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Hensley, K. Johnson, Morrison, Osienski, Ramone; Sens.
Sokola, Townsend

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
151st GENERAL ASSEMBLY

HOUSE SUBSTITUTE NO. 1
FOR
HOUSE BILL NO. 377

AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

1 WHEREAS, Delaware's early childhood workforce often makes minimum wage, yet is working in a highly-
2 skilled and demanding job that supports Delaware's future and economy; and

3 WHEREAS, one in six early childhood professionals left the field during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

4 WHEREAS, data on these professionals is limited and is restraining Delaware's ability to do more to support
5 them; and

6 WHEREAS, the workforce shortage is preventing families from finding child care and returning to work; and

7 WHEREAS, early childhood professionals deserve to be compensated and supported as teachers in public schools
8 are— and there is a nationwide movement for compensation parity across settings; and

9 WHEREAS, Delaware is committed to serving more children in high-quality early childhood and care settings,
10 through the Early Childhood Assistance Program and through the Purchase of Care subsidy program; and

11 WHEREAS, over time, Delaware has committed to increasing qualification requirements for early childhood
12 professionals, with compensation and support; and

13 WHEREAS, to support the workforce long term, Delaware also must invest more in child care to serve more
14 children and pay at the cost of care; and

15 WHEREAS, Delaware's early childhood workforce should reflect the populations of children served and should
16 be developed from a pipeline of paraprofessionals, community members, parents, and others representative of the child
17 population, including bilingual candidates and those without degrees; and

18 WHEREAS, in the past, the state has maintained essential systems of support for early childhood professionals,
19 including scholarships and wage supplements associated with earning credentials and degrees.

20 NOW, THEREFORE:

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE:

Section 1. Amend Chapter 30, Title 14 of the Delaware Code by making deletions as shown by strike through and insertions as shown by underline as follows:

CHAPTER 30. Early Childhood Education ~~Program~~

Subchapter I. General Provisions

Subchapter II. Early Childhood Workforce

§ 3011. Early childhood workforce study.

(a) Beginning in 2022, the Department of Education (Department), in consultation with stakeholders including the Delaware Early Childhood Council, shall annually produce, by November 15, an early childhood workforce study, which shall include all of the following:

(1) The number of individuals receiving state financial support.

(2) The number and percentage of early childhood professionals with credentials or degrees, both in total and disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

(3) The demographics of the early childhood workforce including age, race, ethnicity, and gender.

(4) The estimated cost to close the gap between current wages and the target wage scale, including parity with public school teaching staff and individuals with similar credentials.

(5) Gaps in data gathering and analysis and potential measures to close the gaps.

§ 3012. Comprehensive support program for early childhood professionals.

(a) By September 1, 2023, the Department of Education (Department) shall implement a comprehensive support program for early childhood professionals including those employed by a public school.

(b) By January 31, 2023, the Department, in consultation with the Delaware Early Childhood Council, shall produce a plan for the comprehensive support program, informed by the early childhood workforce study required by § 3011 of this title. The Department shall consider inclusion of the following components:

(1) An educational loan forgiveness program.

(2) Scholarship and other financial support for early childhood professionals pursuing degrees and credential attainment.

(3) Salary supplements for early childhood professionals and a proposed scale for such supplements that increases based on higher levels of educational attainment, and policy proposals to have such supplements excluded as income for purposes of determining eligibility for assistance programs.

(4) Formalized alternative routes to credentialing and certification in early childhood professions, including development of an alternative route to certification similar to the programs currently employed for K-12 educators.

(5) Improvements and coordination for aspiring early childhood professionals of professional pathway programs and the Teacher Academy program in district and charter schools, including strategies to support more diversity, to provide meaningful work-based learning opportunities, and to accelerate postsecondary credit and credentials during high school.

(6) Supports for early childhood professionals in the workforce and aspiring professionals including paraprofessionals, community members, parents, bilingual candidates, and those without degrees.

(7) Partnerships with institutions of higher education to support pathways and career development and support for early childhood professionals. The partnership should consider the viability and effectiveness of the following completion supports for individuals seeking credentials and degrees in fields relevant to early childhood education including:

a. Tutoring.

b. Academic counseling and assistance in navigating credential requirements.

c. Embedded coaching and professional learning.

d. Community-based delivery of training at licensed child care and early learning providers.

e. Courses in languages other than English.

f. Developing or providing funding for substitutes when training or courses are offered during the work day.

(8) Assisting aspiring and current early childhood professionals to access other available financial supports, such as the SEED and INSPIRE scholarships.

SYNOPSIS

This Act requires the Department of Education to conduct an annual workforce study of early childhood professionals to support the development of a plan and implementation of a system of supports to grow and deepen the early childhood workforce. The first study is due by November 15, 2022, the plan by January 31, 2023, and implementation of the system should be in place by September 1, 2023.

The COVID pandemic revealed and heightened an existing difficulty in attracting and maintaining well qualified professionals in child care jobs, which are frequently low-paying compared to K-12 jobs. Since reliable, widely available, high quality child care options are a foundation for the whole workforce, and because the early childhood years are so important to childhood development and school readiness, it is a priority for the State that this crisis be addressed in a systematic, holistic fashion. The Department of Education is tasked with leading this rethinking and prioritization of early childhood careers – through the development of reliable data systems which can help bring living wages, financial and other support for academic and credential attainment, and coordination with CTE programs and institutions of higher education to uplift the profession and support individuals seeking to make a career in early childhood education.