

Early Learning Passes House

The Session's major early learning legislation passed the House on Wednesday. [CS/HB 7165](#) addresses numerous issues related to governance, accountability, transparency and fraud prevention. The Senate companion bill, [CS/CS/SB 1722](#), was on the Senate Special Order Calendar as this Legislative Link went to press.

The bills are very similar. The major differences deal with:

- **Governance** - The House bill places the Office of Early Learning (OEL) in the Department of Education (DOE) as a stand-alone program. The Senate bill places OEL in DOE's Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice.
- **Early Learning Coalition Administrative Expenses** - The House bill phases-in Early Learning Coalition (ELC) administrative caps at 22 percent next year, 20 percent the next, and 18 percent in 2015-16. The Senate bill institutes a static cap of 22 percent, beginning next year.
- **School Readiness Eligibility** - The Senate bill places children from families transitioning from TANF work programs to employment at a higher priority level than the House bill.

Besides those three differences, both bills:

- provide that:
 - OEL is administered by a director fully accountable to the Education Commissioner;
 - OEL shall not be considered part of the K-20 system; and
 - OEL shall administer the VPK and SR programs and develop rules for their implementation.
- require OEL to:
 - 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.
- remove the requirement for OEL to submit an annual funding formula and provides for allocation in the General Appropriations Act;
- revise 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;



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A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida

- include 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;
- require 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;
- require 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;
- clarify 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;
- expand existing School Readiness Program eligibility and priority enrollment requirements to allow providers to serve school-age children and siblings;
- prohibit the OEL and ELCs from requiring providers to administer pre-assessments or post-assessments;
- revise the duties of the Child Care Executive Partnership to include making recommendations concerning implementation and coordination of the School Readiness Program; and
- encourage 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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