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## DIGEST

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Leger

HB No. 954

**Abstract:** Provides relative to the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program, including provisions pertaining to funding, eligibility, cost, and the program's role in the Early Childhood Care and Education Network.

Present law provides for the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program. Proposed law retains such program but revises certain provisions relative to the program, as follows:

### Funding

Present law requires DOE to allocate funding, out of monies appropriated for such purpose, to each public school system or charter school that applies for such funding and uses it solely for the purpose of providing a program for early childhood development and enrichment activity classes (LA 4 classes).

Proposed law deletes present law and instead requires DOE to allocate public funds available for early childhood programs for four-year-olds to eligible early learning centers that apply for such funding and use it solely for the purpose of providing early childhood programs (LA 4 programs).

Present law requires BESE, through DOE, to collaborate with the Dept. of Children and Family Services and the Dept. of Health and Hospitals to establish a seamless early childhood educational system that is coordinated and integrated across all programs and related state agencies, regardless of public funding source. Proposed law retains present law and adds a requirement that DOE support such establishment by allocating funds as provided above in proposed law.

### Program specifications

Present law provides for specific criteria for LA 4 educational programs, enrichment activities, teachers, student-teacher ratios, classroom space and facilities, classroom and instructional materials, meals and snacks, and provision of family support services. Proposed law deletes present law.

### Eligibility

Present law provides that LA 4 classes shall be provided to every child in a school system's jurisdiction who meets the following criteria:

- (1) Is eligible to enter kindergarten the following year.
- (2) Meets the requirements of present law for immunization documentation required for regular school enrollment.
- (3) Is consistently and regularly in attendance for the early childhood education program portion of the day.

Proposed law retains the immunization requirement and otherwise deletes present law and instead provides, subject to the availability of funds, that LA 4 programs shall be available to each child who meets the immunization requirement and these eligibility criteria:

- (1) Applies to an early childhood program.
- (2) Is four years old or eligible to enroll in kindergarten in the following school year.

Proposed law additionally requires that LA 4 programs be made available through a unified registration and enrollment system administered by or on behalf of DOE for every child who meets such eligibility criteria and for whom funding is available. Grants registration and enrollment preference to "at risk" children (as defined by BESE).

#### Cost

Present law provides that LA 4 classes are to be provided at no cost to children eligible for free and reduced lunch, except for lunch costs. Provides that other children may be charged tuition in an amount not to exceed that necessary for the school system to provide the LA 4 class and that such tuition may be charged on a sliding scale according to his family's income.

Proposed law deletes present law and instead provides that the cost of LA 4 programs for shall be as follows:

- (1) For "at risk" children: no cost, except for any applicable lunch cost and the cost of before and after care. Authorizes a cost for any early childhood programs funded through the Child Care Assistance Program, subject to BESE rules.
- (2) For children who are not "at risk": tuition may be charged on a sliding scale in an amount not to exceed that necessary for the early learning center to provide the LA 4 program.
- (3) For all children, both "at risk" and not "at risk", authorizes each early learning center offering LA 4 programs to charge a fee for the cost of meals and the cost of before and after care, subject to BESE rules.

Present law provides for a phased-in implementation of a plan to have provided for universal access to LA 4 classes at no cost other than applicable lunch costs by the 2013-14 school year (if funding had been available). Proposed law deletes present law.

## Early Childhood Care and Education Network

Proposed law adds that the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program serve as the state's unified strategy for administering all publicly funded early childhood programs for four-year-olds through the Early Childhood Care and Education Network (created in present law) and requires early childhood programs to comply with all BESE rules for participation in such network.

### Requirements for DOE and BESE relative to future LA 4 program applications

Proposed law provides for the following, beginning with LA 4 program applications for the 2015-16 school year:

- (1) Requires DOE to annually determine the demand for LA 4 programs.
- (2) Requires BESE to consider such demand, the availability of public funds to support such programs, and the eligibility of early learning centers to receive public funds for early childhood programs and to annually determine the following:
  - (a) The cost of funding all eligible LA 4 program applicants who are considered "at-risk" as defined by BESE.
  - (b) The method for equitably distributing available funds to eligible early learning centers, including those operated as part of public elementary school programs.

(Adds R.S. 17:407.26; Repeals R.S. 17:24.10)