

CHAPTER 2015-104

Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 153

An act relating to the Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project; requiring the Office of Early Learning to establish the pilot project in St. Lucie County to assist low-income, at-risk children in developing emergent literacy skills; requiring the office to select an organization to implement the pilot project; requiring the office to oversee implementation of the pilot project; defining the term “emergent literacy”; providing eligibility requirements for participation; requiring background screening for child care personnel; requiring emergent literacy training for instructors; encouraging the coordination of basic health screening and immunization services in conjunction with emergent literacy instruction; requiring annual submission of an accountability report; requiring the office to allocate funds for the pilot project; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. (1) The Office of Early Learning shall establish the 5-year Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project in St. Lucie County to assist low-income, at-risk children in developing emergent literacy skills.

(a) The Office of Early Learning shall consult with local organizations within St. Lucie County and identify an organization to implement the pilot project. The office shall also consult with the Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County to select municipalities within St. Lucie County eligible for participation in the pilot project. A municipality is eligible for participation if locally or federally subsidized housing is located within the municipality. The office shall oversee the implementation of the pilot project.

(b) The Office of Early Learning shall select a local organization that is a not-for-profit corporation, qualified as charitable under s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, that provides training to parents to assist their children with success in school, such as the Parent Academy of St. Lucie County or another similarly qualified local organization, to implement the pilot project. The office may select a faith-based organization; however, funds provided for the purpose of implementing the pilot project may be used for only those purposes expressly provided in this section.

(2) The organization selected by the Office of Early Learning must use funds provided for the pilot project only to provide emergent literacy instruction to children. In order to provide easy access for participating children and families, the instruction must be provided in a subsidized housing unit located within an eligible municipality selected by the office.

(3) As used in this section, the term “emergent literacy” means a variety of early behaviors and skills associated with successful reading and writing development.

(4) A child is eligible to receive emergent literacy instruction provided through the pilot project only if the child is:

(a) Two or 3 years of age;

(b) Eligible for a federally subsidized child care program; and

(c) A member of a family that is economically disadvantaged and resides in locally or federally subsidized housing. For purposes of this paragraph, the term “economically disadvantaged” means having a family income that does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

(5) The organization selected by the Office of Early Learning must require all child care personnel, as defined in s. 402.302(3), Florida Statutes, to meet the background screening requirements of s. 402.305, Florida Statutes, before participating in the pilot project. The organization may not use state funds to implement the pilot project to pay for background screening. The organization must certify in writing to the office that individuals required to be screened under this subsection have complied with the background screening requirements of this subsection before the office may issue the organization any state funds to implement the pilot project.

(6) An instructor in the pilot project must successfully complete an emergent literacy training course, approved by the Office of Early Learning, before providing emergent literacy instruction under this section.

(7) The organization is encouraged to coordinate with the St. Lucie County Health Department in providing basic health screening and immunization services for children participating in the pilot project in conjunction with emergent literacy instruction. The organization is further encouraged to engage in community outreach efforts to local community service organizations for the purpose of improving the availability and effective delivery of emergent literacy instruction.

(8) By December 31 of each year that the organization provides emergent literacy instruction, the organization shall submit an accountability report to the Office of Early Learning, the Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The accountability report must include, at a minimum, the following information:

(a) The manner in which all state funds received by the organization are used to implement the pilot project, separated by type of expenditure and measured in exact dollar amounts.

(b) Other sources of funding received by the organization for purposes of providing emergent literacy instruction.

(c) The municipalities selected by the Office of Early Learning for participation in the pilot project.

- (d) The identities of the organization’s officers.
- (e) The number of children receiving emergent literacy instruction in each municipality.
- (f) Information and data relating to coordinated health screening and immunization services provided in conjunction with the emergent literacy instruction, if any.
- (9) The Office of Early Learning shall allocate funds for implementation of the pilot project pursuant to this section. Expenditures of state funds pursuant to this section must be verified by affidavit submitted to the office in a procedure and format determined by the office.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2015.

Approved by the Governor June 10, 2015.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 10, 2015.