

Committee Substitute for Committee Substitute for
Senate Bill Nos. 366, 382, and 708

An act relating to school readiness; creating s. 411.01, F.S.; establishing the Florida Partnership for School Readiness for purposes of administering the School Readiness Program; providing legislative intent; providing for the program to be phased in; providing responsibilities and duties of the partnership; providing membership and meeting requirements; providing that members are subject to certain ethics requirements; authorizing partnership members to be reimbursed for per diem and travel expenses; providing for hiring certain employees; requiring that the partnership prepare a system for measuring school readiness; specifying objectives to be measured by such system; requiring that the partnership adopt performance standards and measures; requiring the partnership to make recommendations to the Governor and the State Board of Education; requiring reports to the Legislature; authorizing the partnership to adopt rules; requiring the establishment of school readiness coalitions; specifying services to be provided by the coalitions; requiring coalitions to develop reimbursement schedules; providing for designation and approval of a fiscal agent; providing for grants to be provided to coalitions to develop school readiness plans; providing requirements for school readiness plans; providing for incentive bonuses to be awarded; requiring evaluations and an annual report; providing eligibility criteria; providing for parental choice with respect to child care arrangements and payments; providing for evaluation and performance measures; providing requirements for funding school readiness programs; requiring the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to make certain reports; providing responsibility for implementation; creating s. 229.567, F.S.; requiring the Department of Education to adopt the school readiness uniform screening developed by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness and to require their use by the school districts; amending s. 216.136, F.S.; creating the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference; requiring the conference to develop estimates and forecasts of students eligible for school readiness programs; specifying the principals of the conference; amending s. 414.026, F.S.; requiring the chairperson of the Florida Partnership for School Readiness to serve on the WAGES Program State Board of Directors; amending s. 624.91, F.S.; providing legislative intent that the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation work cooperatively with the School Readiness Program; amending s. 411.222, F.S.; abolishing the State Coordinating Council for Early Childhood Services; establishing the State Coordinating Council for School Readiness Programs; requiring the State Coordinating Council for Early Childhood Services to submit a final report; repealing s. 411.222(4), F.S., relating to the State Coordinating Council for Early Childhood Services; amending s. 240.115, F.S.; requiring that the Commissioner of Education establish a career path for school-readiness-related

professions; authorizing the Governor to transfer funds; requiring that the Florida Partnership for School Readiness recommend appropriations and positions; authorizing the Inter-University Consortium of Child and Family Studies to develop a model to demonstrate best practices; providing that the act does not impede the state's ability to receive federal funds; providing an appropriation; providing effective dates.

WHEREAS, the voters of the State of Florida, in the November 1998 General Election, amended Section 1 of Article IX of the State Constitution to state that it is "a paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education of all children residing within its borders," and

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes the primacy of parents as their children's first teachers and the importance of children entering the education system ready to learn, and

WHEREAS, the Legislature seeks to assist parents by providing opportunities for the state's at-risk birth-to-kindergarten population to enhance their chances for educational success by participating in quality school readiness programs that can better prepare them for school, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 411.01, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

411.01 Florida Partnership for School Readiness; school readiness coalitions.—

(1) SHORT TITLE.—This section may be cited as the "School Readiness Act."

(2) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—

(a) The Legislature recognizes that school readiness programs increase children's chances of achieving future educational success and becoming productive members of society. It is the intent of the Legislature that such programs be developmentally appropriate, research-based, involve parents as their child's first teacher, serve as preventive measures for children at risk of future school failure, enhance the educational readiness of eligible children, and support family education. Each school readiness program shall provide the elements necessary to prepare at-risk children for school, including health screening and referral and an appropriate educational program.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that school readiness programs be operated on a full-day, year-round basis to the maximum extent possible to enable parents to work and become financially self-sufficient.

(c) It is the intent of the Legislature that school readiness programs not exist as isolated programs, but build upon existing services and work in cooperation with other programs for young children, and that school readiness programs be coordinated and funding integrated to achieve full effectiveness.

(d) It is the intent of the Legislature that the administrative staff at the state level for school readiness programs be kept to the minimum necessary to carry out the duties of the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, as the school readiness programs are to be locally designed, operated, and managed, with the Florida Partnership for School Readiness adopting a system for measuring school readiness; developing school readiness program performance standards, outcome measurements, and data design and review; and approving and reviewing local school readiness coalitions and plans.

(e) It is the intent of the Legislature that appropriations for combined school readiness programs shall not be less than the programs would receive in any fiscal year on an uncombined basis.

(f) It is the intent of the Legislature that the school readiness program coordinate and operate in conjunction with the district school systems. However, it is also the intent of the Legislature that the school readiness program not be construed as part of the system of free public schools but rather as a separate program for children under the age of kindergarten eligibility, funded separately from the system of free public schools, utilizing a mandatory sliding fee scale, and providing an integrated and seamless system of school readiness services for the state's birth-to-kindergarten population.

