



# PROGRESS REPORT

A report to the Children's Trust of Alachua County on 2024 operations of the **GAINESVILLE EMPOWERMENT ZONE CENTER**

**We Are Growing Greatness!**



**SUBMITTED BY:**  
**GAINESVILLE FOR ALL**

# Summary

- We opened up the Gainesville Empowerment Zone Family Learning Center on the campus of Metcalfe Elementary School on August 10th.
  - We're 'growing greatness' year-round, 5 days a week, 11 hours a day!
  - The Beber Report in 2018 laid out for this community, in great detail, the gross inequities and disparities that exist here. The problems outlined were particularly acute in education.
  - GNV4ALL is tackling these problems systematically. We're focusing on children from low-income households ages six weeks to 4 years old in efforts to prepare them for kindergarten. Assessments taken at the start of the school year and mid-year are already showing our children are performing above average.
  - The GEZFLC at the end of March had 41 children enrolled, and 22 of them or 40.3% percent are receiving scholarship assistance from us .
  - We have reduced our rates for the ensuing school year, which begins in August 2024.
  - At the FLC, our children are beneficiaries of a curriculum taught by college trained and state certified professionals.
  - We have a professional whose sole job is family engagement. She does everything from finding out the needs of our families and connecting them to vital community services
  - Recent assessments of our GEZFLC students show that 28.57% are currently above average and 42.8% are at average.
  - Our first VPK Assessment Observation Classroom Report was completed in the last week of March and we fared well. (We scored on the high end of the mid range with a 5.53. Six and seven are considered excellent.)
  - A new report commissioned by the Bob Graham Center for Public Service evaluated our program and found that staff and families agreed we are in step with our mission of narrowing the achievement gap long term and preparing kindergarten-ready children in the short term.
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# GEZFLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Accomplishment 1: Renovations

- We renovated the 8,000 square foot building at Metcalfe Elementary School, provided by the Alachua County School Board, to meet Florida Department of Children and Families and state health and safety requirements.
- Gainesville-based Robert Kelly Construction Co. commenced work in the fall of 2022 under a \$127,000 contract, work was completed summer 2023.
- The work included: installation of kitchen, laundry and bathroom equipment, electrical wiring, sidewalks, fencing, new doors and cabinets.
- The work was fully funded by contributions received from private donors and grants
- This week a security gate will be coming up around the center.



# GEZFLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Accomplishment 2: Our Diverse Staff

- James F. Lawrence is serving as acting executive director of the GEZFLC. He is a founder of Gainesville for All, which created the GEZFLC as a major part of its social justice advocacy. Lawrence is the retired editorial page editor of upstate New York's second largest newspaper.
- Schuran Cartwright, a native of South Florida, is our current Center Director. Cartwright, who came to Gainesville from the West Palm Beach area nearly two years ago to work in child care, holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services and an associate degree in early childhood education. She has 20 years of experience in child care.

- Sofiya Nazarov is Executive Administrator
- Victoria Liu is Internal accountant.
- Michael Solomon is external accountant
- Trish White is our Family Engagement Specialist
- Takeshia Jackson is our Toddler 1 yr old Assistant Teacher
- Kathleen Reid is our Toddler 1 yr old Assistant Teacher
- Zoe Lackey is our VPK/ 2 yr old -Lead Teacher.

