions are also provided fringe benefits including health insurance and a retirement contribution. Funds are also used to purchased administrative services like bookkeeping, accounting, and reporting services to comply with Department of Treasury reporting requirements.

The Family Learning Center plans to construct an outside playground/classroom. While the design is not finalized, it will include a large structure for 2–4-year-old children and a small structure suitable for 1-2 year old children. As cost estimates are not finalized, \$50,000 of County provided ARPA funds will be used in combination with other funding including private donations to support the purchase and construction. Additionally, \$50,000 of County provided ARPA funds will be used to purchase classroom furnishing including 12 small group/art/eating tables and chairs for very young children. Other furnishings include 7 dramatic play small tables with 2 chairs, 4 changing tables with stairs, and 15 one-sided shelving units.

Each classroom teacher (funded through other sources) will need to have a Florida staff credential preferably with a National CDA or higher level of education. Those that do not meet this standard will be given time, opportunity, and financial support to continue their education. GEZFLC will be open eleven hours a day. Full-time staff will only be allowed to work 8 hours a day. Additional staff will cover breaks and the rest of the extended day.

Class #	Age Group of children	Number of Children	Number of Staff
1	Infants - under 12 months	six to eight	two
2	Toddlers - 12 months to 36 months	eight	two
3	Toddlers - 12 months to 36 months	eight	two
4	Toddlers - 12 months to 36 months	eight	two
5	Preschoolers - three by September 1	sixteen	two

6	Preschoolers - four by September 1	twenty	two
7	Preschoolers - four by September 1	ten	one

Alachua County and the City of Gainesville have already committed local funding. The School Board of Alachua County is leasing the building for free with additional supports. The majority of the operational funding will come from the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County through our School Readiness and VPK contracts. GEZFLC has received additional one-time funding (grants or donations) from local organizations, including the Gannett foundation, PNC Bank, Cox Cable, and Friends of the Library.

As the ARPA funds provided for the GEZFLC are a one-time only source of funding, GNV4ALL has established a long-term plan for sustainable funding. Within the second year of operations, the GFEZLC intends to become Gold Seal certified. Doing so, provides several financial incentives including increased School Readiness reimbursements (20%) as well as financial incentives for establishing both a CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) and a child assessment process. In total, these financial incentives are estimated at almost \$230,000 annually and coupled with other on-going funding, will sustain the project for years to come. GNV4ALL will also be seeking funding support from the Children’s Trust of Alachua County.

Promoting Equitable Outcomes

Alachua County aims to be an “Equitable and Resilient Community” as stated in the County’s Strategic Plan adopted in 2021. Equitable is defined as “striving to treat everyone justly according to their circumstances, providing opportunity and access for everyone, while focusing on closing existing equity and access gaps.”

In January 2018, the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) released the report “Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County” outlining the systemic racial inequities in our county. Participants of color in the focus groups acknowledged that they live with inequality on a daily basis. They recognized that the primary solution to the problem of inequality is education and noted that children should be encouraged and helped to complete their high school education. The study found stark discrepancies in education in Alachua County:

- The percentage of black third graders proficient in reading is 27.7%, less than half of the non-Hispanic white proficiency (59 %). The proficiency level in the Gainesville Empowerment Zone is even lower, with only 13% of third graders at Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Elementary School scoring at or above grade level⁴ and 26% of third graders at W. A. Metcalfe Elementary scoring at or above grade level.⁵
- Black students are 5.2 times more likely to get suspended from school than White children.

⁴ FSA Testing Scorecard: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Elementary School

<https://data.gainesville.com/school/fsa/alachua/010341/marjorie-kinnan-rawlings-elementary-school/ela/2021-22>

⁵ FSA Testing Scorecard: W. A. Metcalfe Elementary School.

