

By Representatives Warner and Lynn

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to school readiness; creating
3 s. 411.01, F.S.; providing legislative intent;
4 providing definitions; creating the State
5 School Readiness Governing Board; providing
6 membership requirements, meeting requirements,
7 public records requirements, and
8 responsibilities and duties of the governing
9 board; authorizing the governing board to adopt
10 rules; providing eligibility requirements for
11 the school readiness program; requiring
12 performance standards and outcome measures
13 developed and approved by the governing board
14 to meet certain guidelines; providing for the
15 establishment of a school readiness coalition
16 in each county; providing membership of the
17 coalitions; providing for implementation and
18 phasing-in of the school readiness program;
19 requiring the development of a plan; providing
20 for exceptions to law; providing for coalition
21 initiation grants; providing incentive bonuses;
22 providing for the funding of the school
23 readiness program; requiring each coalition to
24 develop a reimbursement rate schedule for all
25 programs funded by the coalition; providing
26 requirements for school readiness agents;
27 providing for parental choice with respect to
28 child care arrangements and payments; requiring
29 the Department of Education and the Office of
30 the Comptroller to establish an electronic
31 funds transfer system; requiring the Office of

1 Program Policy Analysis to provide fiscal
2 oversight; requiring each coalition to conduct
3 an annual evaluation and submit a report to the
4 governing board; creating s. 229.567, F.S.;
5 requiring the Department of Education to
6 require use by the school districts of school
7 readiness screening instruments adopted by the
8 governing board; creating the School Readiness
9 Program Needs-Assessment Conference; requiring
10 the conference to develop information relating
11 to school readiness programs; specifying the
12 principals of the conference; providing an
13 effective date.

14
15 WHEREAS, the voters of the State of Florida, in the
16 November 1998 General Election, amended Section 1 of Article
17 IX of the State Constitution to state that it is "a paramount
18 duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education
19 of all children residing within its borders," and

20 WHEREAS, while the state's public school system
21 educates the kindergarten through 12th grade population, there
22 is no adequate provision for an educational component to early
23 childhood programs for the state's at-risk
24 birth-to-kindergarten population, NOW, THEREFORE,

25
26 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

27
28 Section 1. Section 411.01, Florida Statutes, is
29 created to read:

30 411.01 School readiness program.--

31 (1) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.--

1 (a) The Legislature recognizes that high quality
2 school readiness programs increase children's chances of
3 achieving future educational success and becoming productive
4 members of society. It is the intent of the Legislature that
5 such programs be developmentally appropriate, involve parents
6 as their child's first teacher, serve as preventive measures
7 for children at risk of future school failure, enhance the
8 educational readiness of all children, and support family
9 education. Each school readiness program shall provide the
10 elements necessary to prepare children for school, including
11 health screening and referral and an appropriate educational
12 program.

13 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature that school
14 readiness programs be operated on a full-day, year-round basis
15 to enable parents to work and become financially
16 self-sufficient.

17 (c) It is the intent of the Legislature that school
18 readiness programs not exist as isolated programs, but build
19 upon existing services and work in cooperation with other
20 programs for young children, and that school readiness
21 programs be coordinated and funding integrated to achieve full
22 effectiveness.

23 (d) It is the intent of the Legislature that the
24 implementation of a school readiness program be phased in on a
25 county-by-county basis. Each county's school readiness program
26 shall have available to it funding from all the county's
27 publicly funded early education and child care programs,
28 including Florida First Start programs, Even-Start programs,
29 prekindergarten early intervention programs, Head Start
30 programs, programs offered by public and private providers of
31 child care, preschool programs for children with disabilities,

1 programs for migrant children, Title I programs, subsidized
2 child care programs, teen parent programs, and other services,
3 together with any additional funds appropriated or obtained
4 for purposes of this section, and these programs and services
5 shall be a part of the county's integrated school readiness
6 program.

7 (e) It is the intent of the Legislature that the
8 administration staff at the state level for school readiness
9 programs be kept to a minimum, as the school readiness
10 programs are to be locally designed, operated, and managed,
11 with the state, through the State School Readiness Governing
12 Board, developing only the performance standards, outcome
13 measurements, and data design and review, and approving and
14 reviewing local school readiness coalitions and plans.

15 (f) It is the intent of the Legislature that, by
16 combining funding streams for various existing early education
17 and child care programs, future appropriations for a county's
18 combined school readiness program funding shall not be less
19 than the funding the programs would receive on an uncombined
20 basis for fiscal year 1999-2000.

