

ACT 169

S.B. NO. 1093

A Bill for an Act Relating to School Readiness.

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

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that more of our children are entering kindergarten without the physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional skills necessary to prepare them for success in school life. For example, according to the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment, only forty per cent of kindergarten classes had the majority of their students entering the 2012-2013 school year with school behaviors and skills, and even fewer demonstrated the necessary approaches to learning.

It is no coincidence that the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment also reports that fifty-seven per cent of students who entered kindergarten had attended preschool. This percentage is lower than in years past. According to kindergarten teachers in the department of education, many of the children who do not have experiences in pre-kindergarten programs could be eighteen to twenty-four months behind developmentally than their peers who do. The link between school readiness and success in school is indisputable. Act 13, Session Laws of Hawaii 2002, defined school readiness to mean that “young children are ready to have successful learning experiences in school when there is a positive interaction among the child’s developmental characteristics, school practices, and family and community support.”

The State must commit to efforts to promote school readiness, especially in light of its expectation that kindergarten students master the grade-level common core state standards to develop the academic competencies and habits of mind necessary for college and career success.

Act 178, Session Laws of Hawaii 2012, repealed the junior kindergarten program and beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, required that a child must be five years old by July 31 of the school year to attend a public school kindergarten. The legislature’s intent was to align the changes with the implementation of a program that would more effectively provide a developmentally

appropriate experience to prepare children physically, cognitively, linguistically, socially, and emotionally prior to beginning the public education provided by the department of education.

Currently, the department of human services administers a child care assistance program, called preschool open doors, whose purpose is to contribute to school readiness for children in the year prior to entering kindergarten.

The purpose of this Act, therefore, is to establish the preschool open doors program as the statewide school readiness program. The preschool open doors program will be administered by the department of human services.

SECTION 2. Chapter 346, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

“§346- Preschool open doors program. (a) There is established within the department a school readiness program to be known as the preschool open doors program within the department’s child care assistance program. The program shall:

- (1) Provide access to school readiness services that address children’s physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development;
- (2) Require each provider to conduct school readiness assessments;
- (3) Give priority to children from low- and moderate-income families; and
- (4) Prepare children for school through either of the State’s two official languages.

(b) Subject to the availability of funds, the program shall serve four-year-old children, with priority extended to:

- (1) Children who are not eligible to attend public school kindergarten in the calendar year in which they turn five years of age because their birth date occurs after the kindergarten eligibility date pursuant to section 302A-411; and
- (2) Underserved or at-risk children.

(c) Enrollment in the program shall be voluntary. A parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the program shall share in the costs of the program through a copayment according to a sliding fee scale that is based on need pursuant to rules adopted by the department.

(d) The department may adopt interim rules to carry out the purposes of this section without regard to chapter 91 or 201M; provided that:

- (1) The department shall hold at least one public hearing prior to the adoption of interim rules;
- (2) The interim rules shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws; and
- (3) The interim rules shall be effective for no more than one year after their adoption.”

SECTION 3. The department of human services shall report to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the 2014 and 2015 regular sessions on the following:

- (1) The number of applicants to the preschool open doors program established pursuant to this Act;
- (2) The number of applicants that were placed on a waitlist for the preschool open doors program;
- (3) The geographic distribution of services to participants in the preschool open doors program;
- (4) The number of participating providers; and

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- (5) A summary of any capacity and funding issues the department has experienced in carrying out the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$720,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2013-2014 and the sum of \$440,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2014-2015 to establish three temporary positions and to contract services for the purposes of implementing the preschool open doors program as the statewide school readiness program.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department of human services for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 5. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$6,000,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2014-2015 for subsidies for the preschool open doors program.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of human services for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 6. New statutory material is underscored.¹

SECTION 7. This Act shall take effect upon its approval; provided that sections 4 and 5 shall take effect on July 1, 2013.

(Approved June 24, 2013.)

Note

1. Edited pursuant to HRS §23G-16.5.