<https://data.gainesville.com/school/fsa/alachua/010101/w-a-metcalfe-elementary-school/ela/2021-22/>

- Black households live in neighborhoods with the lowest school proficiency scores. In other words, Alachua County’s Black residents are the poorest, the most concentrated by race and poverty, and live near the poorest performing schools. White residents experience the opposite situation.⁶

Both the experts and community members of color recognized that providing students with a high-quality educational experience will have a significant impact. As stated in the report, “a successfully educated resident will have a higher lifetime income, more and better employment opportunities, and is less likely to become involved with the criminal justice system.”

The potential of early education to help children and improve communities is significant and has been researched extensively. During the first five years of life, 80 to 90% of a child’s brain develops, forming the foundation for future learning. Research shows that all children benefit from high-quality preschool, with low-income children and English language learners benefiting the most.

U.S.-based as well as international studies consistently show that:

- Small and large preschool programs improve outcomes for children from disadvantaged families.
- Preschool programs raise children’s school readiness.
- The benefits of high-quality preschool programs persist into adolescence or young adulthood.
- High-quality child care that enables mothers to enter the labor market pays for itself through increases in family income.
- High-quality preschool pays for itself, both by raising students’ overall achievement and by reducing inequality of achievement.⁷
- Children of color (Black and Hispanic) benefit significantly more than white children from preschool.⁸

In Florida, only 57% of pre-K children were considered “ready for kindergarten” in 2020.⁹ VPK starts at 4 years of age, so the majority of 3-year-olds are not enrolled in educational settings. In Florida, in 2019, 40,632 children (aged 3 to 5) were enrolled in Head Start.

⁶ Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County.

https://www.behr.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Research%20Reports/ri1_baseline_report.pdf

⁷ Waldfogel, J. (2015). The role of preschool in reducing inequality.

<https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/219/pdfs/role-of-preschool-in-reducing-inequality.pdf>

⁸ Bassok, D. (2020). Do Black and Hispanic children benefit more from preschool? Understanding differences in preschool effects across racial groups. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21077867/>

⁹ (The Star Early Literacy assessment has been administered as the statewide kindergarten screening since 2016. This data is from the fall of 2020, when public schools administered the screening to 133,632 kindergarteners.) Division of Early Learning. Annual Report 2021-2022.

<https://www.floridaearlylearning.com/Content/Uploads/floridaearlylearning.com/images/DEL%20Annual%20Report%202021-2022%20FINAL.pdf>

Nearly 40% of Floridians live in childcare “deserts” where there are at least three times as many children as there are available certified childcare slots.¹⁰ Alachua County is classified as a childcare desert according to the Center for American Progress.¹¹ Some areas of Gainesville have 19 children per licensed childcare slot. In terms of the availability of high-quality childcare programs, the Gainesville Empowerment Zone is a childcare desert. There is only one Gold Seal school in the 32609 zip code. Between 2018 and 2020, the majority of the VPK (private and faith-based) in the Gainesville Empowerment Zone were either on probation or categorized as “low performing.”¹²

The lack of childcare options has significant economic impacts from the community level to the national level:

- In 2020, 94% of parents adjusted their career path due to childcare expenses, 42% reduced their work hours, 26% switched to another job, and an additional 26% left the workforce altogether¹³.
- A lack of childcare causes businesses to lose an estimated \$12.7 billion annually due to employee absenteeism¹⁴.
- Working families who can’t access affordable childcare lose \$8.3 billion in wages annually.

On the other hand, when families have access to stable, high-quality child care working parents can increase their work hours, miss fewer work days, and pursue further education. Simply by enabling mothers to enter the labor market, high-quality child care pays for itself through increases in family income.¹⁵

Starting a family center that will be a beacon in the community is the logical next step in addressing the long-standing systemic inequities in Alachua County that are exemplified in the Gainesville Empowerment Zone. The Gainesville Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center aims to remedy the childcare shortage and the academic achievement gap by providing year-round, extended-day childcare, and more ambitiously to provide an educational setting for infants, toddlers, and young children.

