

Regular Session, 2014

HOUSE BILL NO. 954

BY REPRESENTATIVES LEGER AND CARTER AND SENATORS APPEL, LAFLEUR,
AND WALSWORTH

EDUCATION/PRE-K: Provides relative to the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program

1 AN ACT

2 To enact R.S. 17:407.26 and to repeal R.S. 17:24.10, relative to early childhood education;
3 to provide relative to the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program; to provide
4 relative to funding; to provide relative to eligibility criteria; to provide relative to the
5 cost of participation; to provide for a unified registration and enrollment system; to
6 provide for the role of the program in the Early Childhood Care and Education
7 Network; to provide relative to rules and regulations; and to provide for related
8 matters.

9 Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

10 Section 1. R.S. 17:407.26 is hereby enacted to read as follows:

11 §407.26. The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program; inclusion in Early
12 Childhood Care and Education Network

13 A.(1) The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program shall serve as the
14 state's unified strategy for administering all publicly funded early childhood
15 programs for four-year-olds through the Early Childhood Care and Education
16 Network. Such programs shall comply with all rules and regulations promulgated
17 by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, referred to in this
18 Section as the "state board", for participation in the network pursuant to R.S.
19 17:407.24.

1 (2) Pursuant to state board rule, and in accordance with R.S. 17:407.23(C),
2 the state Department of Education, referred to in this Section as the "department",
3 shall support the establishment of a seamless early childhood educational system that
4 is coordinated and integrated across all programs, regardless of public funding
5 source, by allocating public funds available for early childhood programs for four-
6 year-olds to eligible early learning centers that apply for such funding and use the
7 funding solely for the purpose of providing early childhood programs. Such
8 programs shall be referred to in this Part as "LA 4 programs".

9 B.(1) Subject to the availability of funds, LA 4 programs shall be available
10 to every eligible child. To be eligible for LA 4 programs, a child shall meet all of
11 the following criteria:

12 (a) He is four years old or eligible to enroll in kindergarten in the following
13 school year pursuant to R.S. 17:151.3.

14 (b) He meets the requirements of R.S. 17:170 relative to immunization
15 documentation required for regular school enrollment.

16 (c) He applies to an early childhood program.

17 (2) LA 4 programs shall be made available through a unified registration and
18 enrollment system administered by or on behalf of the state Department of
19 Education. "At risk" children, as defined in state board rules and regulations, shall
20 be given preference for such registration and enrollment.

21 C. The cost of LA 4 programs shall be as follows:

22 (1) For children who are "at risk", LA 4 programs shall be provided at no
23 cost, except for any applicable lunch cost and the cost of before and after care. There
24 may be a cost for any early childhood program funded through the Child Care
25 Assistance Program, subject to state board rules and regulations.

26 (2) For children who are not "at risk", tuition may be charged on a sliding
27 scale in an amount not to exceed that necessary for the early learning center to
28 provide the program.

1 (3) For all children, both "at risk" and not "at risk", each early learning center
 2 offering LA 4 programs may charge a fee for the cost of meals and the cost of before
 3 and after care, subject to state board rules and regulations.

4 D. Beginning with LA 4 program applications for the 2015-2016 school
 5 year:

6 (1) The department shall annually determine the demand for LA 4 programs.

7 (2) The state board shall consider such demand, the availability of public
 8 funds to support such programs, and the eligibility of early learning centers to
 9 receive public funds for early childhood programs pursuant to R.S. 17:407.23, and
 10 annually determine the following:

11 (a) The cost of funding all LA 4 program applicants who both meet the
 12 eligibility requirements provided in Paragraph (1) of Subsection B of this Section
 13 and who are determined to be "at-risk".

14 (b) The method for equitably distributing available funds to eligible early
 15 learning centers, including those operated as part of public elementary school
 16 programs.

17 Section 2. R.S. 17:24.10 is hereby repealed in its entirety.

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

Leger

HB No. 954

Abstract: Provides relative to the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program, including provisions pertaining to funding, eligibility, cost, and the program's role in the Early Childhood Care and Education Network.