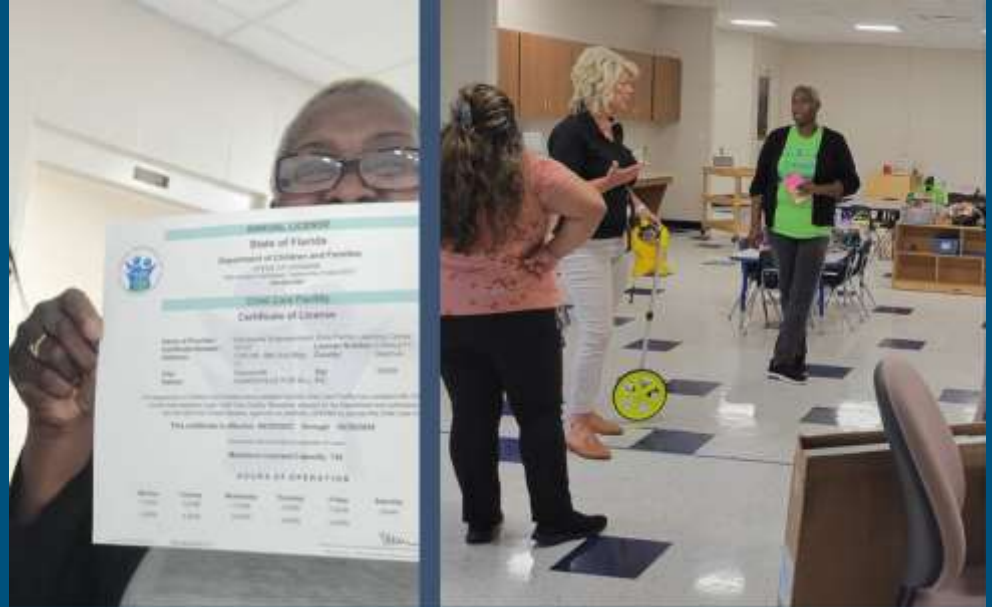
- TaKeshia Jackson is our 1 year old Teacher Assistant
- Atlanta Allen is our Infant Teacher Assistant
- Iza Hill is our Assistant Teacher
- Carolyn Fields is our Infant Teacher
- Samantha Belmore is our Preschool 3 yr old Teacher
- Alicia Mego is our Assistant Teacher/ Floater
- Dericashia Myers is our VPK - Assistant Teacher
- Phelesha Mattis is our VPK/Preschool-Floater



# GEZFLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Accomplishment 3: DCF Licensing

- Our staff seemingly worked around the clock to meet rigid DCF requirements for opening a childcare facility.
- We performed a wide range of tasks such as preparing bids for furniture and playground equipment, purchased books, researched local tuition rates and developed policy manuals.
- Our DCF license was granted on June 6, 2023



# GEZFLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Accomplishment 4: ELC Approval

- We obtained certification from the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, which provides the bulk of operations funding.
- This was no easy task given the paperwork, which included background investigations for each employee and meeting staffing and curriculum requirements.
- We decided to utilize an ELC recommended curriculum: Creative Curriculum/Teaching Strategies Gold.
- The curriculum offers support to staff via virtual training and one-on-one phone calls.
- It also includes an assessment tool, which is very useful in tracking a child's progress.

Individualize learning with one platform, resources of the highest quality, and connected workstreams.

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Whole-child curriculum connected to assessment to individualize learning



Incorporates all essentials for transformative family engagement



Data and reporting to inform instruction and drive program efficacy



Intentional support for every professional development need, from beginner to expert

# GEZFLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Accomplishment 5: Playground Opened

- Our state-of-the-art playground serving toddlers to 4 year-olds opened in early November after more than a year of preparation that included an extensive bidding process to find the right fit for a vendor.
- We settled on the vendor used by ACPs
- More importantly, our children are thrilled.
- We invested more than \$100,000 in playground equipment that will benefit children in our community for decades to come.



# GEZFLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Accomplishment 6: Connecting with the Community

### Family Engagement

- We work closely with community resource organizations to meet the needs of our hard-pressed families. Catholic Charities will bring the Weekend Hunger Backpack Program to families who have food insecurity and not be receiving assistance via siblings enrolled in public school.
- Our Family Engagement Specialist, Trish White, is a staff member dedicated to supporting the GEZFLC families. She has had many referrals and meetings with families. She has also organized many community events with more to come!
- We've assisted families experiencing homelessness, eviction and suicidal thoughts.
- One struggling mother talked of committing suicide as she dropped off her child. Staff members quickly alerted the director who along with other staff members talked her down and encouraged her to seek professional counseling. The mother and her children are now in family therapy.