(g) It is the intent of the Legislature that the federal child care income tax credit be preserved for school readiness programs.

(3) SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM.—The school readiness program shall be phased in on a coalition-by-coalition basis. Each coalition's school readiness program shall have available to it funding from all the coalition's early education and child care programs that are funded with state, federal, lottery, or local funds, including but not limited to Florida First Start programs, Even-Start literacy programs, prekindergarten early intervention programs, Head Start programs, programs offered by public and private providers of child care, migrant prekindergarten programs, Title I programs, subsidized child care programs, and teen parent programs, together with any additional funds appropriated or obtained for purposes of this section. These programs and their funding streams shall be components of the coalition's integrated school readiness program, with the goal of preparing children for success in school.

(4) FLORIDA PARTNERSHIP FOR SCHOOL READINESS.—

(a) There is created the Florida Partnership for School Readiness with responsibility for adopting and maintaining coordinated programmatic, administrative, and fiscal policies and standards for all school readiness programs, while allowing a wide range of programmatic flexibility and differentiation. The partnership is assigned to the Executive Office of the Governor for administrative purposes.

(b)1. The Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall include the Lieutenant Governor or his or her designee, the Commissioner of Education, the Secretary of Children and Family Services, the Secretary of Health, the

chairperson of the Child Care Executive Partnership Board, and the chairperson of the WAGES Program State Board of Directors.

2. The partnership shall also include 10 members of the public who shall be business, community, and civic leaders in the state who are not elected to public office. These members and their families must not be providers in the early education and child care industry. The members must be geographically and demographically representative of the state. Each member shall be appointed by the Governor. Eight of the members shall be appointed from a list of 10 nominees, of which five must be submitted by the President of the Senate and five must be submitted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Members shall be appointed to 4-year terms of office. However, of the initial appointees, two shall be appointed to 1-year terms, two shall be appointed to 2-year terms, three shall be appointed to 3-year terms, and three shall be appointed to 4-year terms. The members of the partnership shall elect a chairperson annually from the nongovernmental members of the partnership. Any vacancy on the partnership shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

(c) The partnership shall meet at least quarterly but may meet as often as it deems necessary to carry out its duties and responsibilities. Members of the partnership shall participate without proxy at the quarterly meetings. The partnership may take official action by a majority vote of the members present at any meeting at which a quorum is present. The partnership shall hold its first meeting by October 1, 1999.

(d) Members of the partnership are subject to the ethics provisions in part III of chapter 112, and no member may derive any financial benefit from the funds administered by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

(e) Members of the partnership shall serve without compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as provided in s. 112.061, and reimbursement for other reasonable, necessary, and actual expenses.

(f) For the purposes of tort liability, the members of the partnership and its employees shall be governed by s. 768.28.

(g) The partnership shall appoint an executive director to serve at its pleasure who shall perform the duties assigned to him or her by the partnership. The executive director shall be responsible for hiring, subject to the approval of the partnership, all employees and staff members, who shall serve under his or her direction and control.

(h) For purposes of administration of the Federal Child Care and Development Fund, 45 C.F.R. Parts 98 and 99, the partnership may be designated by the Governor as the Lead Agency, and if so designated shall comply with the Lead Agency responsibilities pursuant to federal law.

(i) The Florida Partnership for School Readiness is the principal organization responsible for the enhancement of school readiness for the state's children, and shall:

1. Be responsible for the prudent use of all public and private funds in accordance with all legal and contractual requirements.
2. Provide final approval and periodic review of coalitions and plans.
3. Provide leadership for enhancement of school readiness in this state by aggressively establishing a unified approach to the state's efforts toward enhancement of school readiness. In support of this effort, the partnership may develop and implement specific strategies that address the state's school readiness programs.
4. Safeguard the effective use of federal, state, local, and private resources to achieve the highest possible level of school readiness for the state's children.
5. Provide technical assistance to coalitions.
6. Assess gaps in service.
7. Provide technical assistance to counties that form a multicounty coalition.
- 8.a. By July 1, 2000, adopt a system for measuring school readiness that provides objective data regarding the expectations for school readiness, and establish a method for collecting the data and guidelines for using the data. The measurement, the data collection, and the use of the data must serve the statewide school readiness goal. The criteria for determining which data to collect should be the usefulness of the data to state policymakers and local program administrators in administering programs and allocating state funds, and must include the tracking of school readiness system information back to individual school readiness programs to assist in determining program effectiveness.
- b. By December 31, 2000, the partnership shall also adopt a system for evaluating the performance of students through the third grade to compare the performance of those who participated in school readiness programs with the performance of students who did not participate in school readiness programs in order to identify strategies for continued successful student performance.
9. By June 1, 2000, develop and adopt performance standards and outcome measures.
10. In consultation with the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission and the Education Standards Commission, assess the expertise of public and private Florida postsecondary institutions in the areas of infant and toddler developmental research; the related curriculum of training, career, and academic programs; and the status of articulation among those programs. Based on this assessment, the partnership shall provide recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature for postsecondary program improvements to enhance school readiness initiatives.
- (j) The partnership may adopt rules necessary to administer the provisions of this section which relate to preparing and implementing the system

