

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Education

BILL: SB 1254

INTRODUCER: Senator Passidomo

SUBJECT: Early Learning

DATE: January 26, 2018

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Bouck	Graf	ED	Pre-meeting
2.			JU	
3.			AP	

I. Summary:

SB 1254 modifies provisions relating to the school readiness program. Specifically, the bill:

- Requires the Office of Early Learning to:
 - Coordinate with the Department of Children and Families or its contracted provider to triennially evaluate the accrediting agencies and provide a 20 percent payment differential for accredited providers who meet certain criteria.
 - Adopt program assessment requirements that measure the quality of teacher-child interactions using a research-based observation tool.
 - Revise the statewide provider contract to include health and safety provisions, contracted slots, quality improvement strategies, and program assessment requirements.
 - Modify the annual report to include specified program assessment information.
- Revises Early Learning Coalitions (ELC) plans to add information regarding:
 - An assessment based on community data that identifies the needs of children and families and assesses provider capacity to inform local priorities;
 - Local eligibility priorities for children, the use of contracted slots in the ELC's procedures for program implementation, and a description of quality improvement strategies in the ELC's quality activities and services.
- Modifies school readiness program eligibility, provider standards, and funding to:
 - Revise the child eligibility priorities for participation in the school readiness program based on the ELC's local priorities; and also revise the definition of "at-risk" children for eligibility purposes.
 - Revise provider eligibility requirements to specify that the providers must participate in a program assessment and in quality improvement strategies, subject to legislative funding.
 - Authorize the award of grants and financial supports to providers and instructors to meet program assessment requirements.

The bill appropriates \$6 million in nonrecurring funds from the Child Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund to the Office of Early Learning for the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2018.

II. Present Situation:

Established in 1999,¹ the school readiness program provides subsidies for child care services and early childhood education for children of low-income families; children in protective services who are at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment; and children with disabilities.² The School Readiness program offers financial assistance for child care to support working families and children to develop skills for success in school and provides developmental screening and referrals to health and education specialists where needed.

The school readiness program is a state-federal partnership between the Office of Early Learning (OEL)³ and the Office of Child Care of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.⁴ It is administered by early learning coalitions (ELCs) at the county or regional level.⁵ The OEL administers the program at the state level, including statewide coordination of the ELCs.⁶

Office of Early Learning

The OEL is the lead agency in Florida for administering the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund (CCDF).⁷ The School Readiness Program is funded primarily by the CCDF.⁸

The OEL is required to focus on improving the educational quality of all program providers participating in the school readiness program while preserving parental choice by permitting parents to choose from a variety of child care categories.⁹ Other OEL duties include, but are not limited to, requirements to:

- Enter into a memorandum of understanding with local licensing agencies and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for inspections of school readiness program providers to

¹ Section 1, ch. 99-357, L.O.F.

² Section 1002.87, F.S.

³ In 2013, the Legislature established the Office of Early Learning in the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice within the Department of Education (DOE). The office is administered by an executive director and is fully accountable to the Commissioner of Education but shall independently exercise all powers, duties, and functions prescribed by law, as well as adopt rules for the establishment and operation of the school readiness program and the VPK Program. Section 1, ch. 2013-252, L.O.F., codified as s. 1002.213, F.S.

⁴ See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Care and Development Fund Fact Sheet*, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/fact-sheet-occ> (last visited Jan. 26, 2018).

⁵ Section 1002.83, F.S.

⁶ Section 1001.213(3), F.S.

⁷ Section 1002.82(1), F.S.

⁸ The Office of Early Learning, 2016-2018 Child Care Development Fund State Plan, http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/oel_resources/ccdf_plan.aspx (last visited Jan. 26, 2018).

⁹ Section 1002.82(1) and (2)(a)-(b), F.S. Care and curriculum by a faith-based provider must not be limited or excluded in any of these categories. *Id.*

monitor and verify compliance with program provider standards¹⁰ and OEL's health and safety checklist.¹¹

- Develop and adopt standards and benchmarks that address the age-appropriate progress of children in the development of school readiness skills.¹²
- Select assessments that are valid, reliable, and developmentally appropriate for use as preassessment and postassessment.¹³ The assessments must be designed to measure progress in the domains of the performance standards and be administered by qualified individuals.¹⁴
- Adopt, by rule, a standard statewide provider contract to be used with each school readiness program provider that includes, at a minimum, provisions for provider probation, termination for cause, and emergency termination for those actions or inactions of a provider that pose an immediate and serious danger to the health, safety, or welfare of the children.¹⁵
- Monitor and evaluate the performance of each ELC in administering the school readiness program.¹⁶
- Establish procedures for the biennial calculation of the average market rate.¹⁷ The OEL must establish procedures for the adoption of a market rate schedule that include minimum and maximum rates for child care providers that hold a Gold Seal Quality Care designation,¹⁸ and a market rate for providers that do not hold such designation.¹⁹
- Review each early learning coalition's school readiness program plan every 2 years.²⁰