21 (g) It is the intent of the Legislature that the
22 school readiness program coordinate and operate in conjunction
23 with the district school systems. However, it is also the
24 intent of the Legislature that the school readiness program
25 not be construed as part of the system of free public schools
26 but rather as a separate program for children under the age of
27 kindergarten eligibility, funded separately from the system of
28 free public schools, utilizing a mandatory sliding fee scale,
29 and providing an integrated and seamless system of school
30 readiness services for the state's birth-to-kindergarten
31 population.

1 (h) It is the intent of the Legislature that the
2 federal child care income tax credit be preserved for school
3 readiness programs.

4 (2) DEFINITIONS.--As used in this section, the term:

5 (a) "Governing board" means the State School Readiness
6 Governing Board.

7 (b) "Coalition" means a Local School Readiness
8 Coalition.

9 (c) "Plan" means a coalition's school readiness
10 program implementation plan.

11 (3) STATE SCHOOL READINESS GOVERNING BOARD.--The State
12 School Readiness Governing Board is established in the
13 Executive Office of the Governor.

14 (a) The governing board shall consist of:

15 1. The Lieutenant Governor, or his or her designee.

16 2. The Secretary of the Department of Children and
17 Family Services.

18 3. The Commissioner of Education, or his or her
19 designee.

20 4. The chair of the WAGES Program State Board of
21 Directors.

22 5. The chair of the State Workforce Development Board.

23 6. Six members appointed by the Governor. Four of the
24 Governor's appointees shall be appointed from a list of six
25 nominees, of which three have been submitted by the President
26 of the Senate, and three have been submitted by the Speaker of
27 the House of Representatives.

28
29 The appointed members shall be business, community, and civic
30 leaders in the state who are not elected to public office and
31 who do not earn their income in the early education and child

1 care industry. The members must be geographically and
2 demographically representative of the state. The governing
3 board shall select a chair and a vice chair, and shall appoint
4 an executive director, who is responsible for other staff
5 authorized by the governing board.

6 (b) For purposes of administration of the Federal
7 Child Care and Development Fund, 45 C.F.R. Parts 98 and 99,
8 the governing board may be designated by the Governor as the
9 Lead Agency, and if so designated shall comply with the Lead
10 Agency responsibilities pursuant to federal law.

11 (c) The governing board shall meet quarterly and may
12 meet as often as it deems necessary to carry out its duties
13 and responsibilities. Members of the governing board shall
14 participate without proxy at the quarterly meetings. The
15 governing board may take official action by a majority vote of
16 the members present at any meeting at which a quorum is
17 present. The governing board shall hold its first meeting by
18 August 1, 1999.

19 (d) Members of the governing board are subject to the
20 ethics provisions in part III of chapter 112, and no member
21 may derive any financial benefit from the funds administered
22 by the governing board.

23 (e) Members of the governing board shall serve without
24 compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for per diem
25 and travel expenses incurred in the performance of their
26 duties as provided in s. 112.061, and reimbursement for other
27 reasonable, necessary, and actual expenses.

28 (f) For the purposes of tort liability, the members of
29 the governing board and its employees shall be governed by s.
30 768.28.

31 (g) The governing board shall:

- 1 1. Be responsible for the prudent use of all public
2 and private funds in accordance with all legal and contractual
3 requirements.
- 4 2. Provide final approval and periodic review of
5 coalitions and plans.
- 6 3. Provide leadership for enhancement of school
7 readiness in this state by aggressively establishing a unified
8 approach to the state's efforts toward enhancement of school
9 readiness. In support of this effort, the governing board may
10 develop and implement specific strategies that address the
11 state's school readiness programs, and may make
12 recommendations to move agency staff from the Department of
13 Education, the Department of Health, or the Department of
14 Children and Family Services.
- 15 4. Safeguard the effective use of federal, state,
16 local, and private resources in reducing the need for school
17 readiness programs to achieve the highest possible level of
18 school readiness for the state's children.
- 19 5. Adopt a system for measuring school readiness. The
20 system must include a screening instrument, or instruments,
21 which provide objective data regarding the expectations for
22 school readiness.
- 23 6. Establish a method for collecting data from the
24 screening instrument and establish guidelines for using the
25 data so that the measurement, the data collection, and the use
26 of the data serve the statewide goal that all children will be
27 ready for school. The criteria for determining which data to
28 collect should be the usefulness of the data to state
29 policymakers and local program administrators in administering
30 programs and allocating state funds.
31

1 7. Develop and adopt performance standards and outcome
2 measures which meet the requirements of subsection (5).

