

Date of Hearing: January 28, 2008

Committee: Senate Education/Human  
Services and Housing

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent

Title: S.B. 2671, Relating to Education

Purpose: Prohibits the movement of junior kindergarten and kindergarten between tiers, except under certain circumstances; prohibits a junior kindergarten from directly graduating to the first grade; ensures that a separate curriculum is established for the junior kindergarten program; requires the department of education to staff qualified preschool teachers and preschool teacher aides; and appropriates funds for the implementation of a junior kindergarten program that achieves a student to teacher ratio of 10:1 and not more than 15:1 and for an educational specialist to focus on early childhood education issues.

Department's Position: The Department of Education (Department) does not support S.B. 2671 as written. However, the Department is willing to work with the legislators to craft the language of the bill so that the outcomes address the needs of young children and the educational professionals that provide quality instruction. In the current research literature, it is recognized that the nature of the developmental learning sequence of young children continues to be very dynamic, such that those students who

appear to be behind their peers at the beginning of the year may in fact catch up with their peers and be fully prepared for entrance into the first grade by the end of the school year.

Therefore, the Department would recommend that student who may be designated as a junior kindergartener at the beginning of the year, be allowed to be promoted to grade one in a year.

The Department continues to work to develop appropriate assessment protocols that may be used to screen a child for areas of readiness, as well as areas of skill/knowledge development. With a combination of formative and summative assessments, teachers will have assembled evidence to help a school team, including parents, decide if a child is ready for grade one or may benefit from a second year in a two-tiered system.

The Department recognizes that developmentally appropriate practices must be balanced with quality learning experiences that prepare all students, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, for the more rigorous learning in a standards-based classroom.

The Department supports and appreciates the efforts of the legislature to focus on teacher quality and class size. The collaborative work with the early childhood community has allowed us to understand that there will continue to be shortage of qualified preschool teachers and aides throughout the state.

Teacher quality is also enhanced when teachers have access to meaningful professional development opportunities. The Department would appreciate a continued focus on providing inservice teachers of young children with access to professional development in all complex areas throughout the state. We are committed to work with our partners in the early childhood community to ensure that all of our teachers maintain a balance in their professional learning that promotes a positive impact on student learning.

Finally, the fine work of the Early Learning Educational Task Force has helped the Department to understand the need to work more closely with the early childhood community to address school readiness for young children from birth to five. The Department thus recognizes that our collective work will help to define and enhance the two-tiered kindergarten program and would appreciate the opportunity to continue to work with the task force on the comprehensive plan for early learning.