The OEL is also required to annually, by January 1, publish an annual report to include a summary of early learning coalition annual reports, a statewide summary; an analysis of early learning activities throughout the state, including the school readiness program, student disenrollment and reasons for disenrollment, providers by type, and actions on provider contracts.²¹

Early Learning Coalitions

While the OEL governs day-to-day operations of statewide early learning programs and administers federal and state child care funds, across the state 30 regional ELCs and the

¹⁰ Section 1002.88, F.S.

¹¹ Section 1002.82(2)(i), F.S.

¹² *Id.* at (2)(j), F.S.

¹³ *Id.* at (2)(k), F.S.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at (2)(m).

¹⁶ *Id.* at (2)(p), F.S.

¹⁷ *Id.* at (2)(d). OEL must establish procedures for the adoption of a market rate schedule that include minimum and maximum rates for child care providers that hold a Gold Seal Quality Care designation, and a market rate for providers that do not hold such designation. Section 1002.895(1), F.S.

¹⁸ A child care facility, large family child care home, or family day care home that is accredited by an accrediting association approved by the DOE and meets all other requirements shall, upon application to the DOE, receive a separate "Gold Seal Quality Care" designation. Section 402.281(1)(a), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 1002.895(1), F.S.

²⁰ Section 1002.82(2)(e), F.S.

²¹ *Id.* at (5), F.S.

Redlands Christian Migrant Association are responsible for delivering local services.²² Each ELC is governed by a board of directors comprised of various stakeholders and community representatives.²³

In order to participate in the school readiness program, each ELC must submit a school readiness plan to the OEL for approval.²⁴ The plan must include, but is not limited to:²⁵

- The ELC’s operations, including its membership and business organization.
- The minimum number of children to be served by care level.
- The procedures for implementing program requirements such as single point of entry, uniform waiting list, eligibility and enrollment, sliding fee scale, and payment rate.
- A detailed description of the ELC’s quality activities and services.
- A detailed budget outlining the estimated expenditures for state, federal, and local matching funds.
- A detailed accounting of all revenues and expenditures during the previous state fiscal year²⁶
- Policies and procedures governing procurement, maintenance of tangible personal property, maintenance of records, information technology security, and disbursement controls.
- A description of the procedures for monitoring school readiness program providers, including the process for responding to a parental complaint.
- Documentation that the coalition has solicited and considered comments regarding the proposed school readiness plan from the local community.

School Readiness Program

School Readiness Eligibility and Enrollment

Florida law specifies that ELCs must admit children into the School Readiness program according to the following priorities:²⁷

- **First priority** is a child under 13 years of age from families in which an adult is receiving temporary cash assistance²⁸ and subject to federal work requirements.²⁹
- **Second priority** is a child under the age of 9 who is at-risk.
- **Third priority** is a child, birth to beginning of the school year for which the child is eligible for kindergarten, from a working family that is economically disadvantaged³⁰ and may

²² The Office of Early Learning, *Coalitions*, <http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/coalitions.aspx> (last visited Jan. 26, 2018). *See also* 1002.83(1), F.S.

²³ Section 1002.83(3), F.S.

²⁴ Section 1002.85(2), F.S.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Section 1002.85(2)(a)-(i), F.S.

²⁷ Section 1002.87(1), F.S.

²⁸ Temporary cash assistance under chapter 414. Section 1002.87(1)(a), F.S.

²⁹ Federal work requirements require a state to meet or exceed minimum rates of recipients participating in “work activities,” *e.g.*, employment, education, job search, community service, and vocational training. 42 U.S.C. s. 607(a)-(d). Under Florida law, the maximum number of hours a recipient of subsidized child care, who is not otherwise exempt from work activity, may be required to work is 40 hours per week. Section 445.024(2), F.S.

³⁰ “Economically disadvantaged” means having a family income that does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Section 1002.81(7), F.S.

include such a child's eligible siblings who are eligible to enter kindergarten through the summer before sixth grade, provided that the ELC uses local revenues first.