Present law provides for the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program. Proposed law retains such program but revises certain provisions relative to the program, as follows:

Funding

Present law requires DOE to allocate funding, out of monies appropriated for such purpose, to each public school system or charter school that applies for such funding and uses it solely for the purpose of providing a program for early childhood development and enrichment activity classes (LA 4 classes).

Proposed law deletes present law and instead requires DOE to allocate public funds available for early childhood programs for four-year-olds to eligible early learning centers that apply for such funding and use it solely for the purpose of providing early childhood programs (LA 4 programs).

Present law requires BESE, through DOE, to collaborate with the Dept. of Children and Family Services and the Dept. 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. Proposed law retains present law and adds a requirement that DOE support such establishment by allocating funds as provided above in proposed law.

Program specifications

Present law provides for specific criteria for LA 4 educational programs, enrichment activities, teachers, student-teacher ratios, classroom space and facilities, classroom and instructional materials, meals and snacks, and provision of family support services. Proposed law deletes present law.

Eligibility

Present law provides that LA 4 classes shall be provided to every child in a school system's jurisdiction who meets the following criteria:

- (1) Is eligible to enter kindergarten the following year.
- (2) Meets the requirements of present law for immunization documentation required for regular school enrollment.
- (3) Is consistently and regularly in attendance for the early childhood education program portion of the day.

Proposed law retains the immunization requirement and otherwise deletes present law and instead provides, subject to the availability of funds, that LA 4 programs shall be available to each child who meets the immunization requirement and these eligibility criteria:

- (1) Applies to an early childhood program.
- (2) Is four years old or eligible to enroll in kindergarten in the following school year.

Proposed law additionally requires that LA 4 programs be made available through a unified registration and enrollment system administered by or on behalf of DOE for every child who meets such eligibility criteria and for whom funding is available. Grants registration and enrollment preference to "at risk" children (as defined by BESE).

Cost

Present law provides that LA 4 classes are to be provided at no cost to children eligible for free and reduced lunch, except for lunch costs. Provides that other children may be charged tuition in an amount not to exceed that necessary for the school system to provide the LA 4 class and that such tuition may be charged on a sliding scale according to his family's income.

Proposed law deletes present law and instead provides that the cost of LA 4 programs for shall be as follows:

- (1) For "at risk" children: no cost, except for any applicable lunch cost and the cost of before and after care. Authorizes a cost for any early childhood programs funded through the Child Care Assistance Program, subject to BESE rules.
- (2) For children who are not "at risk": tuition may be charged on a sliding scale in an amount not to exceed that necessary for the early learning center to provide the LA 4 program.
- (3) For all children, both "at risk" and not "at risk", authorizes each early learning center offering LA 4 programs to charge a fee for the cost of meals and the cost of before and after care, subject to BESE rules.

Present law provides for a phased-in implementation of a plan to have provided for universal access to LA 4 classes at no cost other than applicable lunch costs by the 2013-14 school year (if funding had been available). Proposed law deletes present law.

Early Childhood Care and Education Network

Proposed law adds that the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program serve as the state's unified strategy for administering all publicly funded early childhood programs for four-year-olds through the Early Childhood Care and Education Network (created in present law) and requires early childhood programs to comply with all BESE rules for participation in such network.

Requirements for DOE and BESE relative to future LA 4 program applications

Proposed law provides for the following, beginning with LA 4 program applications for the 2015-16 school year:

- (1) Requires DOE to annually determine the demand for LA 4 programs.
- (2) Requires BESE to consider such demand, the availability of public funds to support such programs, and the eligibility of early learning centers to receive public funds for early childhood programs and to annually determine the following:
 - (a) The cost of funding all eligible LA 4 program applicants who are considered "at-risk" as defined by BESE.
 - (b) The method for equitably distributing available funds to eligible early learning centers, including those operated as part of public elementary school programs.

(Adds R.S. 17:407.26; Repeals R.S. 17:24.10)