for school readiness, collecting data, approving local school readiness coalitions and plans, providing a method whereby a coalition can serve two or more counties, awarding incentives to coalitions, and issuing waivers.

(k) The Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall have all powers necessary to carry out the purposes of this section, including, but not limited to, the power to receive and accept grants, loans, or advances of funds from any public or private agency and to receive and accept from any source contributions of money, property, labor, or any other thing of value, to be held, used, and applied for the purposes of this section.

(l) The Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall be an independent, nonpartisan body and shall not be identified or affiliated with any one agency, program, or group.

(m) The Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall have a budget, shall be financed through an annual appropriation made for this purpose in the General Appropriations Act, and shall be subject to compliance audits and annual financial audits by the Auditor General.

(n) The partnership shall coordinate the efforts toward school readiness in this state and provide independent policy analyses and recommendations to the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature.

(o) By July 1, 2000, the partnership shall prepare and submit to the State Board of Education a system for measuring school readiness. The system must include a uniform screening, which shall provide objective data regarding the following expectations for school readiness which shall include, at a minimum:

1. The child's immunizations and other health requirements as necessary, including appropriate vision and hearing screening and examinations.

2. The child's physical development.

3. The child's compliance with rules, limitations, and routines.

4. The child's ability to perform tasks.

5. The child's interactions with adults.

6. The child's interactions with peers.

7. The child's ability to cope with challenges.

8. The child's self-help skills.

9. The child's ability to express his or her needs.

10. The child's verbal communication skills.

11. The child's problem-solving skills.

12. The child's following of verbal directions.

13. The child's demonstration of curiosity, persistence, and exploratory behavior.

14. The child's interest in books and other printed materials.

15. The child's paying attention to stories.

16. The child's participation in art and music activities.

17. The child's ability to identify colors, geometric shapes, letters of the alphabet, numbers, and spatial and temporal relationships.

(p) The partnership shall prepare a plan for implementing the system for measuring school readiness in such a way that all children in this state will undergo the uniform screening established by the partnership when they enter kindergarten. Children who enter public school for the first time in first grade must undergo a uniform screening approved by the partnership for use in first grade. Because children with disabilities may not be able to meet all of the identified expectations for school readiness, the plan for measuring school readiness shall incorporate mechanisms for recognizing the potential variations in expectations for school readiness when serving children with disabilities and shall provide for communities to serve children with disabilities.

(q) The partnership shall recommend to the Governor, the Commissioner of Education, and the State Board of Education rules, and revisions or repeal of rules, which would increase the effectiveness of programs that prepare children for school.

(r) The partnership shall conduct studies and planning activities related to the overall improvement and effectiveness of school-readiness measures.

(s) By February 1, 2000, the partnership shall work with the Office of the Comptroller for electronic funds transfer.

(t) By February 1, 2000, the partnership shall present to the Legislature a plan for combining funding streams for school readiness programs into a School Readiness Trust Fund.

(u) The partnership shall establish procedures for performance-based budgeting in school readiness programs.

(v) The partnership shall submit an annual report of its activities to the Governor, the executive director of the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the minority leaders of both houses of the Legislature. In addition, the partnership's reports and recommendations shall be made available to the State Board of Education, other appropriate state agencies and entities, district school boards, central agencies for child care, and county health departments. The annual report must provide an analysis of school readiness activities across the state, including the number of children who were served in the programs and the number of children who were ready for school.

(w) The partnership shall work with school readiness coalitions to increase parents' training for and involvement in their children's preschool education and to provide family literacy activities and programs.

To ensure that the system for measuring school readiness is comprehensive and appropriate statewide, as the system is developed and implemented, the partnership must consult with representatives of district school systems, providers of public and private child care, health care providers, large and small employers, experts in education for children with disabilities, and experts in child development.

(5) CREATION OF SCHOOL READINESS COALITIONS.—

(a) School readiness coalitions.—

1. If a coalition's plan would serve less than 400 birth-to-kindergarten age children, the coalition must either join with another county to form a multi-county coalition, enter an agreement with a fiscal agent to serve more than one coalition, or demonstrate to the partnership its ability to effectively and efficiently implement its plan as a single-county coalition and meet all required performance standards and outcome measures.