- **Fourth priority** is a child of a parent who transitions from the work program into employment from birth through the summer before kindergarten.
- **Fifth priority** is an at-risk child, ages 9 through 13. Such a child is given priority over other children if his or her sibling is enrolled in the School Readiness program under eligibility priorities 1, 2, or 3.
- **Sixth priority** is a child younger than 13 years of age from a working family that is economically disadvantaged. Such a child is given priority over other children if his or her sibling is enrolled in the School Readiness program under eligibility priority 3.
- **Seventh priority** is a child under age 13 whose parent transitions from the work program into employment.
- **Eighth priority** is a child ages 3-5 years of age who has a current individual education plan with a Florida school district. Such a child is eligible until he or she is old enough for kindergarten admission.
- **Last priority** is a child who is also concurrently enrolled in the Head Start program and the VPK Program.³¹

A child is considered to be "at risk" if, among other things, the child is in the custody of a parent who is a victim of domestic violence residing in a certified domestic violence center.³²

School Readiness Provider Standards

In order to be eligible to deliver the school readiness program, a provider must be:³³

- A licensed child care facility;
- A licensed or registered family day care home;
- A licensed large family child care home;
- A public school or nonpublic school;
- A license-exempt faith-based child care provider;
- A before-school or after-school program; or
- An authorized informal child care provider.³⁴

Provider responsibilities include, but are not limited to, a requirement to:³⁵

- Provide instruction and activities to enhance the age-appropriate progress of each child in attaining the child development standards.

³¹ Section 1002.87(1), F.S.

³² At-risk children can also include children who are homeless or who may be experiencing abuse, neglect, abandonment or exploitation. See s. 1002.81(1), F.S. (definition of "at-risk child").

³³ Section 1002.88(1), F.S.

³⁴ *Id.* at (1)(a), F.S. Generally speaking, informal child care is care provided by a relative. See Florida Office of Early Learning, *Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan FFY 2016-2018* (2016) at 99, available at http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/sites/www/Uploads/14-Draft-FY2016-2018%20CCDF%20Plan%20Preprint%20%2012-17-15_final_markup_SC_Comments_CLEAN_PDF_ADA.pdf.

³⁵ Section 1002.88(1), F.S.

- Provide basic health and safety of its premises and facilities and compliance with requirements for age-appropriate immunizations of children enrolled in the school readiness program.
- Employ child care personnel who have satisfied background screening and training requirements.
- Provide activities to foster brain development in infants and toddlers in an environment rich in language and music and visual, tactile, auditory, and linguistic stimulation and including 30 minutes of reading to children each day.
- Execute the standard statewide provider contract adopted by the OEL.
- Implement a character development program.
- Administer preassessments and postassessments that have been approved by the OEL, but only if the provider chooses to administer such assessments.

School Readiness Funding

Funding for the school readiness program is allocated among the ELCs according to law and the General Appropriations Act.³⁶ State, federal, and local matching funds provided to an ELC for purposes of the school readiness program must be used for implementation of its approved school readiness program plan, including the hiring of staff to effectively operate the school readiness program.³⁷

Costs must be kept to the minimum necessary for the efficient and effective administration of the school readiness program with the highest priority of expenditure being direct services for eligible children. Among the administrative costs and nondirect services authorized for expenditure of funds as specified in law,³⁸ allowable activities to improve the quality of child care³⁹ must be to, in part:

- Award grants and providing financial support to school readiness program providers and their staff to assist them in meeting applicable state requirements for child care performance standards,
- Implement developmentally appropriate curricula and related classroom resources that support curricula,
- Provide literacy supports, and
- Provide continued professional development and training.

For FY 2017-18, a total of \$564.1 million was appropriated for the School Readiness program from state and federal funds, including \$140.6 million from the state's General Revenue Fund, \$326.4 million from the CCDF block grant, \$500,000 from Federal Grants Trust Fund, and \$96.6 million from the Welfare Transition Trust Fund.⁴⁰

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 1254 modifies provisions relating to the school readiness program. Specifically, the bill:

³⁶ Section 1002.89(1), F.S.

³⁷ *Id.* at (5), F.S.

³⁸ *Id.* at (6)(a) and (c).

³⁹ 45 C.F.R. s. 98.51.

⁴⁰ Specific Appropriation 84, s. 2, ch. 2017-70, L.O.F.

- Requires the Office of Early Learning to:
 - Coordinate with the Department of Children and Families or its contracted provider to triennially evaluate the accrediting agencies under the Gold Seal Quality Care Program and provide a 20 percent payment differential for accredited providers who meet certain criteria.
 - Adopt program assessment requirements that measure the quality of teacher-child interactions using a research-based observation tool.
 - Revise the statewide provider contract to include health and safety provisions, contracted slots, quality improvement strategies, and program assessment requirements.
 - Modify the annual report to include specified program assessment information.
- Revises Early Learning Coalitions (ELC) plans to add information regarding:
 - An assessment based on community data that identifies the needs of children and families and assesses provider capacity to inform local priorities.
 - Local eligibility priorities for children, the use of contracted slots in the ELC's procedures for program implementation, and a description of quality improvement strategies in the ELC's quality activities and services.
- Modifies school readiness program eligibility, provider standards, and funding to:
 - Revise the child eligibility priorities for participation in the school readiness program based on the ELC's local priorities; and also revise the definition of "at-risk" children for eligibility purposes.
 - Revise provider eligibility requirements to specify that the providers must participate in a program assessment and in quality improvement strategies, subject to legislative funding.
 - Authorize the award of grants and financial supports to providers and instructors to meet program assessment requirements.

