

HB 684 -- EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

SPONSOR: Sauls

This bill repeals current statute relating to early childhood education programs and creates a universal early childhood education program for all children ages three to five to begin in the 2024-25 school year. The bill provides for transfer between districts, cooperation between districts, and contracting with public and private child care providers for early childhood education programs.

The bill requires that after July 1, 2025 contracted providers will hire teachers certified in early childhood education, and requires that all teachers in a facility be certified in early childhood education before the 2028-29 school year. The bill allows for any educator employed by the Head Start Program, with an Associates degree in child development, and five years experience to be certified in early childhood education.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shall develop standards for early childhood programs including but not limited to:

- (1) Research-based curricula and teaching strategies;
- (2) Operating schedules that coordinate with the school year and provide extended or year-round service;
- (3) Providing 30 hours a week of instruction;
- (4) Specifications for teachers and class size;
- (5) Meal and health services,
- (6) Family and community involvement; and
- (7) Relating to teachers for children with special needs.

This bill creates the "Universal Early Childhood Education Fund" and provides DESE with the authority to determine rules for the distribution of appropriated money for early childhood programs.

This bill is similar to HB 1539 (2022).