

Existing law provides for the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program, including provisions pertaining to funding, eligibility, cost, and program specifications. New law revises or eliminates certain provisions, as follows:

Funding

Existing law requires the state Dept. of Education (DOE) to allocate funding, out of monies appropriated for such purpose, to each public school system that applies for funding and uses it solely for the purpose of providing a program (the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program or LA 4 program) for early childhood development and enrichment activity classes (LA 4 classes). Prior law required DOE to allocate such funding for such purpose to charter schools in addition to public school systems. New law adds a requirement that BESE assess all funding streams in order to facilitate diverse delivery and fulfill demand to the greatest extent possible.

Existing law provides relative to participating school systems' use of certain funding for collaborative agreements with nonschool system providers of early childhood education. Prior law required, beginning with the 2009-10 school year, each participating school system to use at least 10% of the total increase in LA 4 funding received each year in excess of the amount received during the 2008-09 school year to provide the early childhood education program component of LA 4 classes through such agreements with such providers. Also provided relative to waiving this requirement under certain conditions. New law provides that beginning with the 2014-2015 school year and thereafter, each participating school system must use at least 5% or 10% of the total increase in such funding received each year in excess of the amount received during the previous year to provide LA 4 classes through such agreements with such providers. Provides that the applicable minimum percentage depends on the per pupil allocation for the program for the school year. Provides for a waiver of this requirement.

Existing law requires that such nonschool system providers meet certain criteria, including that they serve children residing within the school system's geographic boundaries and have attained the minimum quality rating as established by BESE required to be eligible to participate. Prior law required such a provider to meet the existing law definition of "child care facility". New law requires that such a provider meet the new law definition of "early learning center", which is any child day care center, Early Head Start Center, Head Start Center, or stand-alone prekindergarten program not attached to a school.

Existing law requires a nonschool system provider wishing to participate in LA 4 to include the following information, at minimum, in its application to the school system:

- (1) Verification that it has attained the minimum quality rating required to be eligible to participate in the program as established by BESE.
- (2) Documentation that it meet requirements provided by law and BESE rules for participation and documentation relative to its organizational, governance, and operational structure, policies, programs, and practices in place to ensure parental involvement, personnel policies and employment practices, and rules and regulations applicable to children, including disciplinary policies and procedures, the adequacy of its facilities and equipment, the types and amounts of its insurance coverage, and applicable teacher certification requirements.

Prior law additionally required verification that it met the definition of "child care facility". New law instead requires verification that it meets the new law definition of "early learning center".

Eligibility

Existing law provides that LA 4 classes shall be provided to every child in a school system's jurisdiction who meets certain criteria, including the requirements of existing law for immunization documentation required for regular school enrollment. Prior law also required that LA 4 classes be provided to every child eligible to enter kindergarten the following year and consistently and regularly in attendance for the early childhood education program

portion of the day. New law provides, subject to the availability of funds, that the LA 4 program shall be available to each child who meets, in addition to the immunization requirements, these criteria:

- (1) Applies to the LA 4 program.
- (2) Is four years old or eligible to enroll in kindergarten in the following school year.

Cost

Prior law required that LA 4 classes be provided at no cost to the child or his family, except for the applicable lunch cost, for any child eligible to receive free or reduced price meals pursuant to the federal child nutrition program as documented by a completed application for such meals whether or not such meals were sought. Also provided for the following:

- (1) Until the beginning of the 2013-14 school year, authorized charging tuition to any child except those eligible to receive free or reduced price meals, on a sliding scale according to family income, according to BESE rule.
- (2) A phased-in implementation of a plan for universal access to LA 4 classes at no cost other than applicable lunch costs subject to the appropriation of funds.

New law provides that the cost of the LA 4 program shall be as follows:

- (1) For "at risk" children (as defined by BESE): no cost, except for any applicable lunch cost and the cost of before and after care.
- (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 program.
- (3) For all children, both at risk and not at risk, authorizes each public school system offering the LA 4 program to charge a fee for the cost of meals and the cost of before and after care, subject to BESE rules.

Program specifications

Prior law required a full day program of at least 10 hours per day for each day that the school system's regular school program was in session and required both a program of early childhood education during the period of the day that school was normally in session and a program of high quality enrichment activities before and after school. New law requires such hours as the regular school day is in session for the early childhood education program.

Existing law requires a program of developmentally appropriate early childhood education with content meeting standards required for accreditation of a high quality early childhood education program. Prior law provided for DOE to determine these standards. New law provides for BESE to determine these standards.

Existing law requires adequate and appropriate space and facilities. Prior law required, if early childhood education or enrichment activities were provided at a site not operated by the school system, adequate and appropriate space and facilities that met the requirements for licensure as a Class A day care. New law repeals prior law.

Existing law requires the following:

- (1) A "lead teacher" who meets certain specific requirements relative to certification or educational credentials.
- (2) A student to lead teacher ratio of no more than 20:1 and a student to adult staff member ratio of no more than 10:1.
- (3) Classroom and instructional supplies consistent with the standards for accreditation of a high quality early childhood education program.

Prior law required the following:

- (1) Transportation for every student to ensure presence of the child for the early childhood education portion of the LA 4 class. Authorized other transportation to be provided.
- (2) Appropriate meals and snacks for every student.
- (3) Provision for services which supported students and families consistent with the needs of the community, which may have included health care, employment counseling, literacy services, tutoring, or parental training.

New law repeals prior law.

Requirements for DOE

Existing law requires DOE to ensure that school systems comply with state law and BESE rules relative to LA 4.

Prior law required DOE to provide regional coordinators sufficient to provide each applicant and each participating school system with supportive technical assistance. New law requires DOE to provide technical assistance to each school system operating the LA 4 program.

Existing law requires DOE to develop and implement a study of the long-term effects of LA 4 on the school success of participating students and a system of evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of LA 4. Prior law required that this system evaluate LA 4 in terms of improving the preparedness of students for elementary school, especially focused on reading readiness. New law repeals prior law.

Existing law requires DOE to provide professional development for lead teachers and others whose employment involves direct contact with students.

Prior law required that DOE:

- (1) Require statistical reporting and other documentation and reporting as required for primary grades, including the number of children participating in LA 4 classes provided by nonschool system providers.
- (2) Provide early childhood education models and programs to participating schools.

New law repeals prior law.

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

New 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 the LA 4 program.
- (2) Requires BESE to consider such demand, the availability of funds to support the program, and the eligibility of public school systems to receive funds for the program 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 public school systems.
 - (c) The difference in dollar amount between the funding required to meet the measured funding demand and the funding available in the fiscal year.

Effective Aug. 1, 2014.

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