Office of Early Learning

The bill requires the Office of Early Learning (OEL) to coordinate with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to conduct a triennial evaluation of accrediting agencies approved by DCF to participate in the Gold Seal Quality Care Program, to identify accrediting agencies that have requirements and processes that positively impact child outcomes. Based on the results of the evaluation, the bill directs OEL to set payment differentials for each child care provider accredited by those identified in the evaluation at a differential rate 20 percent higher than the coalition's base approved reimbursement rate for each care level and unit of care that have an active Gold Seal Quality Care designation.

The bill requires the OEL to adopt program assessment requirements for providers participating in the school readiness program that measure the quality of teacher-child interactions using a research based observation tool. Program assessment requirements adopted by OEL must include, at a minimum, quality measures, a minimum threshold for contracting purposes, processes for provider participation, granting of exemptions, and the achievement of improvement through the completion of an improvement plan.

Additionally, the bill requires the OEL to revise the standard statewide provider contract for school readiness program providers to include the following provisions:

- Health and safety;
- Contracted slots, if applicable;

- Quality improvement strategies, if applicable;⁴¹ and
- Program assessment requirements.

The bill also requires provisions for termination for cause, included within the standard statewide provider contract, to include a provider's failure to meet the minimum requirements established in law for a period of up to 5 years.

Finally, the bill requires the OEL to revise its annual report to include the number of school readiness program providers who have completed the program assessment requirement and the number of providers who have not met the minimum quality measures to be eligible for a contract, have been granted an exemption, or have an active improvement plan based on the results of a program assessment.

Early Learning Coalitions

The bill requires each Early Learning Coalition (ELC) plan to include:

- An assessment based on available community data and include the results in its school readiness program plan. The assessment must identify the local needs of children and families and assess provider capacity in order to inform local priorities that most directly impact children's readiness for school.
- Local eligibility priorities for children as a part of the ELC's procedures for implementation of the school readiness program.
- The use of contracted slots, as applicable, based on the results of the completed community needs assessment.
- A detailed description of quality improvement strategies utilized by the ELC to strengthen teaching practices and improve child outcomes.

School Readiness Program

School Readiness Eligibility and Enrollment

The bill revises the definition of an "at-risk child" to specify that a child is considered at risk if a certified domestic violence center verifies that the child's custodial parent is a victim of domestic violence. Under current law, an "at-risk" child means a child in the custody of a parent who is a victim of domestic violence residing in a certified domestic violence center. The bill does not require a parent who is a victim of domestic violence to reside in the certified domestic violence center for the child to be considered at risk.

The bill revises child eligibility priorities by requiring ELCs, after serving children in the first two child priority categories, to prioritize services for children in subsequent categories based on the ELC's community needs assessment. Additionally, the bill modifies the child eligibility categories to:

- Expand the 9-13-year age range specified for at-risk children to include an at-risk child eligible for admission to kindergarten but younger than 13 years of age.

⁴¹ Section 658(c)(2)(a) of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014.

- Remove the eligibility provision related to a sibling of a child from a working family that is economically disadvantaged.

Each ELC must include its identified priorities in its biennial school readiness plan as part of its eligibility and enrollment processes.

School Readiness Provider Standards

As a requirement for eligibility to deliver the school readiness program, the bill requires school readiness program providers to participate in a program assessment identified by the OEL and in quality improvement strategies, subject to legislative appropriation.

School Readiness Funding

The bill includes implementation of the program assessment adopted by OEL as an allowable quality activity for purposes of awarding grants and providing financial support to providers.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2018.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

SB 1254 requires school readiness program providers to participate in program assessment and quality improvement strategies as a condition of participation in the program, subject to legislative appropriation.⁴²

⁴² Florida Department of Education, Office of Early Learning, *2017 Agency Bill Analysis for SB 1254* (Dec. 19, 2017), at 7.

C. Government Sector Impact:

SB 1254 appropriates \$6 million for the 2018-2019 fiscal year from the Child Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund to the Office of Early Learning to implement the program assessment and evaluate accrediting associations for purposes of the Gold Seal Quality Care program.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 1002.81, 1002.82, 1002.84, 1002.85, 1002.87, 1002.88, 1002.89, and 1002.92.

IX. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.