
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 PART I

2 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii's children,
3 starting at birth, need support and guidance from parents,
4 caregivers, and teachers to reach their full potential as
5 citizens. As a report released in 2007 by the National
6 Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *The Science of Early*
7 *Childhood Development, Closing the Gap Between What We Know and*
8 *What We Do*, so aptly states:

9 The future of any society depends on its ability to foster
10 the health and well-being of the next generation. Stated
11 simply, today's children will become tomorrow's citizens,
12 workers, and parents. When we invest wisely in children
13 and families, the next generation will pay that back
14 through a lifetime of productivity and responsible
15 citizenship. When we fail to provide our children with
16 what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and
17 productive lives, we put our future prosperity and security
18 at risk.



1 Yet, many of Hawaii's children lack the fundamental skills
2 they should have when they enter kindergarten. *From Neurons to*
3 *Neighborhoods*, a report developed by a committee of seventeen
4 national experts in the fields of education, psychiatry,
5 neuroscience, economics, and public policy, found that

6 [S]triking disparities in what children know and can do are
7 evident well before they enter kindergarten. These
8 differences are strongly associated with social and
9 economic circumstances, and they are predictive of
10 subsequent academic performance.

11 For example, the report acknowledged that by age six, low-income
12 children lag behind high-income children in acquiring more
13 sophisticated reading and math knowledge and skills such as
14 recognizing words by sight or solving simple addition and
15 subtraction problems.

16 The gap can be closed by building an early learning system
17 for Hawaii. Decades of research have determined that
18 investments in high-quality early learning systems, grounded on
19 the collective involvement of parents, caregivers, and teachers,
20 produce significant, long-term benefits for all children,
21 including improved school success, reduced dropout rates,



1 reduced crime, and increased workforce preparedness and
2 productivity.

3 Thirty-six states now offer some type of publicly-funded
4 preschool program. Two states, Oklahoma and Georgia, offer
5 universal preschool programs for all four-year-olds statewide,
6 and New York, Florida, and Illinois are in the process of
7 establishing similar systems.

8 Hawaii is one of the only states in the nation that lacks
9 an early learning program, despite the fact that it was one of
10 the leaders in providing universal access for kindergarten and,
11 even though, in 2001, it adopted a definition for "school
12 readiness" that acknowledged the joint responsibility of
13 families, schools, and communities in preparing children for
14 lifelong learning.

15 It is not too late for Hawaii to move forward to benefit
16 from the lessons learned and best practices developed across the
17 rest of the country. Our State, let alone society as a whole,
18 cannot afford any further delay.

19 In this regard, the legislature finds that the State needs
20 a comprehensive early learning system that ensures a continuum
21 of quality early learning opportunities for young children from
22 birth to age five. It is vital that the system be universally



1 accessible and comprehensive, provide high-quality standards-
2 based education and services, require accountability, and
3 maintain sensitivity to family choice and cultural elements.

4 In 2006, the legislature passed Act 259, establishing the
5 early learning educational task force that included a diverse
6 group of public and private stakeholders that were tasked with
7 developing a five-year plan for an early learning system. This
8 Act takes into consideration the findings and recommendations of
9 the task force.

10 The purpose of this Act is to help Hawaii's children reach
11 their full potential by:

- 12 (1) Creating the early learning council to govern the
13 State's early learning system;
- 14 (2) Establishing an early learning system; and
- 15 (3) Establishing the keiki first steps program.

16 PART II

17 SECTION 2. (a) There is established an early learning
18 council within the department of education for administrative
19 purposes only. To benefit all children from birth to age five
20 throughout the State, the council shall work toward fulfilling
21 the vision of a universally-accessible, comprehensive, and high-



1 quality early learning system that is sensitive to family choice
2 and cultural elements. This system shall:

- 3 (1) Administer the early learning system and the keiki
4 first steps program established by this Act;
- 5 (2) Establish policies and procedures governing its
6 operations;
- 7 (3) Develop a plan, with goals and objectives, for the
8 early learning system, including the development,
9 execution, and monitoring of a phased implementation
10 plan;
- 11 (4) Coordinate, improve, and expand upon existing programs
12 and services for children from birth to five years of
13 age;
- 14 (5) Establish policies and procedures governing the
15 inclusion and establishment of additional programs and
16 services;
- 17 (6) Develop and implement methods of maximizing the
18 involvement of parents, caregivers, and teachers in
19 the early learning system;
- 20 (7) Provide for system accountability to ensure
21 improvement of programs and services and high-quality
22 results;



- 1 (8) Provide for the most effective and efficient
2 allocation of fiscal resources within the early
3 learning system;
- 4 (9) Collect, interpret, and release data relating to early
5 learning in the State; and
- 6 (10) Promote awareness of early learning opportunities to
7 families and the general public.
- 8 (b) The early learning council shall include
9 representation from both public and private organizations, and
10 its membership shall reflect regional, cultural, and ethnic
11 diversity to ensure that the needs of all children in the State
12 are addressed. The members of the early learning council shall
13 consist of fifteen members as follows:
- 14 (1) One representative of the office of the governor;
- 15 (2) The superintendent of education or the
16 superintendent's designee;
- 17 (3) The director of human services or the director's
18 designee;
- 19 (4) The director of health or the director's designee;
- 20 (5) The president of the University of Hawaii or the
21 president's designee;



- 1 (6) One representative from a government agency to
- 2 represent federal children's programs and services;
- 3 (7) One member appointed by the president of the senate;
- 4 (8) One member appointed by the speaker of the house of
- 5 representatives; and
- 6 (9) Seven members appointed by the governor who shall
- 7 represent interests in the early learning community,
- 8 including:
 - 9 (A) Child development, including maternal and child
 - 10 health;
 - 11 (B) Child care and early learning programs and
 - 12 services;
 - 13 (C) Children with special needs;
 - 14 (D) Child advocacy, including parenting support;
 - 15 (E) Business; and
 - 16 (F) Labor.
- 17 (c) The early learning council shall select a chairperson
- 18 by a majority vote of its members. A majority of the council
- 19 shall constitute a quorum to do business. The concurrence of a
- 20 majority of all the members to which the council is entitled
- 21 shall be necessary to make any action of the council valid.