Goals:

- Provide children with a high-quality early childhood educational program.
- Provide high-quality year-round, full-day childcare for working families. GEZFLC will serve at least 76 children and their families every year. As children graduate from the VPK program, new children and their families will begin.
- Reach consistently high levels of attendance among students. At least 85% of students will be in attendance each day, and less than 10% of students will be chronically absent during the year (excluding ACPS district school closures)

¹⁰ Child Care Deserts. Center for American Progress. <https://childcaredeserts.org/2018/?state=FL&split=true>

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² from a search by zipcode (32609) on: <https://vpkrates.floridaearlylearning.com/home/report?id=5526>

¹³ United Way Suncoast. The State of Early Learning: A Childcare Crisis. <https://unitedwaysuncoast.org/what-we-do/education/state-of-early-learning-a-childcare-crisis-2/>

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid*

- Lower the achievement gap between white and black students over time. This can be measured by early childhood assessments, kindergarten readiness testing, 3rd grade reading levels on standardized testing, and high school graduation rates.
- Engage parents as active partners in the development of their child. GEZFLC will offer many opportunities for the parents to actively participate and assist in planning our parent program, including parent classes, parent coffee hours, and monthly parent meetings. Parents will contribute educational and/or behavioral goals for their individual child based on the child's assessments and developmentally appropriate practices.
- Recruit and retain high-quality teachers. Teachers will be recruited at our open house, social media, professional job searches/listings. New teacher hires will need a National CDA or be willing to complete it within the first year of employment. Through TEACH scholarships, staff will be encouraged and supported to continue their formal education. GEZFLC's starting hourly rate will be \$15.00 an hour. Full-time staff will have health insurance, PTO and paid holidays.

Gainesville For All's successful fundraising efforts are evidence of high enthusiasm for this project. So far more than \$300,000 have been raised in the community (private donations and grants) since it has been announced. Canvassing in the local community has provided evidence of widespread support for the project.

The school opening will be announced through flyers and canvassing the neighborhood and promoted through social media and the news media. The Early Learning Coalition will help to publicize the opening. The GEZFLC will also host an open house for families and the community.

The program will be accessible to families who qualify for School Readiness under the School Readiness Act designed to assist low-income, working families. Families and children will be eligible based on criteria defined by School Readiness Act as well as VPK guidelines. The Early Learning Coalition and the School Board of Alachua County will help identify eligible families. The administrative staff at GEZFLC will provide one-on-one assistance to families with eligibility and enrollment.

Community Engagement

Gainesville For All has been engaging the community since 2016. Since the Gainesville Empowerment Zone was identified, the neighborhood was canvassed three times over the past four years in order to assess the needs of residents. GNV4All General Body Meetings have been held every other month since 2020 either in-person or virtually. GNV4All also engages the community via its newsletter (more than 1,000 subscribers), and social media presence (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

GEZFLC will function as a hub of community resources where we will connect families in need with a variety of services at one easily accessible site. By providing high-quality early education and facilitating access to critically needed resources in our community, we can set individuals up for success in school and in life. With a better educational foundation, we can improve their academic experience in all grade levels, interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline by reducing the students' interactions with the criminal justice system, and help address income inequality by increasing their chances of achieving more income in the future.

GEZFLC already partners with these local organizations and agencies:

- Alachua County Public Schools
- W. A. Metcalfe Elementary school
- City of Gainesville
- Alachua County
- North Central Florida Chapter of Florida Association of the Education of Young Children
- Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County
- Children’s Trust of Alachua County
- University of Florida, specifically the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence In Early Childhood Studies, the Lastinger Center for Learning and Flamingo Early Learning, the College of Building Construction, the Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Art, the Harn Museum of Art, the College of Dentistry, and the UF Campaign for Charities
- Alachua County NAACP
- Partnership for Strong Families
- Catholic Charities Bureau and the local faith community
- Santa Fe College
- Community Hospice of Alachua County
- The Cade Museum
- Library Partnership
- Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Children (HIPPPY)
- Cox Cable

Use of Evidence

All children will be in classrooms with teachers trained in research-based Creative and HighScope curriculums, which include assessment tools approved and recommended by the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County. The Creative curriculum boasts use of Teaching Strategies GOLD, which connects teachers, children and families to engaging learning experiences, informative data and stronger partnerships. It is considered by many researchers as a leading early learning platform that empowers teachers to easily identify and respond to each child’s needs.

