
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 39 (File 9, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING REQUIREMENTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.

SUMMARY:

This bill makes several changes to the law regarding early childhood educators' required qualifications. It (1) modifies (a) the types of schools from which individuals may earn a qualifying degree and (b) the programs to which the requirements apply; (2) requires staff members who are exempt from meeting the qualifications and who accept employment with a different school readiness program to submit documentation on their progress toward the qualifications; and (3) requires individual staff members, rather than school readiness programs, to apply for any unexpended school readiness funds. It also makes conforming changes.

*Senate Amendment "A" specifies that the spaces in child day care or school readiness programs must be infant, toddler, and preschool spaces.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2012

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR REQUIREMENTS

The law establishes required qualifications for early childhood educators (see BACKGROUND). Under current law, educators may meet these requirements by, among other things, earning a degree or credential in certain programs from an institution accredited by the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR). The bill instead requires institutions to be accredited by BOR or the State Board of Education (SBE) and regionally accredited. The inclusion of SBE conforms to PA 11-48, which made SBE responsible for accrediting independent institutions of higher education in Connecticut and BOR responsible for public institutions.

Current law applies the staff qualification requirements to all preschool programs accepting state funds, including school readiness or childcare services funds and Department of Social Services funds. The bill instead applies the requirements to programs accepting state funds for infant, toddler, and preschool spaces associated with their child day care program or school readiness program.

EXCEPTIONS

By law, individuals who (1) hold bachelor's degrees and are employed as teachers on or before June 30, 2015 by an early childhood education program accepting state funds and (2) meet the qualification requirements that are in effect until June 30, 2015 are exempt from the requirements that take effect on July 1, 2015 and July 1, 2020.

If an exempt individual terminates employment with his or her current early childhood education program and accepts employment with a different early childhood education program, the bill requires him or her to submit documentation of his or her progress toward meeting the staff qualifications. The bill does not specify to whom the documentation must be submitted, but requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to determine the manner of submission.

UNEXPENDED SCHOOL READINESS FUNDS

The bill removes local school readiness programs from the process of awarding unexpended readiness funds to help staff meet state qualifications. By law, the education commissioner may use up to \$500,000 in unexpended school readiness funds from each fiscal year in the subsequent fiscal year to help early childhood education programs' staff members meet the qualification requirements. The bill requires individual staff members, rather than school readiness programs, to apply for unexpended funds and requires the education commissioner to determine the manner of application.

It also requires SDE, rather than the local school readiness program, to provide the assistance to staff members. In awarding assistance, SDE must give preference to staff members attending a BOR- or SBE-accredited institution that is also regionally accredited.

BACKGROUND***Early Childhood Educator Requirements***

Until July 1, 2015, the law requires that in each school readiness classroom, there is an individual with (1) a childhood development credential, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree that includes 12 credits or more in early childhood education or child development or (2) a teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood education or special education. The credentialing organization must be approved by the education commissioner, and the early childhood education or childhood development credits must be from an institution accredited by BOR or regionally accredited. The early childhood education or child development credits must be determined by the BOR president, in consultation with the education and social services commissioners.

By law, from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2020, at least 50% of individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom of children must have (1) a bachelor's degree with a concentration in early childhood education from an institution accredited by BOR or (2) a teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood or early childhood special education. Early childhood educators who do not meet this requirement must hold an associate's degree in an eligible field.

Effective July 1, 2020, the law requires that all, rather than only 50%, of the individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom of children meet the requirement to have a bachelor's degree or teaching certificate.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 16 Nay 0 (02/21/2012)

Education Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 31 Nay 0 (04/17/2012)

