

will approve each coalition's plan for the use of public funds and other resources to ensure that children are ready for school. Among the most challenging aspects of the coalitions work will be establishing a system to identify and address potential developmental delays in children, to identify and provide for the mental health needs of young children, and to address community factors, such as violence and drug abuse, that interfere with the ability of parents and others in the community to nurture the optimal development of their children.

Young children develop at a very rapid rate as compared to the rate of development of older children. A potential problem in development, if identified and properly addressed at an early age, can be made less severe or overcome altogether, sometimes in a short period of time. Identifying potential delays in development, or other factors that interfere with a child's development, must be done in a way that does not label a child beyond the point at which the problem exists. While young children change rapidly, government programs change slowly. Sometimes an intervention is driven, not by research, but by the funding that is available for treatment. Once a child is in a program under a certain label, with lower expectations for the child's performance, it is very difficult for the child to move beyond the label. On the other hand, a potential problem that goes undiagnosed can become a real problem, leaving the child and family to cope alone with the child's low performance.

Community environment greatly influences children's development, and individual families in a dangerous community environment can find their best efforts undermined by the social environment. Many government programs, including law enforcement, social services, and the public schools work to protect and foster the development of children who live in dangerous community environments. Some of these services are based on research finding and others are not. School readiness coalitions will need assistance in knowing what research indicates about addressing the needs of children and families in dangerous or non-supportive community environments.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill creates a commission to carry out a study on children with developmental delays. The study will focus on children from birth to five years of age who experience, or who are at risk for developing, emotional, cognitive, social, learning, and other developmental delays. The purpose of the study is to focus on developing early intervention strategies and programs that will enable children and their families to avoid unnecessary suffering that occurs when problems and deficits are not identified or are mislabeled. In addition to providing a more productive life for the children, early identification of problems and appropriate intervention should result in a cost savings to public systems such as the criminal justice system and child welfare system. This study must use the work and findings of other groups to the greatest extent possible.

The Florida Partnership for School Readiness will appoint a study commission to carry out the activities required for the study. The members of the commission, who will serve without compensation but who are entitled to receive reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses, are as follows:

1. The Secretary of Juvenile Justice
2. A representative of the Department of Children and Family Services

3. A representative of the Department of Education
4. The Executive Director of the Agency for Health Care Administration
5. A representative of the Department of Health
6. The Department of Psychiatry chair of the University of Florida Brain Institute
7. The chairman of the Department of Pediatrics of the University of Miami Medical School
8. The chair of the Florida Partnership for School Readiness
9. The chair of the Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers
10. A professional who has expertise in the needs of children with learning disabilities
11. A professional who has expertise in the needs of children with emotional or mental disorders
12. A professional who has expertise in the needs of children with developmental disabilities
13. A professional who has expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of children with speech and language disorders
14. A professional who has expertise in the early intervention and prevention services rendered to children in Florida
15. The parent of a child with a learning disability or emotional or mental disorder.

The Florida Partnership for School Readiness must appoint the members of the study commission within two weeks after the act takes effect, and the appointments must be made in consultation with the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The study commission must submit a report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 1, 2001. The report must contain the following elements:

1. An examination of the research and best practices in the pertinent professional disciplines
2. Determination of the best age-appropriate screening and evaluation tools
3. Identification of community risk factors that expose children to developmental and clinical problems and limit the effectiveness of parents
4. Determination of the organizational arrangement of the delivery system that would assure coordination and integration with existing systems
5. Determination of the cost of providing services and proposed funding options
6. A plan for building a comprehensive early intervention system and recommendations for public policy changes to address violence prevention.

The study commission must establish at least two advisory workgroups--one for scientific advice and another for advice about family and community needs and resources. The bill provides for three staff members to support the work of the study commission--a study coordinator, one professional staff member and one clerical staff member--to be appointed by the executive director of the Partnership for School Readiness.

The bill appropriates \$300,000 to support the activities of the study commission. The commission is authorized to invite national experts in the area of brain research, child development, and

violence prevention, and the bill authorizes the commission to spend \$100,000 of its \$300,000 appropriation for that purpose.

The act will expire on June 30, 2001.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill appropriates the sum of \$300,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness to fund the study.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

The bill requires the study commission to identify existing services and programs in the state that are effective. Unless data is already being gathered to determine the effectiveness of the programs, the commission will not have a basis upon which to make a determination of program effectiveness.

VIII. Amendments:

#1 by Fiscal Policy:

Reduces the General Revenue appropriation for fiscal year 2000-2001 from \$300,000 to \$250,000.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
