

By Senators Dawson, Wasserman Schultz, Geller, Meek, Klein and Holzendorf

30-321-01

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A bill to be entitled  
An act relating to school readiness; amending  
s. 411.01, F.S., the "School Readiness Act";  
providing that any copayments by parents of  
children who participate in school readiness  
programs are to be voluntary, rather than  
mandatory; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Paragraph (f) of subsection (2), paragraph  
(d) of subsection (5), subsection (6), and paragraph (f) of  
subsection (9) of section 411.01, Florida Statutes, are  
amended to read:

411.01 Florida Partnership for School Readiness;  
school readiness coalitions.--

(2) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.--

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

(5) CREATION OF SCHOOL READINESS COALITIONS.--

(d) Implementation.--

1           1. The school readiness program is to be phased in.  
2 Until the coalition implements its plan, the county shall  
3 continue to receive the services identified in subsection (3)  
4 through the various agencies that would be responsible for  
5 delivering those services under current law. Plan  
6 implementation is subject to approval of the coalition and the  
7 plan by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

8           2. Each school readiness coalition shall develop a  
9 plan for implementing the school readiness program to meet the  
10 requirements of this section and the performance standards and  
11 outcome measures established by the partnership. The plan must  
12 include a written description of the role of the program in  
13 the coalition's effort to meet the first state education goal,  
14 readiness to start school, including a description of the plan  
15 to involve the prekindergarten early intervention programs,  
16 Head Start Programs, programs offered by public or private  
17 providers of child care, preschool programs for children with  
18 disabilities, programs for migrant children, Title I programs,  
19 subsidized child care programs, and teen parent programs. The  
20 plan must also demonstrate how the program will ensure that  
21 each 3-year-old and 4-year-old child in a publicly funded  
22 school readiness program receives scheduled activities and  
23 instruction designed to prepare children to enter kindergarten  
24 ready to learn. Prior to implementation of the program, the  
25 school readiness coalition must submit the plan to the  
26 partnership for approval. The partnership may approve the  
27 plan, reject the plan, or approve the plan with conditions.  
28 The plan shall be reviewed, revised, and approved biennially.

29           3. The plan for the school readiness program must  
30 include the following minimum standards and provisions:  
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1           a. A statement that the parents of eligible children  
2 must not be required to make any copayment but are encouraged  
3 to contribute to the program such amounts as are set forth in  
4 a sliding fee scale establishing a voluntary copayment for  
5 parents based upon their ability to pay, which is the same for  
6 all program providers, ~~to be implemented and reflected in each~~  
7 ~~program's budget.~~

8           b. A choice of settings and locations in licensed,  
9 registered, religious-exempt, or school-based programs to be  
10 provided to parents.

11           c. Instructional staff who have completed the training  
12 course as required in s. 402.305(2)(d)1., as well as staff who  
13 have additional training or credentials as required by the  
14 respective program provider. The plan must provide a method  
15 for assuring the qualifications of all personnel in all  
16 program settings.

17           d. Specific eligibility priorities for children within  
18 the coalition's county pursuant to subsection (6).

19           e. Performance standards and outcome measures  
20 established by the partnership or alternatively, standards and  
21 outcome measures to be used until such time as the partnership  
22 adopts such standards and outcome measures.

23           f. Reimbursement rates that have been developed by the  
24 coalition.

25           g. Systems support services, including a central  
26 agency, child care resource and referral, eligibility  
27 determinations, training of providers, and parent support and  
28 involvement.

29           h. Direct enhancement services to families and  
30 children. System support and direct enhancement services shall  
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1 be in addition to payments for the placement of children in  
2 school readiness programs.

3 i. A business plan, which must include the contract  
4 with a school readiness agent if the coalition is not a  
5 legally established corporate entity. Coalitions may contract  
6 with other coalitions to achieve efficiency in multiple-county  
7 services, and such contracts may be part of the coalition's  
8 business plan.

9 j. Strategies to meet the needs of unique populations,  
10 such as migrant workers.

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12 As part of the plan, the coalition may request the Governor to  
13 apply for a waiver to allow the coalition to administer the  
14 Head Start Program to accomplish the purposes of the school  
15 readiness program. If any school readiness plan can  
16 demonstrate that specific statutory goals can be achieved more  
17 effectively by using procedures that require modification of  
18 existing rules, policies, or procedures, a request for a  
19 waiver to the partnership may be made as part of the plan.  
20 Upon review, the partnership may grant the proposed  
21 modification.

22 4. Persons with an early childhood teaching  
23 certificate may provide support and supervision to other staff  
24 in the school readiness program.

25 5. The coalition may not implement its plan until it  
26 submits the plan to and receives approval from the  
27 partnership. Once the plan has been approved, the plan and the  
28 services provided under the plan shall be controlled by the  
29 coalition rather than by the state agencies or departments.  
30 The plan shall be reviewed and revised as necessary, but at  
31 least biennially.

1           6. The following statutes will not apply to local  
2 coalitions with approved plans: ss. 125.901(2)(a)3.,  
3 228.061(1) and (2), 230.2306, 411.221, 411.222, and 411.232.  
4 To facilitate innovative practices and to allow local  
5 establishment of school readiness programs, a school readiness  
6 coalition may apply to the Governor and Cabinet for a waiver  
7 of, and the Governor and Cabinet may waive, any of the  
8 provisions of ss. 230.2303, 230.2305, 230.23166, 402.3015,  
9 411.223, and 411.232, if the waiver is necessary for  
10 implementation of the coalition's school readiness plan.

11           7. Two or more counties may join for the purpose of  
12 planning and implementing a school readiness program.

13           8. A coalition may, subject to approval of the  
14 partnership as part of the coalition's plan, receive  
15 subsidized child care funds for all children eligible for any  
16 federal subsidized child care program and be the provider of  
17 the program services.

18           9. Coalitions are authorized to enter into multiparty  
19 contracts with multicounty service providers in order to meet  
20 the needs of unique populations such as migrant workers.

21           (6) PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY.--The school readiness program  
22 shall be established for children under the age of  
23 kindergarten eligibility. Priority for participation in the  
24 school readiness program shall be given to children who meet  
25 one or more of the following criteria:

26           (a) Children under the age of kindergarten eligibility  
27 who are:

28           1. Children determined to be at risk of abuse,  
29 neglect, or exploitation and who are currently clients of the  
30 Family Safety Program Office of the Department of Children and  
31 Family Services.

1           2. Children at risk of welfare dependency, including  
2 economically disadvantaged children, children of participants  
3 in the welfare transition program, children of migrant  
4 farmworkers, and children of teen parents.

5           3. Children of working families whose family income  
6 does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

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

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

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

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

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

1 (f) All cost savings and all revenues received through  
2 a voluntary ~~mandatory~~ sliding fee scale shall be used to help  
3 fund the local school readiness program.

4 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2001.

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7 SENATE SUMMARY

8 Provides that the parents of children who participate in  
9 school readiness programs under s. 411.01, F.S., must not  
10 be required to pay copayments but may make copayments  
11 voluntarily.  
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