



Substitute Senate Bill No. 25

Public Act No. 14-41

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT SMART START PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2014*) (a) For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2015, to June 30, 2024, inclusive, the Office of Early Childhood, in consultation with the Department of Education, shall design and administer the Connecticut Smart Start competitive grant program to reimburse local and regional boards of education for capital and operating expenses related to establishing or expanding a preschool program under the jurisdiction of the board of education for the town. A local or regional board of education may submit an application to the office, in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, and may receive (1) a grant for capital expenses in an amount not to exceed seventy-five thousand dollars per classroom for costs related to the renovation of an existing public school to accommodate the establishment or expansion of a preschool program, and (2) an annual grant for operating expenses (A) in an amount not to exceed five thousand dollars per child served by such grant, or (B) in an amount not to exceed seventy-five thousand dollars for each preschool classroom, provided no town shall receive a total annual grant for operating expenses greater than three hundred thousand dollars. Each local or regional board of education that

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establishes or expands a preschool program under this section shall be eligible to receive an annual grant for operating expenses for a period of five years, provided such preschool program meets standards established by the Commissioner of Early Childhood. Such local or regional board of education may submit an application for renewal of such grant to the office.

(b) On and after July 1, 2014, local and regional boards of education, individually or cooperatively, pursuant to section 10-158a of the general statutes, may apply, at such time and in such manner as the commissioner prescribes, to the office for a capital grant and an operating grant for the purposes described in subsection (a) of this section. To be eligible to receive such grants under this section, an applicant board of education shall (1) demonstrate that it has a need for establishing or expanding a preschool program using information requested by the commissioner on a form prescribed by the commissioner, such as data collected from the preschool experience survey, described in section 583 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A", (2) submit a plan for the expenditure of grant funds received under this section that outlines how such board of education will use such funds to establish or expand a preschool program, including, but not limited to, the amount that such board will contribute to the operation of such preschool program and how such board of education will provide access to preschool for children who would not otherwise be able to enroll in a preschool program, and (3) submit a letter of support for establishing or expanding a preschool program by the local or regional school readiness council, described in section 10-16r of the general statutes, if any, for the school district. The commissioner shall give priority to boards of education (A) that demonstrate the greatest need for the establishment or expansion of a preschool program, and (B) whose plan allocates at least sixty per cent of the spaces in such preschool program to children who are members of families that are at

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or below seventy-five per cent of the state median income, or fifty per cent of the spaces in such preschool program to children who are eligible for free and reduced price lunches. The commissioner, in reviewing applications submitted under this subsection, shall also take into consideration (i) whether an applicant board of education (I) currently offers a full-day kindergarten program, (II) will be cooperating and coordinating with other governmental and community programs to provide services during periods when the preschool program is not in session, or (III) will collaborate with other boards of education, as part of a cooperative arrangement pursuant to section 10-158a of the general statutes, to offer a regional preschool program, and (ii) current community capacity for preschool programs and current opportunities for preschool for children in the community.

(c) A preschool program created or expanded under this section shall (1) contain a classroom with an individual who holds certification pursuant to section 10-145b of the general statutes with an endorsement in early childhood education or early childhood special education and is an employee of the board of education providing a preschool program under this section, (2) maintain a classroom size and teacher-child ratio that is in compliance with standards established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, (3) obtain accreditation, as described in section 10-16p of the general statutes, not later than three years after the creation or expansion of the preschool program, and (4) be located in a public school or in a space maintained by an early care and education and child development program provider, pursuant to an agreement between a board of education and such early care and education and child development program provider.

(d) Each local or regional board of education receiving a grant under this section shall submit an annual report, on a form and in a manner prescribed by the commissioner, to the Office of Early Childhood

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regarding the status and operation of the preschool program.

(e) A local or regional board of education receiving grant funds under this section may implement a sliding fee scale for the cost of services provided to children enrolled in such preschool program.

Sec. 2. Subsection (a) of section 504 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A", is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

(a) The Office of Early Childhood shall develop and implement an early childhood information system. Such early childhood information system shall facilitate and encourage the sharing of data between and among early childhood service providers by tracking (1) the health, safety and school readiness of all young children receiving early care and education services from (A) any local or regional board of education, including children enrolled in a preschool program under the Connecticut Smart Start competitive grant program, pursuant to section 1 of this act, (B) school readiness program, as defined in section 10-16p of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or (C) any program receiving public funding, in a manner similar to the system described in section 10-10a of the general statutes, (2) the characteristics of the existing and potential workforce serving such children, (3) the characteristics of such programs serving such children, and (4) data collected, if any, from the preschool experience survey, described in section 583 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A".

Sec. 3. Section 581 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A", is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2014*):

The Commissioner of Early Childhood shall develop a plan to

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provide (1) spaces to all eligible children, as defined in section 582 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A", in an accredited school readiness program, as defined in section 582 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A", or a school readiness program seeking accreditation, as defined in section 582 of substitute house bill 5562 of the current session, as amended by House Amendment Schedule "A", and (2) access to a preschool program established or expanded under the Connecticut Smart Start competitive grant program, described in section 1 of this act. The commissioner shall submit such plan to the Governor on or before January 1, 2015.

Approved May 28, 2014