

A bill for an act

relating to education; establishing an Office of Early Learning; creating school readiness assessments; reducing the basic sliding fee waiting list; appropriating money; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 4.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. **[4.046] OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING.**

(a) An Office of Early Learning is established to coordinate high quality prekindergarten and child care programs. The governor must appoint an executive director who is a recognized expert in the field of early childhood care and education and who will facilitate communication and coordinate prekindergarten and child care programs under the administration of the Departments of Education and Human Services.

(b) The executive director of the Office of Early Learning must coordinate Departments of Education and Human Services staff efforts to:

(1) consolidate and coordinate resources and public funding streams for early education and child care, and ensure the accountability and coordinated development of all early education and child care services to children from birth to age five;

(2) work with the Departments of Education and Human Services and Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) to create common standards for quality early childhood programming and rules for teacher training and certification;

(3) create a seamless transition from early childhood programs to kindergarten;

(4) encourage family choice by ensuring a mixed system of high quality public and private programs, with local points of entry, staffed by well-qualified professionals;

(5) assure parents a decisive role in the planning, operation, and evaluation of programs that aid families in the care of children;

(6) provide consumer education and accessibility to early education and child care resources;

(7) advance the quality of early education and child care programs in order to support the healthy development of children and preparation for their success in school;

(8) develop a seamless service delivery system of early education and child care programs administered by local, state, and federal agencies, with local points of entry;

(9) develop and manage an effective data collection system to support the necessary functions of a coordinated system of early education and child care in order to enable accurate evaluation of its impact;

(10) respect and be sensitive to family values and cultural heritage; and

(11) establish the administrative framework for and promote the development of early education and child care services in order to provide that such services, staffed by well-qualified professionals, are available in every community for all families that express a need for them.

(c) The Office of Early Learning must report to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over the early childhood education and child care programs by February 1 of each year on the status of the work required under paragraph (b) and any statutory changes necessary to improve quality and increase access.

Sec. 2. **SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENTS AND KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION STRATEGIES.**

Subdivision 1. **Establishment.** In order to increase the capacity of school districts to improve the performance of children at risk for not being fully prepared for kindergarten, school readiness assessment and kindergarten transition strategy grants are established.

Subd. 2. **Technical assistance.** (a) The commissioner of education must provide resources and technical assistance to enable a participating school district to offer comprehensive and developmentally appropriate assessments to entering kindergartners or, where applicable, children in prekindergarten programs and to develop and implement kindergarten transition strategies.

(b) The assessment tool must be research-based and must assist with identifying risk and informing instructional improvement. A participating school district must coordinate with community and school-based early childhood programs.

(c) An effective kindergarten transition strategy may include:

(1) transition plans for children entering kindergarten;

(2) a transition planning team composed of representatives from early care and education providers, elementary school staff including kindergarten teachers, parents, and community members;

(3) information and education for parents, program providers, and educators on:
(i) comprehensive child development;
(ii) the skills and knowledge incoming kindergartners should demonstrate; and
(iii) related community resources;
(4) building community awareness about the importance of children's school readiness; and

(5) fostering collaboration among child care, Head Start, early childhood family education, school readiness, family, friends and neighbors, and other early childhood programs and elementary school providers.

Subd. 3. **Application.** A school district must submit its application to the commissioner in the form and manner required by the commissioner. The commissioner must select school districts to receive grants giving priority to districts with high poverty rates. To the extent practical, the selected districts must be located throughout the state.

Subd. 4. **Annual report.** A school district that receives a grant must submit an annual report to the commissioner in the form and manner required by the commissioner. The report must include a description of the assessment tool, process, and results.

Sec. 3. APPROPRIATION.

Subdivision 1. **Child care assistance basic sliding fee waiting list.** \$..... is appropriated from the general fund in fiscal year 2009 to the commissioner of human services to reduce the basic sliding fee waiting list under Minnesota Statutes, section 119B.03, subdivision 2. This appropriation is in addition to the appropriation under Laws 2007, chapter 147, article 19, section 3, subdivision 4, paragraph (d), and is added to the base.

Subd. 2. **School readiness and kindergarten transition strategies.** \$..... is appropriated from the general fund in fiscal year 2009 to the commissioner of education for school readiness and kindergarten transition strategies. Of this amount, \$..... is for program administration. This appropriation must be added to the base budget.