3 (h) The governing board may adopt rules necessary to
4 administer the provisions of this section which relate to
5 preparing and implementing the system for school readiness,
6 collecting data, approving local school readiness coalitions
7 and plans, providing a method whereby a coalition can serve
8 two or more counties, and awarding incentives to coalitions.

9 (4) PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY.--The school readiness program
10 shall be established for children under the age of
11 kindergarten eligibility. The program shall be funded from the
12 programs listed in paragraph (1)(d), together with any
13 additional funds appropriated or obtained for purposes of this
14 section, shall be administered by a school readiness agent
15 selected by the coalition, and shall receive funds pursuant to
16 subsection (9). The school readiness agent along with all
17 providers shall make reasonable efforts to accommodate the
18 needs of children for extended-day and extended-year services
19 without compromising the quality of the program. Priority for
20 participation in the school readiness program is as follows:

21 (a) Children under the age of kindergarten eligibility
22 who are:

23 1. Children determined to be at risk of abuse,
24 neglect, or exploitation and who are currently clients of the
25 Children and Family Services Program Office of the Department
26 of Children and Family Services.

27 2. Children at risk of welfare dependency, including
28 economically disadvantaged children, children of participants
29 in the WAGES program, children of migrant farmworkers,
30 children of teen parents, and children from other families at
31

1 risk of welfare dependency due to a family income of less than
2 100 percent of the federal poverty level.

3 3. Children of working families whose family income is
4 equal to or greater than 100 percent, but does not exceed 150
5 percent, of the federal poverty level.

6 (b) Three-year-old children and 4-year-old children
7 who may not be economically disadvantaged but who are students
8 with disabilities and served in a specific part-time or
9 combination of part-time exceptional student education
10 programs with required special services, aids, or equipment
11 and who are reported for funding part-time with the Florida
12 Education Finance Program as exceptional students.

13 (c) Economically disadvantaged children, children with
14 disabilities, and children at risk of future school failure,
15 from birth to 4 years of age, who are served at home through
16 home visitor programs and intensive parent education programs
17 such as the Florida First Start Program.

18 (d) Children who meet federal and state requirements
19 for eligibility for the migrant preschool program but who do
20 not meet the criteria of economically disadvantaged.

21
22 An "economically disadvantaged" child means a child whose
23 family income is below 150 percent of the federal poverty
24 level or who is eligible to participate in the free lunch
25 program. Notwithstanding any change in a family's economic
26 status or in the federal eligibility requirements for free
27 lunch, but subject to additional family contributions in
28 accordance with the sliding fee scale, a child who meets the
29 eligibility requirements upon initial registration for the
30 program shall be considered eligible until the child reaches
31 kindergarten age.

- 1 (5) STANDARDS; OUTCOME MEASURES.--
2 (a) All publicly funded school readiness programs
3 shall be required to meet the performance standards and
4 outcome measures developed and approved by the governing
5 board. These performance standards and outcome measures shall
6 be applicable on a state-wide basis and must:
7 1. Help prepare preschool children to enter
8 kindergarten ready to learn, as measured by a methodology
9 adopted by the governing board with input from the Department
10 of Education.
11 2. Provide extended-day services and extended-year
12 services when needed.
13 3. Include a staff development plan to ensure that the
14 program has qualified professionals.
15 4. Provide for expanded access to community services
16 and resources, including adult literacy assistance, to help
17 families achieve economic self-sufficiency.
18 5. Provide for a simplified point of entry and unified
19 waiting list.
20 6. Serve at least as many children as were served
21 prior to implementation of the program.
22 7. Establish a community plan to increase the number
23 of accredited centers.
24 8. Meet all state licensing guidelines, where
25 applicable.
26
27 The school readiness agent shall be responsible to its
28 coalition for monitoring to ensure the achievement of the
29 expected performance standards and outcome measures. The
30 governing board shall develop a phase-in schedule through
31 which all publicly funded school readiness programs shall be

1 measured by these performance standards. The school readiness
2 agent shall report to its coalition on the achievement of
3 performance standards with recommendations for future funding.

