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GOVERNOR

HB 4165/Early Learning Legislation

Streamlining and improving early childhood services to prepare kids for kindergarten and beyond

Oregon has more than 108,000 at-risk children under the age of six, and fewer than half of them get the nutrition, health care, or pre-school services they need to ensure they are ready for kindergarten. Further, early childhood programs often lack coordination and accountability, and are not integrated with the K-12 system. Oregon pays the price down the road, with an elevated high school drop-out rate and increased costs for counseling, remediation, social dependency, and corrections. A more effective early learning strategy is the foundation to Oregon's education and economic objectives. The proposed legislation will streamline disparate early childhood programs and add accountability measures to ensure more kids arrive at school with the skills and support they need to succeed.

Streamlines Administration, Policy, and Planning

- Eliminates the Oregon Commission on Children and Families and the Oregon Commission on Childcare, transferring the programs and responsibilities to the Early Learning Council.
- Designates the Council as the state Advisory Council on ELC as defined in the Head Start Act. Replaces Early Childhood Matters Council (and three subcommittees) created by Kulongoski Executive Order.
- Replaces the Juvenile Crime Prevention Committee and Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee with one single body – Youth Development Council - for non-school programs targeting youth.
- Eliminates requirements on counties to form or operate local commissions and removes state obligations to fund County Commissions on Children and Families.

Promotes Outcomes Based on Collaboration, Competition, and Local Creativity

Rather than a state-mandated administrative structure imposed on every county, the ELC will establish a request-for-proposals process for "Accountability Hubs" to convene and coordinate early learning services in a defined area. Administrative costs will be limited to 15 percent, with an effort to reduce overlapping structures at all levels. The new system moves away from planning and process and will:

- Require broad-based local oversight, including elected officials and community members.
- Require documented participation from government and non-government partners and providers, including counties and health care providers.
- Determine the "region" or area of service based on feedback from and collaboration of the respondents. In some areas, this may be based on participation by one or more county governments, in others by, for example, a nonprofit organization, university, tribe, or faith-based organization.
- Feature a provider-neutral RFP process focused on a coordinated system committed to outcomes for at-risk and underserved children and families.
- Set standards that communities are then empowered to meet in ways they deem best.

No Changes to Head Start

This legislation makes no changes to Head Start and Early Head Start, which together serve 14,000 of the estimated 108,000 children under age six at-risk in Oregon. Oregon has a parallel program, Oregon Pre Kindergarten, which also remains unchanged. Instead, HB 4165 will:

- Keep Oregon aligned with federal rules for Head Start.
- Include Head Start programs in the list of programs shown as participating in a locally coordinated system (consistent with federal requirements and existing statute).
- Direct the state to adopt Head Start standards and align with Common Core State Standards for K-12 education.

No Changes to Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education

The ELC and State Interagency Council on EI/ECSE are directed to engage in a joint planning process for these important services to students with special needs, and will report back prior to the 2013 legislative session.

Consistent Screening and Readiness

- Directs the ELC to work with the Oregon Health Authority, counties, the Department of Education, and communities to select screening tools for use in all settings serving children. Screening is already required by statute; this bill designates the ELC as the lead.
- Directs the state to implement a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to determine how many children are prepared for school and can hold early childhood programs accountable.

Incentives for Quality and Tools for Parent Choice in Childcare

Directs the Childcare Division to implement a Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System – similar to a rating system for hotels – for childcare settings. This provides an incentive for providers to improve and provides parents with a way to evaluate settings for their children based on quality. This was a key requirement of the recent “Race to the Top” grant process and is a leading national practice.

Accountability: Legislative Oversight Required

Requires the Council to report back to all appropriate legislative committees (Education, Human Services, Ways and Means, and/or others determined by the Legislature) at all 2012 interim hearing periods and to prepare recommendations for legislative consideration in 2013.

A New Budget Approach for 2013

Directs the ELC to prepare a financial model for a “global budgeting” approach to Early Learning Services for consideration by the legislature in 2013.

Next Steps

Passing the Early Learning Council legislation during the 2012 session continues with the significant work begun last session and implements recommendations that will set students up for broader educational success, starting with early childhood learning and kindergarten.

For more information on the Early Learning Council, visit www.education.oregon.gov, email duke.shepard@state.or.us, or call 503-378-5540.