### Volunteers

- We have many volunteers who regularly give their time and hearts to GEZFLC children.
- We have volunteers from Alachua County Library who provide storytime, music and other fun activities for our children.
- We have volunteers that have painted murals at the center for us and play piano for the children.
- This Spring Semester we have six interns from the University of Florida who have been serving at the Center. We have interns who will be joining us for Summer Semester as well. We also have many dedicated volunteers from the Gainesville for All University of Florida Chapter who put in many volunteer hours.
- Meanwhile, businesses such as Vystar Credit Union make their financial literacy program available to our parents free of charge.



# Challenges

## Challenge 1

- The biggest hurdle we've faced so far has been making our services affordable for our struggling families.
- Our family learning center not only provides a highly rated curriculum and family services, but we pay competitive salaries to our staff, which includes college- educated professionals. We also provide health insurance and retirement benefits.
- Low- income families are our target audience, so we felt compelled to make our services as affordable as possible.
- Less than two months after opening, we began making available scholarship assistance of up to 50 percent off parent contributions and beyond reimbursement rates paid by ELC.
- Reducing our rates is a significant loss in revenue but we hope that we can find private and public monies to make up for the deficit.

## Challenge 2

- We had hoped to open our doors with 50 children but last- minute obstacles such as delays in getting our ELC contract approved left families with no choice but to enroll their children elsewhere to utilize their vouchers.
- Consequently, we opened with three infants, five one-year olds, two 2-year-olds, three 3-year-olds, and six VPK children totaling 19 children and five staff.
- As of December 1, we had 38 enrolled children and 8 teachers.

# Challenges

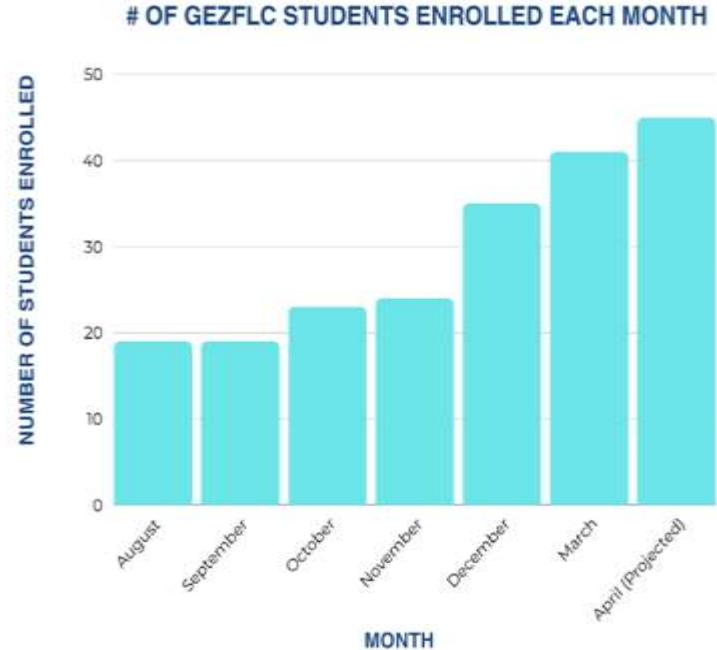
## Challenge 3

- We had planned on utilizing the federally funded Child Care Food Program starting on opening day but were notified just weeks before opening that the certification process would take longer than expected.
- We were told that we had to be open for at least three months to qualify.
- We had to find an alternative and sought assistance from Alachua County Public Schools Food Service, which agreed to supply our meals at a cost of about \$2,000 per month for our 30 plus children.
- These unexpected costs had not been budgeted.