4 (b) All publicly funded school readiness programs
5 shall be required to implement a comprehensive program of
6 children and family services that will enhance the cognitive,
7 social, and physical development of children to achieve the
8 performance standards and outcome measures specified in
9 paragraph(a).

10 (6) LOCAL SCHOOL READINESS COALITIONS.--

11 (a) Each coalition shall consist of the following
12 local officials:

13 1. The Department of Children and Family Services
14 district administrator.

15 2. The district superintendent of schools.

16 3. The regional workforce development board chair or
17 director, where applicable.

18 4. The county health department director or his or her
19 designee.

20 5. The Children's Services Council chair or executive
21 director, if applicable.

22 6. The child care licensing agency head.

23 7. Two members appointed by the Department of Children
24 and Family Services district administrator.

25 8. Two members appointed by the board of county
26 commissioners.

27 9. Two members appointed by the district school board.

28 10. The central child care agency administrator.

29 11. Head Start director or directors.
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1 (b) The central child care agency administrator and
2 the Head Start director or directors shall be nonvoting
3 members.

4 (c) No member of a coalition may appoint a designee to
5 act in his or her place. A member may send a representative to
6 coalition meetings, but that representative will have no
7 voting privileges.

8 (7) IMPLEMENTATION; PHASING-IN OF PROGRAM; EXCEPTIONS
9 TO LAW.--

10 (a) The school readiness program is to be phased-in as
11 prescribed by the procedures for implementation provided in
12 this subsection and subsection (8). Until the county
13 implements its school readiness program, the county shall
14 continue to receive the services identified in paragraph
15 (1)(d) through the various agencies that would be responsible
16 for delivering those services under current law.

17 (b) The school readiness program shall be implemented
18 in any county upon the establishment, with the participation
19 of the district school system and the Department of Children
20 and Family Services Services District, of a coalition for that
21 county; and upon final approval of the coalition and the
22 coalition's plan by the governing board.

23 (c) In order to obtain plan approval by the governing
24 board, the coalition must submit to the governing board a plan
25 that includes strategies to meet the requirements of this
26 section, including:

27 1. Specific eligibility priorities for children within
28 the coalition's county pursuant to subsection (4).

29 2. Performance standards and outcome measures
30 established by the governing board or alternatively, standards
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1 and outcome measures to be used until such time as the
2 governing board adopts such standards and outcome measures.

3 3. Reimbursement rates that have been developed by the
4 coalition.

5
6 As part of the plan, the coalition may request the Governor to
7 apply for a waiver to allow the county to administer the Head
8 Start Program to accomplish the purposes of the school
9 readiness program. If any school readiness plan can
10 demonstrate that specific statutory goals can be achieved more
11 effectively by using procedures that require modification of
12 existing rules, policies, or procedures, a request for a
13 waiver to the governing board may be made as part of the plan.
14 Upon review, the governing board may grant the proposed
15 modification.

16 (d) The coalition may not implement its plan until it
17 submits the plan to and receives approval from the governing
18 board. Once the plan has been approved, services provided
19 under the plan shall be provided through the coalition and its
20 school readiness agent, rather than through the state agencies
21 or departments. The plan shall be reviewed and revised as
22 necessary, but not less than every 3 years.

23 (e) Upon approval by the governing board of a
24 coalition's plan, the provisions of this section shall
25 supersede and prevail over any provisions of ss. 230.2303,
26 230.2305, 230.2306, 383.011, 402.3015, 409.153, 411.204,
27 411.221, 411.222, 411.223, and 411.232.

28 (f) The plan shall then be utilized by the school
29 readiness agent for the coalition to develop and issue a
30 request for proposals for:

31

1 1. Systems support services, including a central
2 agency, child care resource and referral, eligibility
3 determinations, and training of providers.

4 2. Direct enhancement services to families and
5 children.

6
7 System support and direct enhancement services shall be in
8 addition to payments for the placement of children in school
9 readiness programs.

10 (g) Two or more counties may join for the purpose of
11 planning and implementing a school readiness program.

12 (8) COALITION INITIATION GRANTS; INCENTIVE BONUSES.--

13 (a)1. Coalitions that are approved by the governing
14 board by October 1, 1999, shall be eligible for a \$50,000
15 initiation grant to support the coalition in developing its
16 plan.

