

Early Learning Bill Launched

On Tuesday, the House Education Committee passed its major early learning bill, a proposed committee bill (PCB) that has since been filed as [HB 7165](#). The Senate Education Appropriations Subcommittee will amend and pass its current bill ([CS/SB 1722](#)) to make it mirror the House bill next week.

Huge kudos to Education Committee Chair Marlene O'Toole for taking the time and having the patience and flexibility to successfully navigate myriad issues to a sound and solid landing. The bill, a good one strongly supported by United Way and most early learning advocates, provides a good beginning to a multi-year commitment by O'Toole and her committee to improve the early learning system. As part of the process, Committee staff have compiled a list of pending issues that will be addressed next session.

Giant kudos also to legislators, legislative staff, and advocates for working together to collectively to create a bill that, while not perfect, is so good we couldn't have fathomed it happening last session. It is the result of legislative leadership, advocates working together, and legislative leaders and staff – in the Education Committee and the Speaker's Office – embracing an open, solution-driven process.

Focused primarily on Chair O'Toole's original target areas – accountability, transparency, governance and fraud. Per the staff analysis, the bill, among others:

- moves the School Readiness Program from Chapter 411 to the school code under Chapter 1002;
- moves the Office of Early Learning (OEL) into the Department of Education under an Executive Director accountable to the Commissioner of Education;
- provides that OEL will independently exercise all power, duties, and functions prescribed by law and will not be construed as part of the K-20 education system;
- requires OEL:
 - adopt a list of approved curricula and a process for review and approval of a provider's curriculum that meets the performance standards;
 - identify a pre-assessment and post-assessment for School Readiness participants;
 - adopt a statewide, standardized contract to be used by coalitions with each school readiness provider; and
 - coordinate with other agencies to perform data matches on individuals or families participating in the school readiness program.
- removes the requirement for OEL to submit an annual funding formula and provides for allocation in the General Appropriations Act;
- revises the methodology for calculating the market rate schedule to require that the OEL biennially calculate the market rate at the average of the market rate by program care level and provider type in a predetermined geographic market;
- includes provisions for fraud investigations and penalties for school readiness providers and parents who knowingly submit false information related to child eligibility and attendance in a school readiness program;



Legislative Link

A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida

- requires private prekindergarten providers to maintain liability insurance coverage and the necessary business requirements to legally operate a business in the state, including any required worker's compensation and unemployment compensation;
- requires the Early Learning Advisory Council to periodically analyze and provide recommendations to OEL on the effective and efficient use of local, state and federal funds; the content of instructor training programs; and best practices for the development and implementation of coalition plans;
- clarifies that care and curriculum by a "faith-based" provider, rather than a "sectarian" provider, may not be limited or excluded when offering parents choices in providers;
- revises School Readiness Program eligibility and priority enrollment requirements to allow providers to serve siblings of school readiness children in after-school programs if the siblings are in the first through fifth grade, providing that local funds revenues are used first;
- prohibits the OEL and ELCs from requiring providers to administer pre-assessments or post-assessments;
- phases-in caps on administrative costs over the next three fiscal years, beginning with 22 percent in 2013-2014, 20 percent in 2014-2015, and 18 percent in 2015-2016 and thereafter;
- revises the duties of the Child Care Executive Partnership to include making recommendations concerning implementation and coordination of the School Readiness Program; and
- encourages providers to include specific activities that enhance brain development in infants and toddlers.

For additional information, please contact
the United Way of Florida at: (850) 488-8276.

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