# Relevant Data

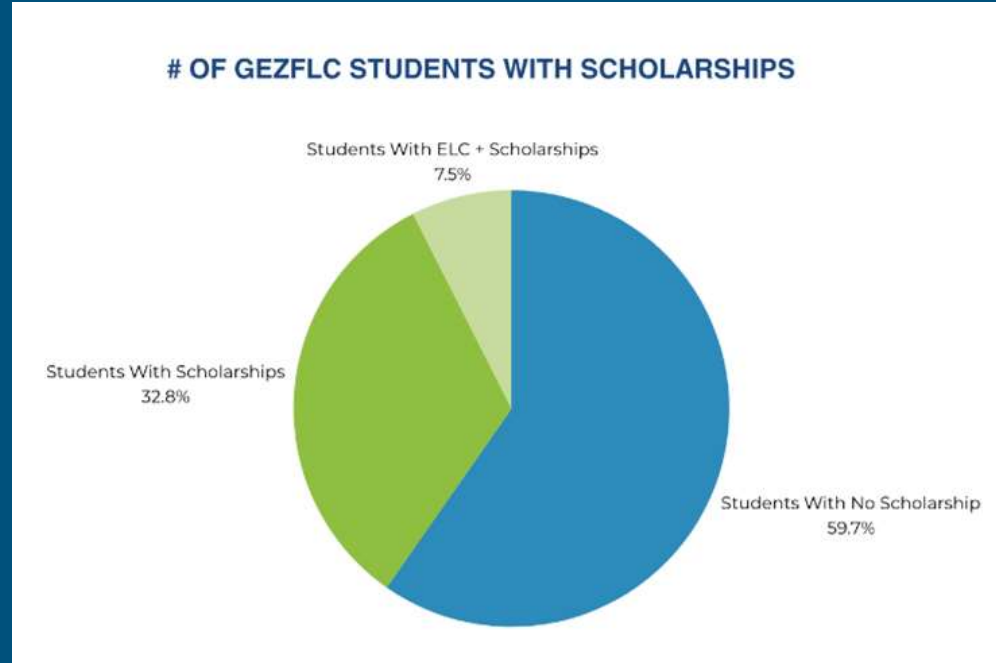
- In October we began awarding scholarships to assist families in paying for GEZFLC tuition rates.
- The graph shows the correlation in enrollment rates and the timing of when scholarship began being awarded.
- This data demonstrates that a big obstacle for these families in enrolling their children in quality early childhood learning is the cost of tuition.
- We currently have families in the process of registering and are projected to have 45 students at the beginning of April.

## Relevant Data- GEZFLC Student Enrollment



# Relevant Data-GEZFLC Student Scholarships

- Currently we have a total of 40.3% of our students who need assistance through GEZFLC Scholarships. Of the 40.3% students, 32.8% receive only our scholarship and 7.5% receive our scholarship in addition to ELC funding.
- One of our interns, Alayna Dean, conducted a research project funded through the Bob Graham Center for Public Service as a Reubin Askew Scholar Project. While surveying GEZFLC parents, Alayna found that 75% of the parents surveyed said that scholarship funding is pivotal to be able to have their children attend the GEZFLC.



# Relevant Data

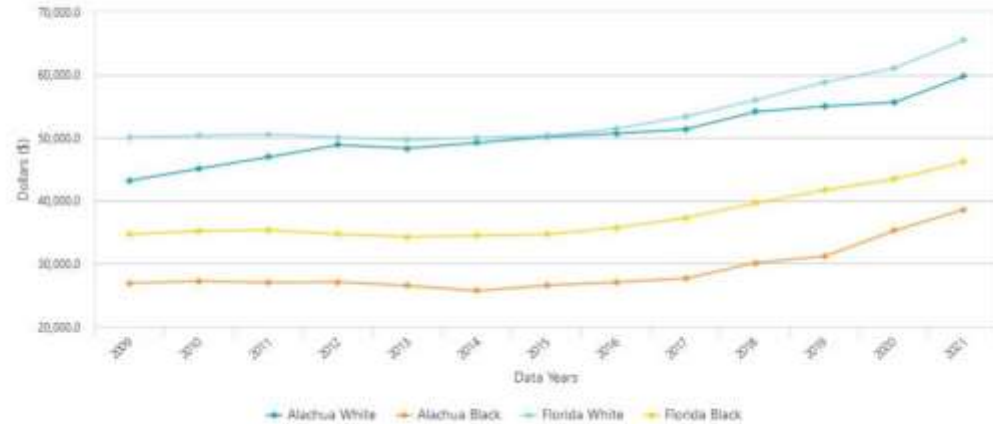
- This graph shows the stark difference in income between white and black citizens in Alachua County as well as in the state of Florida.

