



Critical Legislation on Early Childhood Education 2013 Session Summary

The Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families seeks to be an independent source of data, research and information for policy makers, stakeholders and the public at large around issues related to early childhood in Louisiana. The Partnership's position for the 2013 Legislative Session was defensive--not introducing bills, but working to make the bills introduced by others better, and to defend the School Readiness Tax Credits. Critical proposed legislation:

School Readiness Tax Credits

SRTC remained whole and will not be changed before 2015. There were a number of bills that would have reduced them, changed them by way of statute, or allowed BESE to change them by regulation, and all were defeated or amended through the work of the advocates. Ultimately, only House Bill 698 passed. It preserves the current credits and essentially provides that a statute will be introduced in the 2015 Session to align the credits with the new rating system.

Senate Bill 130, Implementation of Act 3

Died on the House Floor. The reason for its failure had little to do with the bill's content, and more to do with unrelated political issues. The Partnership was concerned that the bill continued the elimination of the components of the current Quality Start system and continued to allude to a system based on child outcomes (although it did also refer to assessing the "quality" of "programs"). It also continued the concept of assigning programs a letter grade. The Partnership was also concerned that SB 130 provided for a statewide enrollment system and repealed the LA 4 statute, given that the statute specifies the excellent quality components of that program. By contrast, SB 130 also contained some excellent provisions including allowing child care centers to apply directly to the state for LA 4 (and not through school districts), a provision of four years before a program could lose its funding based on its rating, the recognition that the Network includes children from birth to age 5, a provision that allowed centers not taking public funding to be able to participate in the Network, a mandate to align the funding requirements of the early childhood programs, a requirement that BESE submit all plans and recommendations to implement the Network to BrightStart, the Child Care Association of LA and the Non-Public School Council, and that beginning December 2013, BESE would be required to report to these entities regarding the progress of the Network semi-annually. Many of these provisions were included/added due to the work of the advocates.

Although SB 130 died, of course, Act 3 is still the law and most of the provisions of SB 130 can be enacted through regulation. However, unlike Act 3, SB 130 did specify that BESE allocate funding to members of the Network based on the rating system. The delay resulting from SB 130's failure will provide an opportunity for the pilots to inform the policies that will ultimately be enacted as they were intended to do.

Senate Bill 222, Revamp of Child Care Licensure

Passed. The original bill de-licensed Class B centers and created two levels of licensure for what is currently Class A, including a category for publicly funded programs requiring their participation in

the Network and the new rating system.

The bill went through over 100 amendments during the process. Ultimately what passed maintains licensure of Class B centers (a win for the advocates), which will now be called "Type I" and limits Class B in the future to only church and religious organizations while grandfathering in current non-church Class B centers. It creates a Level II license for current Class A centers that do not take public funding (however, Level II may participate in the food program), and creates a Type III license for current Class A centers that take public funds, including Head Start/Early Head Start and child care assistance. Type III centers must meet the performance and academic standards of the Network and the new rating system.

The bill also creates a working group to provide input on the new regulations establishing Type I, II and III licenses, and this group will also approve the new regulations. The members of that group include a representative from BrightStart, the Child Care Association of LA, the Nonpublic School Council, the Head Start Association, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Education, the Children's Cabinet and the Governor's Office. The bill specifies that the group "shall include participants having expertise in care of infants and toddlers, pediatric health, pediatric mental health, cognitive development and social emotional development" (another win for the advocates). It also provides that a draft of the regulations will be provided to the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families, the Children's Defense Fund, and the Louisiana Association for the Education of Young Children for review and comment by November 1, 2013.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 76

Passed. It urges and requests the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Education to determine the feasibility of developing an operational plan for the transfer of the Child Care Development Fund lead agency authority and associated functions (possibly including licensing of child care centers) to the Department of Education no later than July 1, 2015, and to submit a plan to the House and Senate Committees on Education and Health and Welfare no later than 60 days before session.

House Bill 1, The Budget, Amendment 282

HB 1, The Budget, Amendment # 282 provides in the Department of Education's Budget: "Payable out of the State General Fund by Interagency Transfers from the Department of Children and Family Services to the District Support Program for the Early Childhood Education, Quality Improvement, and Head Start Programs. \$9,777,865."

This seems to be the Quality Component of the Child Care Development Fund Block Grant (CCDF) that in the past was administered by the DCFS, but given these are federal funds it is odd that this amendment refers to State General Funds. The Quality Component of CCDF funds includes many of the supports currently available for child care, including the Resource and Referral Agencies, the scholarships for child care teachers, the Pathways program, and the Child Care Mental Health Consultation Program, all of which will presumably be moving to the Department of Education in the coming fiscal year.

Texts and other information on these and other bills can be found at www.legis.la.gov.