



## **Hobe Sound Strong Start**

In 2018, the Chest took a step back to determine what would make the most difference in the lives and future of Hobe Sound residents. It identified early childhood education as a key driver of life success and a key gap of service in Hobe Sound. In 2018 there were 464 children under the age of 5 in Hobe Sound, only 56% were receiving a pre-school education and only 46% were kindergarten ready.

Children who are not kindergarten ready are less likely to be reading proficient in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Children who are not reading proficient in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are more likely to drop out of high school, be arrested or incarcerated, be high utilizers of social services and have lower lifetime earnings than those who are reading proficiently. Research has demonstrated that every dollar invested in promoting kindergarten readiness yields eight dollars in downstream benefit from wages earned and costs avoided.

The Chest had a dream – by 2025 every pre-school child would have a place to go to school and the means to get there. Our goal was to increase the percentage of children receiving a preschool education from 50% to 90% (an increase of 157 children) and improve the kindergarten readiness scores from 46% to 80%.

### **RESULTS ACHIEVED TO DATE**

Hobe Sound Strong Start has invested over \$1.5mil in the creation of 5 new classrooms at the Hobe Sound Early Learning Center and Banner Lake Early Learning Center. Space for 100 new students was created. HSSS also has employed a Hispanic social worker to educate families on the value of preschool and assist them with the enrollment process.

Over the past year 48 children who would never have attended preschool have attended school. Many of these children come from Spanish-speaking households. Teachers tell us that within 6 months the children become English language fluent. Imagine being bilingual at 4 years of age!

Also, more than 325 children have had weekly arts and music classes through Lighthouse ArtCenter and the Music Together program. These classes have nurtured creativity, the development of problem-solving skills, and language acquisition. Over 1,500 classes have been taught.

The effect has been that the kindergarten readiness rate is increasing. When the project started, 46% of our in-coming kindergarteners were assessed as “ready to learn”. Now that figure is 86% for program participants. And these gains are having positive downstream effects; 60% of program participants are reading proficient in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, vs. 47% of their non-participating peers.