## Relevant Data-Median Incomes in Alachua County



Florida Department of Health  
Bureau of Community Health Assessment  
Division of Public Health Statistics and Performance Management

Median Household Income, Single Year



# Relevant Data

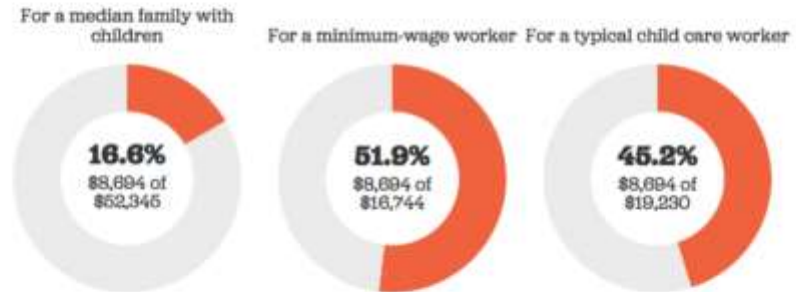
- In 2021 the average household income of Black Alachua County Citizens was \$38,610.00, based on this average, the share of childcare cost compared to income for Black families in Alachua county is 22.5% of their income.
- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, childcare is affordable if it costs no more than 10% of a family's income.
- This percentage is more than double that.

## Relevant Data-Cost of Childcare Compared to Income

The following graph shows childcare costs in Florida vs. Income.

### How big a bite does child care take?

*Infant care costs as a share of income in Florida*



### Average cost of infant care in Florida: \$8,894/year (\$725/month)

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, child care is affordable if it costs no more than 10% of a family's income. By this standard, only 30.3% of Florida families can afford infant care.

Source: Economic Policy Institute: *The cost of child care in the United States*

ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

# GAINESVILLE EMPOWERMENT ZONE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER

## 2024 BUDGET OVERVIEW

- Operational and capital needs are sourced from tuition, private grants, and reimbursable grants from the City of Gainesville and Alachua County.
- The absence of office rent significantly bolsters our financial stability.
- \$209,771.87 is projected to be used from reimbursable grants from the City of Gainesville and Alachua County to cover a portion of salaries and wages. The grants are projected to be depleted the end of June 2024.
- We envision operating at 100% capacity from August onwards.
- Annual operating expenses are a total of \$167,205.19.
- \$29,297.26 is allocated to office supplies, technology, and insurance.
- \$13,000.00 is for essential services such as electricity and internet.
- \$10,500.00 is for program expenses, specifically for marketing to promote GNV4ALL initiatives.
- \$712,577.87 is for salaries and administrative costs including compensation for key personnel: an executive director, assistant director, family engagement specialist, teachers, teacher assistants, and additional staff.
- The budget incorporates covering FICA, reemployment tax, and professional fees.
- At full capacity we will employ 5 full-time teachers and 8 full-time teacher assistants to serve 87 children.
- We benefit from hundreds of volunteer hours of professionals, executives and talented individuals.
- The President and Executive Director of GNV4ALL receives no compensation for his services.
- The GEZFLC offers partial and whole scholarships to families who demonstrate financial hardship.
- The demand for scholarships is greater than our ability to fund and we anticipate greater demand in the future.
- Annual budget for 2025 projected at \$902,000, with shortfall of \$186,000. The annual budget for the remainder of calendar year 2024 is \$95,2418.06
- GNV4ALL is actively pursuing other initiatives to fund the operations of the Family Learning Center.