2. Each coalition shall have at least 18 but not more than 25 members and such members must include the following:

- a. A Department of Children and Family Services district administrator.
- b. A district superintendent of schools.
- c. A regional workforce development board chair or director, where applicable.
- d. A county health department director or his or her designee.
- e. A children's services council or juvenile welfare board chair or executive director, if applicable.
- f. A child care licensing agency head.
- g. One member appointed by a Department of Children and Family Services district administrator.
- h. One member appointed by a board of county commissioners.
- i. One member appointed by a district school board.
- j. A central child care agency administrator.
- k. A Head Start director.
- l. A representative of private child care providers.
- m. A representative of faith-based child care providers.

More than one-third of the coalition members must be from the private sector, and neither they nor their families may earn an income from the early education and child care industry. To meet this requirement a coalition must appoint additional members from a list of nominees presented to the coalition by a chamber of commerce or economic development council within the geographic area of the coalition.

3. No member of a coalition may appoint a designee to act in his or her place. A member may send a representative to coalition meetings, but that representative will have no voting privileges.

4. The school readiness coalition shall replace the district interagency coordinating council required under s. 230.2305.

5. Members of the coalition are subject to the ethics provisions in part III of chapter 112.

6. Multicounty coalitions shall include representation from each county.

7. The terms of all appointed members of the coalition must be staggered.

(b) Program participation.—The school readiness program shall be established for children from birth to 5 years of age or until the child enters kindergarten. The program shall be administered by the school readiness coalition. Within funding limitations, the school readiness coalition, along with all providers, shall make reasonable efforts to accommodate the needs of children for extended-day and extended-year services without compromising the quality of the program.

(c) Program expectations.—

1. The school readiness program must meet the following expectations:

a. The program must prepare preschool children to enter kindergarten ready to learn, as measured by criteria established by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

b. The program must provide extended-day and extended-year services to the maximum extent possible to meet the needs of parents who work.

c. There must be coordinated staff development and teaching opportunities.

d. There must be expanded access to community services and resources for families to help achieve economic self-sufficiency.

e. There must be a single point of entry and unified waiting list.

f. As long as funding or eligible populations do not decrease, the program must serve at least as many children as were served prior to implementation of the program.

g. There must be a community plan to address the needs of all eligible children.

h. The program must meet all state licensing guidelines, where applicable.

2. The school readiness coalition must implement a comprehensive program of readiness services that enhance the cognitive, social, and physical development of children to achieve the performance standards and outcome measures specified by the partnership. At a minimum, these programs must contain the following elements:

a. Developmentally appropriate curriculum.

b. A character development program to develop basic values.

c. An age-appropriate assessment of each child's development.

d. A pretest administered to children when they enter a program and a posttest administered to children when they leave the program.

e. An appropriate staff-to-child ratio.

f. A healthful and safe environment.

g. A resource and referral network to assist parents in making an informed choice.

(d) Implementation.—

1. The school readiness program is to be phased in. Until the coalition implements its plan, the county shall continue to receive the services identified in subsection (3) through the various agencies that would be responsible for delivering those services under current law. Plan implementation is subject to approval of the coalition and the plan by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

2. Each school readiness coalition shall develop a plan for implementing the school readiness program to meet the requirements of this section and the performance standards and outcome measures established by the partnership. The plan must include a written description of the role of the program in the coalition's effort to meet the first state education goal, readiness to start school, including a description of the plan to involve the pre-kindergarten early intervention programs, Head Start Programs, programs offered by public or private providers of child care, preschool programs for children with disabilities, programs for migrant children, Title I programs, subsidized child care programs, and teen parent programs. The plan must also demonstrate how the program will ensure that each 3-year-old and 4-year-old child in a publicly funded school readiness program receives scheduled activities and instruction designed to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Prior to implementation of the program, the school readiness coalition must submit the plan to the partnership for approval. The partnership may approve the plan, reject the plan, or approve the plan with conditions. The plan shall be reviewed, revised, and approved biennially.

