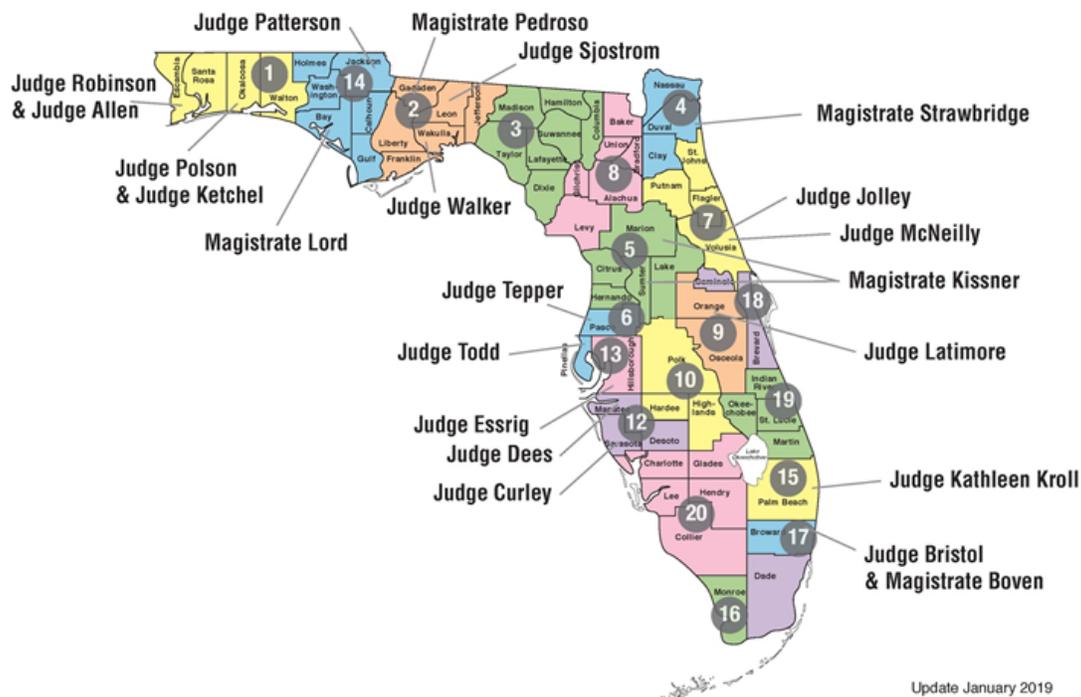


FLORIDA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COURTS

Early Childhood Courts are a type of problem-solving court.

Problem-solving courts address the root causes of justice system involvement through specialized dockets, multidisciplinary teams, and a nonadversarial approach. Offering evidence-based treatment, judicial supervision, and accountability, problem-solving courts provide individualized interventions for participants, thereby reducing recidivism and promoting confidence and satisfaction with the justice system process.



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FLORIDA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COURTS

★ Target group: abused and neglected children who enter the dependency court system before age three

STATEWIDE PARTNERS

- ❖ Office of the State Courts Administrator
- ❖ Department of Children and Families
- ❖ Florida Guardian ad Litem Program
- ❖ Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, Florida State University
- ❖ Florida Institute for Child Welfare
- ❖ Other universities and child-serving agencies

STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

- ❖ Best practice standards and certification
- ❖ Statewide training events
- ❖ Trauma-responsive education
- ❖ Technical assistance for local teams
- ❖ Treatment and service provider capacity-building
- ❖ Resource materials
- ❖ Legislative activities
- ❖ Statewide data collection
- ❖ Maintenance of statewide data system
- ❖ Evaluation
- ❖ Continuous quality improvement
- ❖ Funding and sustainability

LOCAL PARTNERS

Court Team*

- ❖ Judge
- ❖ Community coordinator
- ❖ Caseworker
- ❖ Guardian ad litem
- ❖ Attorneys
- ❖ Clinician
- ❖ Parents
- ❖ Caregivers
- ❖ Parent supports
- ❖ Early intervention providers
- ❖ Infant mental health providers
- ❖ Child-serving agencies
- ❖ Parent service providers
- ❖ Department of Children and Families leadership
- ❖ Community-based care leadership
- ❖ Child advocates
- ❖ Health and dental providers
- ❖ Funders
- ❖ And more...



ACTIVITIES

- Judicial leadership
- Monthly case review court hearings
- Monthly family team meetings
- Early childhood services
- Co-parenting
- Evidence-based treatment
- Frequent family contact
- Concurrent planning from day 1
- Continuous quality improvement

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

- Heals trauma and promotes parenting capacity
- Builds attachment
- Tracks progress
- Ensures developmental and family supports
- Placement stability

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Decreases time to a permanent home
- Reduces recurrence of maltreatment
- Improves child well-being
- Increases cost savings for taxpayers
- Breaks the intergenerational cycle of child abuse
- Enhances public confidence and satisfaction with the child welfare system

*The judge led court team is comprised of key community stakeholders who are committed to restructuring the way the community responds to the needs of infants and toddlers in child welfare. Members of the court team who are directly involved with a family's case (including the parents but excluding the judge) have monthly Family Team Meetings to support the family and address specific needs.

WHY EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT?

In the midst of an opioid epidemic, the single largest age cohort coming into out-of-home care in the child welfare system is the group ages zero to three years old.



The most opportune time for brain development to hard wire for healthy development is ages zero to three.



Early Childhood Court has proven effectiveness in timely permanency and reduction of re-abuse.



Early Childhood Court provides tax payer cost-savings through efficiency and effectiveness, and by breaking the intergenerational cycle of abuse.

Measuring Florida's Early Childhood Court (ECC) Success

The Office of Court Improvement conducted an analysis of ECC children (356 children) and non-ECC children (366 children) whose cases were closed between 2014 and 2018. The non-ECC population consisted of a random sample similar to the ECC population. Based on this analysis, ECC children attained permanency through reunification **approximately 8.5 months quicker** than non-ECC children. The data below highlight findings from this comparative analysis:

ECC Data Analysis	ECC	Non-ECC
Reunification (average days from removal to closure)	477	736
Overall Permanency (average days from removal to closure)	553	696
Number of Children Removed After Case Closure (Re-removals)	22	36
Total number of ECC youth served:	799	

Key Findings from National Research

Early Childhood Courts (Safe Babies Court Teams Project)

- ❖ Florida's early childhood court is modeled after the national Safe Babies Court Teams Project, which has a scientific rating of "3" (promising research evidence) and a "high" child welfare system relevance level on the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. It shows potential for: promoting greater collaboration among the courts, the child welfare system, and community providers to meet the needs of very young children; realizing positive safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes, and preserving family connections; and, applying the science of early childhood development to the court process.
- ❖ 97% of the identified service needs were met. The children achieved timely permanency. There was increased parent-child contact. More than two-thirds remained in 1 or 2 placements. 99.05% of these children were protected from further maltreatment (James Bell and Associates; Hafford, McDonnell, Kass, DeSantis, & Dong, 2009).
- ❖ The Safe Babies Court Teams Project data show that the project yielded a range of \$8,500 to \$18,000 of in-kind costs per child (one grant dollar generated another dollar of in-kind support).
- ❖ Children exit foster care significantly faster than the comparison group. Savings generated from their earlier exits are estimated at an average of \$7,300 per child. Children are more likely to remain with biological family members (Foster, E.M., McCombs-Thornton, K.L., 2012, Investing in Our Most Vulnerable: A Cost Analysis of the ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Teams Initiative. Birmingham, AL: Economics for the Public Good, LLC.