Regular Session, 2012

ACT No. 3

ENROLLED

SENATE BILL NO. 581

BY SENATORS APPEL, ALARIO AND THOMPSON AND REPRESENTATIVES CARTER AND KLECKLEY

AN ACT

To enact Part X-A of Chapter 1 of Title 17 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, to be comprised of R.S. 17:407.21 through 407.25, relative to early childhood education; to provide for the creation of an early childhood care and education network; to provide for the purposes of such network and the duties and responsibilities of certain state agencies related thereto; to provide relative to early childhood education programs and standards; to provide for an accountability system for early childhood education programs; to provide relative to a quality rating system for certain day care centers; to provide for legislative findings and intent; and to provide for related matters.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

Section 1. Part X-A of Chapter 1 of Title 17 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, to be comprised of R.S. 17:407.21 through 407.25 is hereby enacted to read as follows:

PART X-A. LOUISIANA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

§407.21. Short title

This Part shall be known and may be cited as the "Louisiana Early Childhood Education Act".

§407.22. Legislative findings and intent

A. The legislature finds and declares that:

(1) In order to significantly improve outcomes at all levels of the state's educational system, it is imperative that standards for, and expectations of, our early childhood programs be raised to levels that will promote kindergarten readiness and sustain lifelong learning and achievement.

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(2) Publicly-funded early childhood programs should prioritize kindergarten readiness and public monies should fund programs that excel at achieving high levels of kindergarten readiness, or progression towards kindergarten readiness, as applicable for the ages of children served.

(3) Parents who choose to send their children to publicly-funded early childhood programs should have clear and actionable information on the quality of the programs available.

(4) Providers of publicly-funded early childhood programs should be held accountable for the public monies they receive, but given the autonomy to implement an educational program that promotes and achieves kindergarten readiness without undue regulation.

(5) State entities involved in the oversight or provision of early childhood programs should collaborate, set standards of educational achievement for young children that align with standards established for children enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve, and hold providers of publicly-funded early childhood programs accountable without imposing undue regulation on said programs.

(6) There are high quality early childhood programs in this state that can serve as a model for increasing standards of achievement and financial efficiency in publicly-funded early childhood programs.

(7) Publicly-funded early childhood programs receive a significant amount of public monies that can and should be maximized in pursuit of high quality early childhood programs that achieve high levels of kindergarten readiness or progression towards kindergarten readiness, as applicable for the ages of children served.

(8) Tax incentives created for the purpose of promoting high quality early childhood programs should be awarded based on kindergarten readiness, or progression towards kindergarten readiness, as applicable for the ages of children served.

(9) A fragmented system of standards, funding, and oversight of the

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state's publicly-funded early childhood programs serves as a barrier to providing every child with the high quality services and programs which he deserves and to providing parents with the information needed to make an informed choice when selecting the programs that best fit the needs of their children.

B. It is the intent of the legislature that a comprehensive and integrated delivery system for early childhood care and education be created to ensure that every child enters kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

§407.23. Early Childhood Care and Education Network; creation; components; duties and responsibilities

A. Not later than July 1, 2013, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, hereinafter called the state board, shall create a comprehensive and integrated network through which to manage and oversee all programs funded through state or federal resources that provide early childhood care or educational services.

B. To facilitate the creation of this network, the state board shall:

(1) Establish a definition of kindergarten readiness aligned with state content standards for elementary and secondary schools.

(2) Establish performance targets for children under the age of three and academic standards for kindergarten readiness for three - and four-year old children to be used in publicly-funded early childhood education programs.

(3) Create a uniform assessment and accountability system for publicly-funded early childhood education programs that includes a letter grade indicative of student performance.

(4) Coordinate with the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Health and Hospitals to align the standards for the licensing of child care facilities, including the requirements for participation in the Louisiana Quality Start Child Care Rating System, with the standards established for early childhood education programs.

(5) Establish a timeline for the creation and implementation of the early

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childhood care and education network that shall be fully implemented by the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year.

C.(1) In creating this network, the state board, through the state Department of Education, shall work cooperatively and collaboratively with the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Health and Hospitals to establish a seamless early childhood educational system that is coordinated and integrated across all programs and related state agencies, regardless of public funding source.

(2)(a) The state Department of Education shall submit the plans and recommendations formulated by the impacted agencies to Louisiana's Early Childhood Advisory Council, the Child Care Association of Louisiana, and the nonpublic school commission appointed by the state board pursuant to R.S. 17:11 for review and comment.

(b) Each reviewing entity shall submit its comments and recommendations to the state Department of Education, which shall prepare a summary report to be submitted to the state board for its consideration not later than January 1, 2013.

(3) By not later than March 1, 2013, the state board shall submit a written report to each member of the legislature, the Senate Committee on Education secretary, and the House Committee on Education secretary on the status of development of the early childhood care and education network. Such report shall include but not be limited to any recommendations relative to changes in law or administrative policy needed to properly implement the network.

§407.24. Rules

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education shall promulgate rules and regulations in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act to implement the provisions of this Part.

§407.25. Applicability; limitation

This Part shall not apply to early childhood programs that receive public

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funds solely for food and nutrition assistance.

Section 2. This Act shall become effective upon signature by the governor or, if not signed by the governor, upon expiration of the time for bills to become law without signature by the governor, as provided by Article III, Section 18 of the Constitution of Louisiana. If vetoed by the governor and subsequently approved by the legislature, this Act shall become effective on the day following such approval.

_____
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

_____
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

_____
GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

APPROVED: _____

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