3. The plan for the school readiness program must include the following minimum standards and provisions:

a. A sliding fee scale establishing a co-payment for parents based upon their ability to pay, which is the same for all program providers, to be implemented and reflected in each program's budget.

b. A choice of settings and locations in licensed, registered, religious-exempt, or school-based programs to be provided to parents.

c. Instructional staff who have completed the training course as required in s. 402.305(2)(d)1., as well as staff who have additional training or credentials as required by the respective program provider. The plan must provide a method for assuring the qualifications of all personnel in all program settings.

d. Specific eligibility priorities for children within the coalition's county pursuant to subsection (6).

e. Performance standards and outcome measures established by the partnership or alternatively, standards and outcome measures to be used until such time as the partnership adopts such standards and outcome measures.

f. Reimbursement rates that have been developed by the coalition.

g. Systems support services, including a central agency, child care resource and referral, eligibility determinations, training of providers, and parent support and involvement.

h. Direct enhancement services to families and children. System support and direct enhancement services shall be in addition to payments for the placement of children in school readiness programs.

i. A business plan, which must include the contract with a school readiness agent if the coalition is not a legally established corporate entity. Coalitions may contract with other coalitions to achieve efficiency in multiple-county services, and such contracts may be part of the coalition's business plan.

j. Strategies to meet the needs of unique populations, such as migrant workers.

As part of the plan, the coalition may request the Governor to apply for a waiver to allow the coalition to administer the Head Start Program to accomplish the purposes of the school readiness program. If any school readiness plan can demonstrate that specific statutory goals can be achieved more effectively by using procedures that require modification of existing rules, policies, or procedures, a request for a waiver to the partnership may be made as part of the plan. Upon review, the partnership may grant the proposed modification.

4. Persons with an early childhood teaching certificate may provide support and supervision to other staff in the school readiness program.

5. The coalition may not implement its plan until it submits the plan to and receives approval from the partnership. Once the plan has been approved, the plan and the services provided under the plan shall be controlled by the coalition rather than by the state agencies or departments. The plan shall be reviewed and revised as necessary, but at least biennially.

6. The following statutes will not apply to local coalitions with approved plans: ss. 125.901(2)(a)3., 228.061(1) and (2), 230.2306, 411.204, 411.221, 411.222, and 411.232. To facilitate innovative practices and to allow local establishment of school readiness programs, a school readiness coalition may apply to the Governor and Cabinet for a waiver of, and the Governor and Cabinet may waive, any of the provisions of ss. 230.2303, 230.2305, 230.23166, 402.3015, 411.223, and 411.232, if the waiver is necessary for implementation of the coalition's school readiness plan.

7. Two or more counties may join for the purpose of planning and implementing a school readiness program.

8. A coalition may, subject to approval of the partnership as part of the coalition's plan, receive subsidized child care funds for all children eligible for any federal subsidized child care program and be the provider of the program services.

9. Coalitions are authorized to enter into multiparty contracts with multi-county service providers in order to meet the needs of unique populations such as migrant workers.

(e) Reimbursement rate.—Each coalition shall develop a reimbursement rate schedule that encompasses all programs funded by that coalition. The reimbursement rate schedule must take into consideration the relevant market rate, must include the projected number of children to be served, and must be submitted to the partnership for information. Informal childcare arrangements shall be reimbursed at not more than 50 percent of the rate developed for family childcare.

(f) Requirements relating to fiscal agents.—If the local coalition is not a legally established corporate entity, the coalition must designate a fiscal agent, which may be a public entity or a private nonprofit organization. The fiscal agent shall be required to provide financial and administrative services pursuant to a contract or agreement with the school readiness coalition. The fiscal agent may not provide direct early education or child care services, however, a fiscal agent may provide such services upon written request of the coalition to the partnership and upon the approval of such request by the partnership. The cost of the financial and administrative services shall be negotiated between the fiscal agent and the school readiness coalition. If the fiscal agent is a provider of early education and care programs, the contract must specify that the fiscal agent will act on policy direction from the coalition and will not receive policy direction from its own corporate board regarding disbursement of coalition funds. The fiscal agent shall disburse funds in accordance with the approved coalition school readiness plan and based on billing and disbursement procedures approved by the partnership. The fiscal agent must conform to all data-reporting requirements established by the partnership.

(g) Coalition initiation grants; incentive bonuses.—

1. School readiness coalitions that are approved by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness by January 1, 2000, shall be eligible for a \$50,000 initiation grant to support the school readiness coalition in developing its school readiness plan.

2. School readiness coalitions that are approved by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness by March 1, 2000, shall be eligible for a \$25,000 initiation grant to support the school readiness coalition in developing its school readiness plan.

3. School readiness coalitions that have their plans approved by July 1, 2000, shall receive funding from the Florida Partnership for School Readiness in fiscal year 2000-2001, and each year thereafter.

4. Upon approval by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness of any coalition's plan that clearly shows enhancement in the quality and standards of the school readiness program without diminishing the number of children served in the program, the partnership shall award the coalition an incentive bonus, subject to appropriation.

5. In fiscal year 2000-2001, and each year thereafter, any increases in funding for school readiness programs shall be administered through school readiness coalitions.

6. In fiscal year 2001-2002, the Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall request proposals from government agencies and nonprofit corporations for the development and operation of a school readiness coalition in each county that does not have an approved coalition by March 1, 2001.