1 (d) Members of the early learning council shall serve
2 three-year terms; provided that half of these members, as
3 determined by the council, shall be appointed to two-year terms
4 to allow for staggered terms.

5 (e) The early learning council may adopt rules as
6 necessary to effectuate the purposes of this part.

7 (f) All meetings of the early learning council shall be
8 exempt from chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

9 (g) The early learning council shall submit to the
10 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
11 each regular session, a report regarding:

12 (1) Its progress; and

13 (2) The status of the early learning system in the State.

14 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
15 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
16 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 to
17 support the operations of the early learning council, including
18 supplies, personnel, and travel expenses.

19 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
20 education for the purposes of this part.



1 PART III

2 SECTION 4. There is established an early learning system
3 that shall ensure a continuum of quality early learning
4 opportunities for children from birth to age five throughout the
5 State, to be developed and administered by the early learning
6 council. The system:

7 (1) Shall be universally accessible. In its first phases,
8 the system shall focus on all three- and four-year old
9 children in the State, giving priority to underserved
10 or at-risk children. When complete, the system shall
11 provide a seamless experience for children from birth
12 to five years of age;

13 (2) Shall be a comprehensive system in which:

14 (A) All existing programs, whether publicly- or
15 privately-run, which consist of a variety of
16 early learning approaches, service deliveries,
17 and settings, are coordinated;

18 (B) Public and private resources are maximized; and

19 (c) The use of public facilities for either publicly-
20 or privately-run early learning programs is
21 maximized;



1 (3) Shall provide high-quality education with standards-
2 based content, curriculum, and instructional
3 approaches for accountability, and an adequate number
4 of well-qualified educators and administrators who are
5 fairly compensated and have access to continuing
6 professional development;
7 and

8 (4) Shall be sensitive to family choice and cultural
9 elements.

10 SECTION 5. There is established the keiki first steps
11 program, to be developed and administered by the early learning
12 council as the first phase in the development of the State's
13 early learning system. The program shall focus on the
14 coordination, improvement, and expansion of existing programs
15 and services within the early learning system for three- and
16 four-year-old children in the State, with priority for
17 underserved or at-risk children. The core components of the
18 program shall be:

19 (1) The identification of research-based and proven
20 curricula and methods, and implementation of various
21 means of improving existing curricula and methods,
22 including:



- 1 (A) Research-based early learning program models for
2 three- and four-year-old children;
- 3 (B) Research-based early learning program models for
4 at-risk children from birth to three years of
5 age;
- 6 (C) Ensuring that written program standards exist and
7 are implemented in early learning programs;
- 8 (D) Developing incentives to enhance quality in child
9 care and early learning programs; and
- 10 (E) Developing an effective, comprehensive, and
11 integrated system to provide training, technical
12 assistance, and monitoring to ensure high quality
13 services are provided in all early learning
14 programs;
- 15 (2) Low staff-child ratio and group size in early learning
16 settings;
- 17 (3) Parent and community engagement;
- 18 (4) Health and developmental screenings for children;
- 19 (5) Well-qualified and adequately-compensated staff, who
20 have:
- 21 (A) Opportunities to receive early childhood
22 education degrees;



- 1 (B) Access to continuing professional development;
- 2 (C) A structure for standardized roles across the
- 3 early learning system and for incentives such as
- 4 awarding credentials to staff who have received
- 5 certain levels of achievement; and
- 6 (D) A system that addresses the early learning labor
- 7 market and has working conditions that build a
- 8 qualified, diverse, and stable early learning
- 9 workforce;
- 10 and
- 11 (6) Child assessment and program and service evaluation to
- 12 maintain and promote high quality in early learning
- 13 programs and services, including:
 - 14 (A) Developing guidelines for developmental screening
 - 15 and ongoing assessment of individual children
 - 16 served by early learning programs to facilitate
 - 17 appropriate instruction and document progress;
 - 18 (B) Developing guidelines for the use of child and
 - 19 program data for programs to perform self-
 - 20 assessments to assist continuous efforts to
 - 21 improve the programs;



1 (C) Developing an evaluation plan for programs and
2 services; and

3 (D) Sharing of data across programs and services to
4 assist evaluation and planning.

5 SECTION 6. For the purposes of this part, "at-risk
6 children" shall be defined as children who, because of their
7 home and community environment, are subject to language,
8 cultural, economic, and like disadvantages that cause them to
9 have been determined through screening procedures to be at risk
10 for academic failure.

11 SECTION 7. There is appropriated out of the general
12 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
13 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 for
14 the keiki first steps program.

15 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
16 education for the purposes of this part.

17 PART IV

18 SECTION 8. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2008.



Report Title:

Early Learning Council; Keiki First Steps Program; Appropriation

Description:

Creates the early learning council to govern the state's early learning system. Establishes an early learning system.
Establishes the keiki first steps program. (SD1)

