

The school readiness system is governed locally by coalitions of 18 to 25 individuals, representing both the public and the private sectors. On December 16, 1999, the Partnership approved 57 school readiness coalitions, representing every county in Florida. Coalitions are writing school readiness plans that they will submit to the Partnership for approval. Each coalition's school readiness program will have available to it state, federal, local, and lottery funds including those for the Florida First Start Program, Even Start literacy programs, prekindergarten early intervention programs, Head Start programs, migrant prekindergarten programs, Title I programs, subsidized child care programs, and teen parent programs. Some district administrators for the Department of Children and Family Services are serving on several coalitions.

The prekindergarten early intervention program, established in s. 230.2305, F.S., is designed to serve economically disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds, the majority of whom must be 4 years of age, in educational programs administered by district school boards. This program is funded by a direct state appropriation of lottery dollars. School districts may spend the funds they receive to implement and conduct a prekindergarten program or to contract with public or non-public entities to serve eligible children. School readiness coalitions with approved plans will receive these funds.

Section 402.3015, F.S., governs the subsidized child care program. The Department of Children and Family Services within each district of the department, must contract for the provision of subsidized child care services. At least once every 3 years, each district must select community child care coordinating agencies through a competitive bid. This requirement is not appropriate under the School Readiness Act, because school readiness coalitions will coordinate school readiness programs and issue requests for proposals from providers .

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill makes technical statutory changes that are necessary for implementation of the School Readiness Act of 1999. The bill amends s. 411.01, F.S., to revise the composition of the Florida Partnership for School Readiness and school readiness coalitions. In keeping with changes in workforce development, the chairperson of the WAGES Program State Board of Directors is replaced by the chairperson of the Board of Directors of Workforce Florida, Inc. on the Partnership for School Readiness.

Two members of local school readiness coalitions are authorized to appoint designees to serve on school readiness coalitions. A Department of Children and Family Services District Administrator may appoint a designee who is authorized to make decisions on behalf of the department, and a district superintendent of schools may appoint a designee who is authorized to make decisions on behalf of the district. When a district administrator for the Department of Children and Family Services or a district superintendent of schools appoints a designee to a school readiness coalition, the designee will be the voting member of the coalition. Any member attending in place of the designee, including the district administrator or superintendent, will have no voting privileges.

The bill limits service by appointed members of coalitions to a maximum of two terms. When a vacancy occurs in an appointed position, the coalition must advertise the vacancy.

The bill grants coalition members the same exemption from sovereign immunity that is granted to members of the Partnership. For purposes of tort liability, the members of the coalition and its employees will be governed by s. 768.28, Florida Statutes.

To clarify terminology regarding payment to providers of school readiness programs, the bill replaces the term reimbursement rate with the term payment. While child care providers are reimbursed, prekindergarten programs receive payment at intervals during the school year. Payment is a term that covers both ways of paying providers.

The bill amends s. 230.2305(6), F.S., to authorize prekindergarten early intervention funds to be allocated to school readiness coalitions rather than school districts. The Florida Partnership for School Readiness will annually designate the maximum amount to be spent per child in the prekindergarten program and the minimum grant that each coalition will receive.

The bill repeals paragraph (a) of subsection (6) of section 402.3015, F.S., thereby deleting the requirement that, at least once every three years, each district of the Department of Children and Family Services must select community child care coordinating agencies through a competitive bid.

The bill will take effect upon becoming a law.

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:

Approximately \$100 million in prekindergarten early intervention program funds will be administered through school readiness coalitions, rather than by school districts.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

1 by Education Committee--

Makes a technical correction by changing the word department to district.

2 by Education Committee--

Makes a technical correction by adding a comma.

3 by Education Committee--

Requires each school readiness coalition to issue a request for proposals to provide school readiness programs at least once every three years.

4 by Education Committee--

Authorizes the Department of Education to distribute prekindergarten early intervention funds to school districts if the local school district is authorized by the local school readiness coalition to be the provider.