(h) Evaluation and annual report.—Each school readiness coalition shall conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of the school readiness program, including performance standards and outcome measures, and shall provide an annual report and fiscal statement to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness. This report must conform to the content and format specifications set by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness. The partnership must include an analysis of the coalition reports in its annual report.

(6) PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY.—The school readiness program shall be established for children under the age of kindergarten eligibility. Priority for participation in the school readiness program shall be given to children who meet one or more of the following criteria:

(a) Children under the age of kindergarten eligibility who are:

1. Children determined to be at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation and who are currently clients of the Children and Family Services Program Office of the Department of Children and Family Services.

2. Children at risk of welfare dependency, including economically disadvantaged children, children of participants in the WAGES program, children of migrant farmworkers, and children of teen parents.

3. Children of working families whose family income does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

(b) Three-year-old children and 4-year-old children who may not be economically disadvantaged but who have disabilities, have been served in a specific part-time or combination of part-time exceptional education programs with required special services, aids, or equipment, and were previously reported for funding part time with the Florida Education Finance Program as exceptional students.

(c) Economically disadvantaged children, children with disabilities, and children at risk of future school failure, from birth to 4 years of age, who are served at home through home visitor programs and intensive parent education programs such as the Florida First Start Program.

(d) Children who meet federal and state requirements for eligibility for the migrant preschool program but who do not meet the criteria of economically disadvantaged.

An “economically disadvantaged” child means a child whose family income is below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Notwithstanding any change in a family’s economic status, but subject to additional family contributions in accordance with the sliding fee scale, a child who meets the eligibility requirements upon initial registration for the program shall be considered eligible until the child reaches kindergarten age.

(7) PARENTAL CHOICE.—

(a) The school readiness program shall provide parental choice pursuant to a purchase service order that ensures, to the maximum extent possible, flexibility in school readiness programs and payment arrangements. According to federal regulations requiring parental choice, a parent may choose an informal child-care arrangement. The purchase order must bear the name of the beneficiary and the program provider and, when redeemed, must bear the signature of both the beneficiary and an authorized representative of the provider.

(b) If it is determined that a provider has provided any cash to the beneficiary in return for receiving the purchase order, the coalition or its fiscal agent shall refer the matter to the Division of Public Assistance Fraud for investigation.

(c) The Office of the Comptroller shall establish an electronic transfer system for the disbursement of funds in accordance with this subsection. School readiness coalitions shall fully implement the electronic funds transfer system within 2 years after plan approval unless a waiver is obtained from the partnership.

(8) STANDARDS; OUTCOME MEASURES.—All publicly funded school readiness programs shall be required to meet the performance standards and outcome measures developed and approved by the partnership. The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability shall provide consultation to the partnership in the development of the measures

and standards. These performance standards and outcome measures shall be adopted by June 1, 2000, and shall be applicable on a state-wide basis.

(9) FUNDING; SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM.—

(a) It is the intent of this section to establish an integrated and quality seamless service delivery system for all publicly funded early education and child care programs operating in this state.

(b) All state funds budgeted for a county for the programs specified in subsection (3), along with the pro rata share of the state administrative costs of those programs in the amount as determined by the partnership, all federal funds and required local matching funds for a county for programs specified in subsection (3), and any additional funds appropriated or obtained for purposes of this section, shall be transferred for the benefit of the coalition for implementation of its plan, including the hiring of staff to effectively operate the coalition's school readiness program. As part of plan approval and periodic plan review, the partnership shall require that administrative costs be kept to the minimum necessary for efficient and effective administration of the plan, but total administrative expenditures shall not exceed 5 percent unless specifically waived by the partnership. The partnership shall annually report to the Legislature any problems relating to administrative costs.

(c) By February 15, 2000, the partnership shall present to the Legislature recommendations for combining funding streams for school readiness programs into a School Readiness Trust Fund. These recommendations must include recommendations for the inclusion or noninclusion of pre-kindergarten disabilities programs and funding.

(d) The partnership shall annually distribute all eligible funds as block grants to assist coalitions in integrating services and funding to develop a quality service delivery system. Subject to appropriation, the partnership may also provide financial awards to coalitions demonstrating success in merging and integrating funding streams to serve children and school readiness programs.

(e) State funds appropriated for the school readiness program may not be used for the construction of new facilities or the purchase of buses. By February 15, 2000, the partnership shall present to the Legislature recommendations for providing necessary transportation services for school readiness programs.

(f) All cost savings and all revenues received through a mandatory sliding fee scale shall be used to help fund the local school readiness program.

(10) REPORTS.—The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability shall assess the implementation, efficiency, and outcomes of the school readiness program and report its findings to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 1, 2002. Subsequent reviews shall be conducted at the direction of the Joint Legislative Auditing Committee.