17 2. Coalitions that are approved by the governing board
18 by March 1, 2000, shall be eligible for a \$25,000 initiation
19 grant to support the coalition in developing its plan.

20 (b) Coalitions that have their plans approved by March
21 1, 2000, shall receive funding from the governing board in
22 fiscal year 2000-2001, and each year thereafter.

23 (c) Upon the governing board's approval of any
24 coalition's plan that clearly shows enhancement in the quality
25 and standards of the school readiness program without
26 diminishing the number of children served in the program, the
27 governing board shall award the coalition an incentive bonus
28 on a per-student-served basis, subject to appropriation.

29 (d) In fiscal year 2000-2001, and each year
30 thereafter, any increases in funding for school readiness
31 programs shall be administered through the coalitions.

1 (e) In fiscal year 2001-2002, the governing board
2 shall request proposals from government agencies and nonprofit
3 corporations for the development and operation of a coalition
4 in each county that does not have an approved coalition by
5 March 1, 2001, unless the county has requested and been
6 granted a waiver by the governing board for good cause.

7 (9) FUNDING; SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM.--

8 (a) It is the intent of this section to establish an
9 integrated and quality seamless service delivery system for
10 all publicly funded early education and child care programs
11 operating in this state.

12 (b) All state funds budgeted for a county for the
13 programs specified in paragraph (1)(d), along with the pro
14 rata share of the state administrative costs of those
15 programs, all federal funds and required local matching funds
16 for a county for programs specified in paragraph (1)(d), and
17 any additional funds appropriated or obtained for purposes of
18 this section, shall be transferred to the school readiness
19 agent for the benefit of the county for implementation of a
20 school readiness program by the coalition and its school
21 readiness agent.

22 (c) All funds transferred to and retained by the
23 school readiness agent shall be invested pursuant to s.
24 18.125. Any interest accruing to the trust fund shall be for
25 the benefit of counties providing a school readiness program.
26 Notwithstanding the provisions of s. 216.301, and pursuant to
27 s. 216.351, any undisbursed balance and interest accruing and
28 not distributed by the school readiness agent at the end of
29 the fiscal year shall remain with the school readiness agent.

30 (d) The governing board shall annually distribute all
31 eligible funds as block grants to those counties exhibiting a

1 coalition which is integrating services and funding to develop
2 a quality service delivery system. The governing board shall
3 also provide financial awards to counties merging and
4 integrating funding streams to serve children and school
5 readiness programs.

6 (e) State funds appropriated for the school readiness
7 program may not be used for the construction of new facilities
8 or the purchase of buses.

9 (f) All cost savings and all revenues received through
10 a mandatory sliding fee scale shall be used to help fund the
11 local school readiness program.

12 (10) REIMBURSEMENT RATE.--Each coalition shall develop
13 a reimbursement rate schedule that encompasses all programs
14 funded by that coalition. The reimbursement rate schedule must
15 include the projected number of children to be served and must
16 be submitted to the governing board for information. Informal
17 child care arrangements shall be reimbursed at 50 percent of
18 the rate developed for family child care.

19 (11) REQUIREMENTS RELATING TO SCHOOL READINESS
20 AGENTS.--The school readiness agent must be a public entity, a
21 private nonprofit organization, or a partnership of public
22 entities and private nonprofit organizations, so long as the
23 school readiness agent provides no direct early education or
24 child care services. Where a children's services council or
25 juvenile welfare board is selected as a school readiness
26 agent, the provisions of s. 125.901(2)(a)3. shall not prohibit
27 the children's services council or juvenile welfare board,
28 acting as a school readiness agent, to contract for services
29 or programs that are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the
30 public school system in that county. The school readiness
31 agent shall be required to provide, or cause to be provided

1 through a request for proposal process, all administrative,
2 system support, direct enhancement, and direct funding
3 services as determined by the coalition. The school readiness
4 agent shall be responsible for monitoring all system support
5 and direct enhancement providers to ensure that the governing
6 board's performance standards and outcome measures are carried
7 out. No public funds shall be paid to a provider unless the
8 provider agrees to allow the school readiness agent access to
9 fulfill its monitoring responsibilities.

10 (12) PARENTAL CHOICE.--

11 (a) The school readiness program shall provide
12 parental choice pursuant to a purchase service order that
13 ensures, to the maximum extent possible, flexibility in school
14 readiness programs and payment arrangements. According to
15 federal regulations requiring parental choice, a parent may
16 choose an informal child-care arrangement. The purchase order
17 must bear the name of the beneficiary and the program provider
18 and, when redeemed, must bear the signature of both the
19 beneficiary and an authorized representative of the provider.

