

Laws 2023, Chapter 54 (H.F. 2292) – Early Education Omnibus Bill

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Section 1. **Distribution of appropriation.** Provides that the state appropriation for Head Start programs may be used for costs associated with program operations, infrastructure, or reconfiguration to serve children from birth to age five in center-based services. Designates 10.72 percent of the total state appropriation to Tribal Head Start programs and specifies an order in which the state appropriation must be distributed.

Section 2. **Great start scholarship program.** Directs the commissioner of children, youth, and families to develop and implement the great start scholarships program to ensure affordable access to high-quality early care and learning for children from birth to kindergarten entry. Establishes program requirements. Requires the commissioner, to establish the program's administrative structures and systems by July 1, 2028. Requires the commissioner to submit a report to the legislature on the progress towards establishing the program by July 1, 2026.

Section 3. **Screening program.** Allows an early childhood developmental screening to be conducted virtually for families who make the request based on their immunocompromised health status or health conditions.

Section 4. **Developmental screening aid.** Increases the developmental screening aid per child or student screened to \$98 for a child screened at age three; \$65 for a child screened at age four; \$52 for a child screened at age five or six prior to kindergarten; and \$39 for a student screened within 30 days after first enrolling in a public school kindergarten if the student has not been previously screened.

Section 5. **Prekindergarten, school readiness, preschool, and early education programs; licensure requirement.** Requires a school district or charter school to employ a licensed teacher to provide instruction in a preschool, school readiness, school readiness plus, prekindergarten, or school-based early education program. States that the requirement does not apply to individuals providing instruction in a licensed child care center or a certified license-exempt child care center.

Allows any teacher who has taught in an early childhood program for at least five years prior to September 1, 2028, to continue to teach without obtaining a license.

Section 6. **Grants for Grow Your Own early childhood educator programs.** Establishes a Grow Your Own early childhood and family educator grant program and grant procedures. Establishes a Grow Your Own early childhood education program account in the special revenue fund. Annually appropriates up to \$175,000 to the commissioner for program administration and monitoring. Requires grant recipients to annually report to the commissioner of education on their activities. Requires the commissioner to publish a report for the public that summarizes the activities and outcomes of the grant recipients.

Section 7. **Support staff.** Requires the department of education to employ two full-time equivalent staff to serve as resources for early childhood family education programs. Requires each staff person to hold a valid license as a teacher of parent and family education.

Section 8. **Additional duties.** Strikes obsolete language related to the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care. Requires the council to review and provide input on the recommendations and implementation timelines developed by the Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force.

Section 9. **System components.** Provides an automatic one-star rating under Parent Aware to licensed child care centers, licensed family child care providers, and Tribally licensed child care providers provided the licensed programs do not opt out of the rating system and are in good standing. Directs the commissioner of human services to establish a process under which a licensed program may opt out of the automatic one-star rating by July 1, 2026. Directs the commissioner to consult with Tribes to develop a process for rating Tribally licensed programs that is consistent with the goals of the automatic one-star rating.

Section 10. **Kindergarten entry assessment.** Directs the commissioner of education to implement a kindergarten entry assessment of incoming kindergarteners. Directs school districts and charter schools to choose a kindergarten entry assessment tool approved by the Department of Education that meets specified requirements. Requires the department to provide assessment-related technical assistance and professional development to educators, school districts, and charter schools. Requires school districts and charter schools annually report the results of the kindergarten entry assessment to the department. Directs the commissioner to publicly report the results in the manner specified. Provides a three-year phase-in of the requirements under this section, with all school districts and charter schools complying beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.

Section 11. **Family eligibility.** Modifies financial eligibility for early learning scholarships. Adds having a child referred as in need of child protection services as an eligibility requirement for receiving an early learning scholarship regardless of a family's income level. Beginning January 1, 2024, changes a child's eligibility for scholarships to include all children from birth through age four on September 1 of the current school year.

Section 12. **Applications; priorities.** Adds priority groups for early learning scholarships beginning July 1, 2024. Requires the Department of Education to give highest priority for scholarships to children in families with income less than or equal to 47 percent of state median income, and then prioritize children who meet the other specified criteria within the group beginning July 1, 2025.

Section 13. **Administration.** Directs the commissioner of education to establish a schedule of tiered scholarship amounts based on specified factors. Modifies the time a family has before the scholarship cancels and the recipient must reapply from ten months to three months. Allows for an extension if a program is unavailable to a child within the three month timeline.

Section 14. **Early childhood program eligibility.** Removes the requirement for programs to have three or four stars under Parent Aware to accept scholarships by July 1, 2024.

Section 15. **Early learning scholarship account.** Increases the amount the commissioner may use for costs associated with administering and monitoring scholarships to up to \$2,133,000 annually. Allows the commissioner to use money in the early learning scholarship special revenue fund for family outreach and distribution of scholarships. Allows the commissioner to use up to \$5,000,000 to create information technology systems. Starting July 1, 2025, allows the commissioner to use up to \$750,000 annually to maintain the information technology systems.

Section 16. **School of parents' choice.** Allows a parent of a student with a disability who is not yet enrolled in kindergarten and not open enrolled in a nonresident district to elect a school in the nonresident district in which the student is enrolled in a Head Start or licensed child care program.

Section 17. **Direction to commissioner of human services; one-star rating report.** Directs the commissioner of human services to engage with early care and learning providers to assess how the automatic one-star Parent Aware rating may impact whether providers choose to work toward higher Parent Aware ratings. Requires the commissioner to determine the cost of establishing the automatic one-star rating and funding needed to support providers that seek to earn higher ratings. Requires the commissioner to report the findings to the legislature by December 31, 2024.

Section 18. **Appropriations given effect once.** Provides that if an appropriation or transfer in this article is enacted more than once during the 2023 regular session, then the appropriation or transfer must take effect only once.

Section 19. **Appropriation; great start scholarships program.** Makes a onetime appropriation of \$2,610,000 in fiscal year 2024 from the general fund to the commissioner of human services for establishing and implementing the great start scholarships program. Allows the commissioner to transfer part or all the appropriation to the commissioner of children, youth, and families beginning July 1, 2024.

Section 20. **Appropriations; Department of Education.** Appropriates money to the Department of Education for early learning programs.