In Detroit, the public school district is partnering with Teaching Strategies GOLD to implement an integrated solution, including the Creative Curriculum, alongside embedded professional development, and coaching. Within the first year of implementation, students demonstrated strong growth in meeting or exceeding widely held expectations across every domain and displayed significant gains in kindergarten readiness.

Lesley Jennings, program supervisor for Detroit’s early childhood program, describes the Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD as seamless integration. “They are embedded tightly together and work hand in hand. I don’t know how you would do curriculum or assessment without the other successfully.”

After only one year, Detroit’s preschool students meeting widely held expectations rose from 22.2 percent to 63.8 percent in language and from 29.6 percent to 79.1 percent in literacy.

Creative and Teaching strategies have impacted more than 15 million children over the past 10 years , including 270,000 classrooms since 2018 alone. Its ecosystem brings together all essential elements of a high-quality early learning program.

As for High Scope, research conducted at a national level involving children from different backgrounds has shown that those who attend HighScope programs score higher on measures of development. The HighScope curriculum defines itself as “a set of *teaching practices* for adults and *content* for children’s learning in all areas of development”. It is characterized by a play-based and child-centered approach in an active learning environment. In a HighScope classroom, children are guided to explore, interact, and exercise their creative imagination through purposeful play.

In the infant-toddler environment, “key strategies for adult-child interactions are touching, holding, playing alongside infants and toddlers at their level and pace, communicating in give-and-take exchanges verbally and nonverbally, respecting children’s choices and encouraging their efforts, acknowledging children’s strong emotions, and involving toddlers in resolving conflicts. The space is organized into play and care areas that serve the needs of infants and toddlers and stocked with a variety of sensory-motor materials that infants and toddlers can reach, explore, and play with in their own way at their own pace. Infants and toddlers are free to move about, explore materials, exercise creativity, and solve problems.”¹⁶ Six content areas guide the teaching and learning process:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development and Health
- Communication, Language, and Literacy
- Cognitive Development
- Creative Arts

The preschool classroom is equipped with “diverse, open-ended materials that reflect children’s home, culture, and language.” It is organized and labeled to promote independence and encourage children to carry out their intentions. Every day is guided by a consistent framework. “Children engage in both individual and social play, participate in small- and large-group activities, assist with cleanup, socialize during meals, develop self-care skills, and exercise their small and large muscles. The most important segment of the daily routine is the plan-do-review sequence, in which children make decisions about what they will do, carry out their ideas, and reflect upon their activities with adults and other children.” Content areas include Physical Development and Health; Language, Literacy, and Communication; Mathematics; Creative Arts; Science and Technology; and Social Studies.¹⁷

More on the history of the program can be found at <https://highscope.org/who-we-are/>

¹⁶ <https://highscope.org/our-practice/infant-toddler-curriculum/>

¹⁷ <https://highscope.org/our-practice/preschool-curriculum/>

In order to document the growth in infants through preschool-aged children, we will use COR Advantage, developed by HighScope Educational Research Foundation. It is built on 36 items that best prepare children for school success. It includes an online tool that summarizes data, “enabling teachers to create individualized lesson plans and detailed reports on child and classroom progress” and “delivering consistent data administrators can rely on to meaningfully guide their program to the next level”.¹⁸ With its focus on development rather than age, it is appropriate for children with special needs. COR Advantage is aligned to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Common Core State Standards, and early learning state standards. In addition, we will also use the Florida Department of Education's VPK Pre- and Post- Assessment. In order to evaluate program quality, we will use CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System). It measures the quality of educator-child interactions. It aims to improve teaching quality through tailored and individualized professional development.

Project Inventory

Project [Identification Number]: to be assigned

[Project Name]: GNV4ALL Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center

Funding amount: \$350,000.00 (one-time, first year of operations)

Project Expenditure Category: [3.1, Education Assistance: Early Learning]

* End of Report

¹⁸ <https://highscope.org/cor-advantage/>