(11) CONFLICTING PROVISIONS.—In the event of a conflict between the provisions of this section and federal requirements, the federal requirements shall control.

Section 2. Section 229.567, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

229.567 School readiness uniform screening.—The Department of Education shall adopt the school readiness uniform screening developed by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, and shall require that all school districts administer the kindergarten uniform screening to each kindergarten student in the district school system upon the student's entry into kindergarten. Children who enter public school for the first time in first grade must undergo a uniform screening approved by the partnership for use in first grade.

Section 3. Subsection (11) is added to section 216.136, Florida Statutes, 1998 Supplement, to read:

216.136 Consensus estimating conferences; duties and principals.—

(11) SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM ESTIMATING CONFERENCE.—

(a) Duties.—

1. The School Readiness Program Estimating Conference shall develop such estimates and forecasts of the number of individuals eligible for school readiness programs in accordance with the standards of eligibility established by state or federal statute or administrative rule as the conference determines are needed to support the state planning, budgeting, and appropriations processes.

2. In addition, the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference shall estimate the unduplicated count of children who are eligible for services under the school readiness program.

3. The Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall provide information on needs and waiting lists for school readiness program services requested by the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference or individual conference principals in a timely manner.

(b) Principals.—The Executive Office of the Governor, the Director of Economic and Demographic Research, and professional staff who have forecasting expertise from the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Education, the Senate, and the House of Representatives, or their designees, are the principals of the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference. The principal representing the Executive Office of the Governor shall preside over sessions of the conference.

Section 4. Subsection (2) of section 414.026, Florida Statutes, 1998 Supplement, is amended to read:

414.026 WAGES Program State Board of Directors.—

(2)(a) The board of directors shall be composed of the following members:

1. The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee.
2. The Secretary of Children and Family Services.
3. The Secretary of Health.
4. The Secretary of Labor and Employment Security.
5. The Secretary of Community Affairs.
6. The Secretary of Transportation, or the secretary's designee.
7. The director of the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development.
8. The chairperson of the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

9.8. The president of the Enterprise Florida workforce development board, established under s. 288.9620.

10.9. The chief executive officer of the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, established under s. 288.1226.

11.10. Nine members appointed by the Governor, as follows:

a. Six members shall be appointed from a list of ten nominees, of which five must be submitted by the President of the Senate and five must be submitted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The list of five nominees submitted by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives must each contain at least three individuals employed in the private sector, two of whom must have management experience. One of the five nominees submitted by the President of the Senate and one of the five nominees submitted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives must be an elected local government official who shall serve as an ex officio nonvoting member.

b. Three members shall be at-large members appointed by the Governor.

c. Of the nine members appointed by the Governor, at least six must be employed in the private sector and of these, at least five must have management experience.

The members appointed by the Governor shall be appointed to 4-year, staggered terms. Within 60 days after a vacancy occurs on the board, the Governor shall fill the vacancy of a member appointed from the nominees submitted by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the remainder of the unexpired term from one nominee submitted by the President of the Senate and one nominee submitted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Within 60 days after a vacancy of a member appointed at-large by the Governor occurs on the board, the Governor shall

fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term. The composition of the board must generally reflect the racial, gender, and ethnic diversity of the state as a whole.

(b) The board of directors shall annually elect a chairperson from among the members appointed by the Governor. The board of directors shall meet at least once each quarter. A member appointed by the Governor may not authorize a designee to attend a meeting of the board in place of the member. The Governor may remove an appointed member for cause, and an absence from three consecutive meetings results in automatic removal, unless the member is excused by the chairperson.

(c) Members of the board shall serve without compensation, but are entitled to reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses as provided in s. 112.061.

Section 5. Paragraph (a) of subsection (2) of section 624.91, Florida Statutes, 1998 Supplement, is amended to read:

624.91 The Florida Healthy Kids Corporation Act.—

(2) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—

(a) The Legislature finds that increased access to health care services could improve children's health and reduce the incidence and costs of childhood illness and disabilities among children in this state. Many children do not have comprehensive, affordable health care services available. It is the intent of the Legislature that the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation provide comprehensive health insurance coverage to such children. The corporation is encouraged to cooperate with any existing health service programs funded by the public or the private sector and to work cooperatively with the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

Section 6. Subsection (4) of section 411.222, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

411.222 Intraagency and interagency coordination; creation of offices; responsibilities; memorandum of agreement; creation of coordinating council; responsibilities.—

(Substantial rewording of subsection. See s. 411.222(4), F.S., for present text.)