20 (b) If it is determined that a provider has provided
21 any cash to the beneficiary in return for receiving the
22 purchase order, the school readiness agent shall refer the
23 matter to the Division of Public Assistance Fraud for
24 investigation.

25 (c) The Department of Education and the Office of the
26 Comptroller shall establish an electronic transfer system for
27 the dissemination of funds in accordance with this subsection.
28 School readiness agents shall fully implement the electronic
29 funds transfer system within 3 years after plan approval
30 unless a waiver is obtained from the governing board.

31

1 (d) The Office of Program Policy Analysis and
2 Government Accountability shall provide fiscal oversight of
3 funds provided to local school readiness coalitions and their
4 school readiness agents.

5 (13) EVALUATION AND ANNUAL REPORT.--Each coalition
6 shall conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of its school
7 readiness program including performance standards and outcome
8 measures, and shall provide an annual report to the governing
9 board.

10 (14) CONFLICTING PROVISIONS.--In the event of a
11 conflict between the provisions of this section and federal
12 requirements, the federal requirements shall control.

13 Section 2. Section 229.567, Florida Statutes, is
14 created to read:

15 229.567 School readiness screening instruments.--The
16 Department of Education shall require that the school
17 readiness screening instrument or instruments adopted by the
18 State School Readiness Governing Board be utilized uniformly
19 by all school districts as the kindergarten screening
20 instrument administered to each kindergarten student in the
21 district school system.

22 Section 3. School Readiness Program Needs-Assessment
23 Conference.--

24 (1) DUTIES.--

25 (a) The School Readiness Program Needs-Assessment
26 Conference shall develop official information relating to the
27 state's system of school readiness programs, including
28 forecasts of school readiness program needs, as the conference
29 determines is needed for the state planning and budgeting
30 system. Such official information must include, but need not
31 be limited to, program needs for subsidized child care, Head

1 Start, prekindergarten early intervention, prekindergarten
2 disabilities, Even-Start literacy, Florida First Start,
3 migrant prekindergarten, and Title I prekindergarten.

4 (b) In addition, the School Readiness Program
5 Needs-Assessment Conference shall estimate the unduplicated
6 count of children who are eligible for services under the
7 school readiness program.

8 (c) The State School Readiness Governing Board shall
9 provide information on needs and waiting lists for school
10 readiness program services requested by the School Readiness
11 Program Needs-Assessment Conference or individual conference
12 principals in a timely manner.

13 (2) PRINCIPALS.--The Executive Office of the Governor,
14 the Director of Economic and Demographic Research, and
15 professional staff who have forecasting expertise from the
16 State School Readiness Governing Board, the Department of
17 Children and Family Services, the Department of Education, the
18 Senate, and the House of Representatives, or their designees,
19 are the principals of the School Readiness Program
20 Needs-Assessment Conference. The principal representing the
21 Executive Office of the Governor shall preside over sessions
22 of the conference.

23 Section 4. This act shall take effect upon becoming a
24 law.

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HOUSE SUMMARY

Creates the State School Readiness Governing Board. Provides membership requirements, meeting requirements, public records requirements, and responsibilities and duties. Authorizes the governing board to adopt rules. Provides eligibility requirements for the school readiness program. Requires performance standards and outcome measures developed and approved by the governing board to meet certain guidelines. Provides for the establishment of a school readiness coalition in each county. Provides membership of the coalitions. Provides for implementation and phasing-in of the school readiness program. Requires the development of a plan. Provides for exceptions to law. Provides for coalition initiation grants. Provides for the funding of the school readiness program. Requires each coalition to develop a reimbursement rate schedule for all programs funded by the coalition. Provides requirements for school readiness agents. Provides for parental choice with respect to child care arrangements and payments. Requires the Department of Education and the Office of the Comptroller to establish an electronic funds transfer system. Requires the Office of Program Policy Analysis to provide fiscal oversight. Requires each coalition to conduct an annual evaluation and submit a report to the governing board. Requires the Department of Education to require the use by the school districts of the school readiness screening instrument or instruments adopted by the governing board. Creates the School Readiness Program Needs-Assessment Conference. Requires the conference to develop information relating to the school readiness programs. Specifies the principals of the conference.