

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 85 Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project
SPONSOR(S): Choice & Innovation Subcommittee and Lee, Jr.
TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 880

| REFERENCE | ACTION | ANALYST | STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF |
|--|---------------------|----------|--|
| 1) Choice & Innovation Subcommittee | 13 Y, 0 N, As CS | Rininger | Fudge |
| 2) Education Appropriations Subcommittee | | | |
| 3) Education Committee | | | |

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The bill requires the Office of Early Learning (OEL) to establish a 5-year Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project in St. Lucie County to assist low-income, at-risk children in developing emergent literacy skills. The OEL, in consultation with the Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County must select one or more municipalities to participate in the project. The OEL must seek partnerships with local nonprofit organizations and the business community to implement the project. The bill:

- Provides a definition for “emergent literacy”.
- Defines child eligibility.
- Requires background screening for employees and volunteers participating in the pilot project.
- Requires instructors in the project to complete an emergent literacy training course approved by the OEL.
- Requires the OEL to select a local organization to implement the pilot project and provides criteria the organization must meet in order to be selected.
- Requires the instruction to be conducted in a subsidized housing unit to provide easy access for participating children and families.
- Encourages the organization selected to implement the pilot project to coordinate with the St. Lucie County Health Department for the provision of basic health screening and immunization.
- Requires the organization to submit an annual accountability report to the Office of Early Learning, the St. Lucie County Early Learning Coalition, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- Requires the selected organization to verify expenditures to the OEL by affidavit.

The bill has a fiscal impact on state government of approximately \$110,000. See Fiscal Analysis & Economic Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

Florida's Office of Early Learning (OEL) is the lead agency for administration of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund¹ in Florida and must comply with the lead agency responsibilities under those sections.² The OEL is responsible for administering school readiness programs at the state level and providing guidance to early learning coalitions in the implementation of the program at the local level.³

The OEL provides funding and oversight to the School Readiness Program through the Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County. School Readiness services are offered by private schools, public schools, faith-based, profit and non-profit providers.⁴ The coalition determines a family's eligibility for School Readiness services, by considering several factors including verification of child age, residency, family income, purpose of care (work/education activities), whether children are at risk of abuse or neglect, and at risk of future school failure. The OEL must follow specified criteria for prioritizing participants for the School Readiness Program.⁵ The coalition currently partners with local non-profits and private businesses to administer early learning programs. Some individuals representing these entities may serve on the early learning coalition board. The coalition also verifies required instructor credentials and training, and monitors early learning provider sites.⁶

In 2013, the Legislature established the OEL within the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice of the Department of Education (DOE). The OEL is administered by an executive director and is fully accountable to the Commissioner of Education but independently exercises all powers, duties, and functions prescribed by law regarding the school readiness program and the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program.⁷

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill requires the OEL to:

- Establish the 5-year Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project in St. Lucie County.
- Select a local organization located in St. Lucie County to implement the pilot project.
- Consult with the Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County to select municipalities in St. Lucie County eligible for participation in the pilot project.
- Allocate funds for implementation of the pilot project.

A municipality within which locally or federally subsidized housing is located is eligible for participation in the pilot project.

The bill provides specific criteria that an organization must meet in order to be selected by the OEL to implement the pilot project. The organization must:

- Be located in St. Lucie County;
- Be a not-for-profit corporation qualified as charitable under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and

¹ 45 C.F.R. parts 98 and 99.

² Section 1002.82(1), F.S.

³ Section 1001.213(3), F.S.

⁴ Florida Department of Education 2013 Bill Analysis for HB 803

⁵ Section 1002.87(1), F.S.

⁶ Florida Department of Education 2013 Bill Analysis for HB 803

⁷ Section 1, 2013-252, L.O.F., *codified as s. 1001.213*, F.S.

- Provide training to parents to assist their children with success in school.

The bill identifies the Parents Academy of St. Lucie County as an example of a qualifying organization. The bill requires the OEL to oversee implementation of the project.

Instructors in the pilot project must have successfully completed an emergent literacy training course approved by the OEL. Further, the organization may not receive funds until it certifies in writing to the OEL, subject to confirmation by the office, that all of its volunteers, instructors, and noninstructional personnel who make direct contact with participating children have undergone level 2 background screening, which includes fingerprinting. The emergent literacy instruction must be conducted in a subsidized housing unit in order to provide easy access for participating children and families.

To participate in the pilot project a child must be:

- Two or 3 years of age
- Eligible for a federally subsidized child care program
- A member of a family that is economically disadvantaged and reside in locally or federally subsidized housing.

The bill provides the following definitions:

- “Economically disadvantaged” means having a family income that does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level.
- “Emergent literacy” means a variety of early behaviors and skills associated with successful reading and writing development during the first 5 years of life that contribute to a child’s foundations for literacy and learning and future success in school and life.

The bill encourages the organization implementing the pilot project to coordinate with the St. Lucie County Health Department for the provision of basic health screening and immunization services for children participating in the pilot project in conjunction with emergent literacy instruction. It also encourages the organization to engage in community outreach efforts to local community service organizations for the purpose of improving the availability and effective delivery of emergent literacy instruction.

The bill requires the organization selected to implement the pilot project to annually submit an accountability report to the OEL, the Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must include, at minimum, the following information:

- The manner in which all state funds received by the organization are used to implement the pilot project, separated by type of expenditure and measured in exact dollar amounts;
- Other sources of funding received by the organization for purposes of providing emergent literacy instruction;
- The municipalities selected by the organization for participation in the pilot project;
- The identities of the organization’s corporate officers;
- The number of children receiving emergent literacy instruction in each municipality; and
- Information and data relating to coordinated health screening and immunization services provided in conjunction with the emergent literacy instruction, if any.

The bill requires the organization to verify its expenditures of state funds for implementation of the pilot project to the OEL by affidavit. The format of the affidavit and the procedure of submission are to be determined by the OEL.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Creates an unnumbered section of law; requiring the OEL to establish the pilot project in St. Lucie County to assist low-income, at-risk children in developing emergent literacy skills; providing eligibility requirements for participation; requiring background screening for instructors, volunteers, and

noninstructional personnel who make direct contact with children; requiring emergent literacy training for instructors; encouraging the coordination of basic health screening and immunization services in conjunction with emergent literacy instruction; requiring annual submission of an accountability report; requiring the OEL to allocate funds for the pilot project; requiring for the verification of expenditures by affidavit.

Section 2. Provides an effective date of July 1, 2014.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

Expenditures:

The bill requires the OEL to allocate funds to implement the Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project, but does not specify a funding source for the pilot. In 2013, the Legislature appropriated \$110,000 to fund the pilot project. However, funding for the program was vetoed by the Governor.⁸ Funding for the project was not included in either DOE's or OEL's 2014-15 Legislative Budget Requests.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not Applicable. This bill does not appear to affect county or municipal governments.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

⁸ Specific Appropriation 103, s. 2, ch. 2013-40, L.O.F.
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DATE: 2/21/2014

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

On February 18, 2014, the Choice & Innovation Subcommittee adopted a strike-all amendment and reported the bill favorably as a committee substitute. The amendment replaces DOE with the OEL as the entity charged with establishing the pilot project and administering the program.

This bill analysis is drafted to the committee substitute.