

New law provides for an Early Childhood Care and Education Network and requires BESE to:

1. By July 1, 2013, create a comprehensive and integrated network through which to manage and oversee publicly-funded programs that provide early childhood educational services.
2. Establish performance targets for children under the age of three and academic standards for kindergarten readiness for three - and four-year old children to be used in publicly-funded early childhood education programs.
3. Create a uniform assessment and accountability system for publicly-funded early childhood education programs that includes a letter grade indicative of student performance.
4. Coordinate with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) to align the standards for the licensing of child care facilities, including the requirements for participation in the La. Quality Start Child Care Rating System, with the standards established for early childhood education programs.
5. Establish a timeline for the creation and implementation of the early childhood care and education network that shall be fully implemented by the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year.
6. Work cooperatively and collaboratively with DCFS and DHH, 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.
7. Submit recommendations for any legislative changes needed to implement new law prior to 2013 R.S.
8. Promulgate rules and regulations in accordance with the APA to implement new law.

New law requires the Dept. of Education to submit the plans and recommendations formulated by the impacted agencies to Louisiana's Early Childhood Advisory Council, the Child Care Association of Louisiana, and the nonpublic school commission appointed by BESE for review and comment. Further requires each reviewing entity to submit its comments and recommendations to the Dept. of Education and requires the department to prepare a summary report to BESE for its consideration not later than January 1, 2013.

Provides that new law shall not apply to early childhood programs that receive public funds solely for food and nutrition assistance.

Requires that BESE submit a written report to each member of the legislature and the secretaries of the legislative education committees on the status of the early childhood care and education network. Requires that this report include recommendations for changes in law or administrative policy needed to implement the network.

Effective upon signature of the governor (April 18, 2012).

(Adds R.S. 17:407.21-407.25)