(4) STATE COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMS.—

(a) Creation; intent.—The State Coordinating Council for School Readiness Programs is established to ensure coordination among the programs that serve preschool children in order to support the first state education goal, readiness to start school; to facilitate communication, cooperation, and the maximum use of resources; and to promote high standards for all programs that serve preschool children in this state. It is the intent of the Legislature that the coordinating council be an independent nonpartisan

body and not be identified or affiliated with any one agency, program, or group.

(b) Membership.—The council shall be composed of the following 15 members:

1. The seven current members of the 1998-1999 State Coordinating Council Executive Committee.

2. Eight additional members, appointed by the executive committee, including a representative of each of the following: subsidized child care programs; prekindergarten early intervention programs; Head Start programs; health care programs; private providers; faith-based providers; programs for children with disabilities; and parents of preschool children.

(c) Term.—The State Coordinating Council for School Readiness Programs shall terminate on July 1, 2002.

(d) Organization.—

1. The council shall adopt internal organizational procedures or bylaws necessary for the efficient operation of the council. The council may establish committees that are responsible for conducting specific council programs and activities.

2. The council shall have a budget and be financed through an annual appropriation made for this purpose in the General Appropriations Act. Council members are entitled to reimbursement for per diem and travel expenses as provided in s. 112.061 while carrying out official business of the council. When appropriate, parent representatives shall receive a stipend for child care costs incurred while attending council meetings. For administrative purposes only, the council is assigned to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness.

3. The coordinating council shall hold quarterly meetings that are open to the public, and the public shall be given the opportunity to comment at each such meeting. The coordinating council shall notify persons of the date, time, and place of each quarterly meeting upon request.

(e) Duties.—The coordinating council shall recommend to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness methods for coordinating public and private school readiness programs and procedures to facilitate communication, cooperation, and the maximum use of resources to achieve the first state education goal, readiness to start school. In addition, the council shall:

1. Advise the Florida Partnership for School Readiness concerning criteria for grant proposal guidelines, the review of plans and proposals, and eligibility for services of school readiness programs.

2. Recommend to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness methods to increase the involvement of public and private partnerships in school readiness programs in order to maximize the availability of federal funds and to effectively use available resources through cooperative funding and coordinated services.

(f) Reporting requirements.—The coordinating council shall submit its final report to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness by July 1, 2002.

Section 7. Effective July 1, 2002, subsection (4) of section 411.222, Florida Statutes, is repealed.

Section 8. Paragraph (e) is added to subsection (1) of section 240.115, Florida Statutes, 1998 Supplement, to read:

240.115 Articulation agreement; acceleration mechanisms.—

(1)

(e) The Commissioner of Education, in conjunction with the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, and the Education Standards Commission, shall conduct a statewide assessment to determine the extent and nature of instruction for those who work or are training to work in the fields of child care and early childhood education, as well as an assessment of the market demand for individuals trained at various levels. Based on this assessment, the Articulation Coordinating Committee shall establish an articulated career path for school readiness-related professions, which shall lead from entry-level employment in child care and early childhood education to a baccalaureate degree. The career path shall provide for the articulation of:

1. Vocational credit to college credit for associate in science degrees;
2. Credit earned in associate in science or associate in arts degree programs to credit in baccalaureate degree programs;
3. Credit awarded by public and private institutions; and
4. Credit for experiential learning associated with minimum training requirements for employment. The Articulation Coordinating Committee shall ensure that the articulation of such credit does not jeopardize the receiving institution's accreditation status.

Before the printing of the catalog for the fall semester 2002, the articulation agreement must guarantee the statewide articulation of appropriate coursework as established in the career path.

Section 9. In accordance with the provisions of chapter 216, Florida Statutes, the Governor is authorized to transfer funds from the relevant state departments or agencies to the Florida Partnership for School Readiness to fund local school readiness coalitions during the phase-in period.

Section 10. The Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall recommend to the Legislature by February 15, 2000, whether the current appropriations and positions for Department of Children and Family Services contract managers and Department of Education Prekindergarten Early Intervention and School Readiness personnel should be phased out, or transferred in whole or in part to the partnership to provide for school readiness program staffing. If, before such time as its own staff is in place, the Florida

Partnership for School Readiness needs staff assistance in reviewing and approving local coalition plans, the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Education shall provide such staff assistance.

Section 11. Subject to appropriation by the Legislature, the Inter-University Consortium on Child and Family Studies is authorized to design and develop the concept for a child care and development center, which may be used as a model for demonstrating best practices in children's readiness for school.

Section 12. This act is not intended to impede or curtail the state's ability to receive federal funds.

Section 13. The recurring sum of \$330,000 is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Executive Office of the Governor for the purpose of implementing this act in fiscal year 1999-2000.

Section 14. Except as otherwise expressly provided in this act, this act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

Approved by the Governor June 15, 1999.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 15, 1999.