

THE FLORIDA SENATE
2021 SUMMARY OF LEGISLATION PASSED
Committee on Education

CS/CS/HB 419 — Early Learning and Early Grade Success

by Education and Employment Committee; PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee; and Reps. Grall, Aloupis, and others (CS/SB 1282 by Appropriations Committee and Senators Harrell and Ausley)

The bill (Chapter 2021-10, L.O.F.) modifies the administration of the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) Program and the school readiness program and reorganizes the regulatory structure of the Office of Early Learning to consolidate authority and oversight within the State Board of Education (SBE). The bill places early learning coalitions (ELCs) under the authority of the SBE and the Commissioner of Education. The bill also transfers the Gold Seal Quality Care program to the Department of Education (DOE) from the Department of Children and Families, adds standards for accrediting entities, and requires procedures to verify compliance.

The bill repeals the current kindergarten readiness rate and associated assessment, and expands accountability and assessment requirements for VPK providers. The bill requires a coordinated screening and progress monitoring program (CSPM) to be administered at the beginning, middle, and end of every school year for students in VPK through grade 3 to provide information on students' progress in mastering the appropriate grade-level standards to parents, teachers, and school and program administrators. VPK students who demonstrate a substantial reading deficiency must be referred to the school district for intervention. The bill creates the Council for Early Grade Success within the DOE to oversee the CSPM and requires the new screenings and assessments to be administered by qualified individuals.

The bill also requires:

- Beginning in the 2022-2023 program year, a program assessment composite score for each VPK provider based on the results of a program assessment that measures the quality of teacher-child interactions, including emotional and behavioral support, engaged support for learning, classroom organization, and instructional support for children ages 3 to 5 years, in each VPK classroom. If a VPK provider fails to meet a minimum composite score adopted by the DOE, the provider may not participate in the VPK Program.
- A performance metric that provides a score to each VPK provider based on the results of the CSPM, including learning gains, and the program assessment, beginning in the 2022-2023 program year.
- The assignment of a performance designation for VPK providers beginning with the 2023-2024 program year. The designations must provide for a differential payment to VPK providers based on program performance.

The bill requires the DOE to adopt procedures for merging or terminating ELCs, and must adopt performance standards and outcome measures that include implementation of a customer service survey. Survey results may require ELCs to implement a correction plan.

The bill modifies the market rate schedule paid to school readiness providers to require a market rate schedule based on the prevailing market rate. The bill also authorizes early learning coalitions to adopt an alternative payment schedule that has been approved by the federal Administration for Children and Families.

These provisions were approved by the Governor and take effect July 1, 2021.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 118-0