

Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission

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Committee Charge

Pursuant to state law (Section 26-6.5-203, C.R.S.), the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission (ECSRLC) must meet at least four times per year to study issues concerning early childhood and school readiness. Topics to be studied include: health care, mental health, parental involvement, family support, child care, and early learning. The commission is required to solicit input from the public, especially from those who have expertise in early childhood and school readiness issues. The commission is also required to meet with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, which is a group focused on improving outcomes for young children from birth to age eight, to discuss policy concerning early childhood and school readiness.

Committee Activities

The ECSRLC held six meetings during the 2015 interim. Presentations were made by state departments, early childhood professionals, child care providers, foundations, and members of the public on a wide range of subjects related to early childhood, including:

- early childhood school discipline;
- mental health and child welfare;
- child care licensing and demographics;
- home visitation programs;
- foundation funding and pay-for-success programs;
- transitioning children from preschool to kindergarten; and
- the Early Childhood Colorado Framework.

The ECSRLC divided itself into five breakout groups to focus on specific topics, solicit stakeholder feedback, and generate ideas for legislation. The breakout groups met at ECSRLC meetings, and several stakeholders participated in these discussions. The commission was divided into breakout groups as follows:

- child welfare, home visitation, and transitioning to kindergarten;
- teachers;
- child care licensing; demographics; and family, friend, and neighbor care;
- equalizing access to care, tax credits, Colorado's Early Learning Challenge Grant, and Senate Bill 10-191; and
- past legislation by the ECSRLC.

The following subsections discuss the ECSRLC's activities during the 2015 interim.

Early childhood school discipline. The commission heard from representatives of the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the University of Colorado School of Medicine about suspension and expulsion rates in early childhood centers and the collection of data to document disparities in suspension and expulsion rates among demographic groups. The commission and panelists explored issues of

teacher training and competency, appropriate intervention strategies, the need for mental health consultation infrastructure in early childhood settings, and the impact of behavioral challenges on early childhood classrooms.

Mental health and child welfare. Testimony was provided by Voices for Children Court Appointed Special Advocates about the needs of young children who have been victims of abuse or neglect, focusing on children ages 0 to 2. The ECSRLC explored the mental health care and early childhood education needs of young children in foster care.

Child care licensing and demographics. The commission was briefed by a representative from the Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado on issues related to the demographics of child care in Colorado and issues related to licensing of child care centers. The ECSRLC discussed the reasons for the recent decrease in the number of child care centers in the state, as well as the cost of child care and the wages earned by childcare workers.

Home visitation programs. Representatives from the Nurse-Family Partnership and Clayton Early Learning addressed the ECSRLC about the work currently being done by visiting nurses, including working with expectant mothers and parents of young children to improve health and education outcomes in at-risk communities.

Foundation funding and pay-for-success programs. Representatives from the Temple Buell Foundation, the Rose Community Foundation, and the Merage Foundation spoke to the ECSRLC about their work providing funding for projects ranging from parenting education, home visiting, mental health, professional development for educators, capacity building in rural areas, and the use of public-private partnerships to pursue innovative cost-effective programs. Senator Mike Johnston spoke to the ECSRLC concerning the implementation of House Bill 15-1317, the Pay for Success Act. The Pay for Success Act encourages partnerships between philanthropists and foundations and educators to address existing issues in educational programs. Partners must agree on measurable metrics to assess the impact of the funding over time.

Transitioning children from preschool to kindergarten. Superintendents from Denver Public Schools, Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Aurora Public Schools, and the Douglas County School District, in addition to representatives from the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County and Mapleton Public Schools, informed commission members about how their schools prepare children for the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Presenters stressed issues concerning crowded classrooms, an existing achievement gap among students entering kindergarten, lack of adequate funding for preschool classroom expansions, and assistance for students who may not have attended preschool in their district transition to kindergarten.

The Early Childhood Colorado Framework. Members of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission presented the updated Early Childhood Colorado Framework to the ECSRLC. Created in 2008, the framework provides a comprehensive resource and guide for early childhood educational systems. The framework allows educators to communicate effectively on the latest research and provide resources to address gaps that may exist in the educational system. The framework was updated in 2015 and will continue to be updated to reflect current best practices as necessary.

Committee Recommendations

As a result of commission discussion and deliberation, the ECSRLC recommends the following three bills for consideration in the 2016 legislative session.

Bill A — This bill repeals the contingent start of the refundable Colorado child tax credit, allowing the credit to be claimed beginning in tax year 2016. Under current law, the credit becomes effective beginning with tax year 2016 only if Congress passes the Marketplace Fairness Act (or similar legislation). The Marketplace Fairness Act is a federal bill that requires out-of-state retailers to collect and remit sales taxes to states that have met minimum simplification requirements for sales tax administration. To date, Congress has not passed the bill or an alternate measure with similar requirements.

Under this bill, beginning in tax year 2016, qualifying taxpayers may claim a refundable state income tax credit equal to 30 percent, 15 percent, or 5 percent of the federal child tax credit depending on their federal adjusted gross income (AGI). The credit is capped for single filers at an AGI of \$75,000, and for joint filers at an AGI of \$85,000.

Bill B — The bill removes the existing ten-county cap on the number of counties that may participate in the Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program. It also removes the two-year participation requirement for counties if the Department of Human Services (DHS) determines that participation during a shorter period will still contribute relevant data to the evaluation of the pilot program.

The Cliff Effect Pilot Program was created by Senate Bill 12-022 to allow counties to modify their child care assistance programs so that families are able to phase out their participation in the program as they enter the workforce and receive higher incomes. Subsequently, Senate Bill 14-003 was enacted, which created a cash fund for the pilot program and appropriated \$1.3 million to fund county pilot programs. Currently, ten counties are participating in the pilot. The pilot program is scheduled to conclude on June 30, 2019.

Bill C — The bill creates a task force to address issues relating to the child care needs of low-income parents. The task force is housed in the Workforce Development Council in the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE). Its mission is to develop strategies and procedures for state and local agencies, and institutions of higher education, to use in coordinating efforts that address the child care needs of low-income parents who are seeking to advance their education.

Specifically, the task force is required to:

- identify and reduce barriers to obtaining child care;
- determine whether state, federal, and campus-based financial resources are meeting the needs of parents pursuing further education;
- review and streamline administrative processes for the provision of child care;
- create a plan for communicating child care availability and processes; and
- recommend legislation to address issues related to child care for parents pursuing further education.

The bill sets the conditions for the selection and composition of the 15-member task force.

Task force members serve without per diem or reimbursement of costs. CDLE, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the Department of Higher Education (DHE), and DHS are required to provide staff support to the task force. The task force must hold its first meeting no later than September 1, 2016, and submit reports to the health and human services committees of the General Assembly and the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission. The task force is repealed July 1, 2017.