

Blueprint of the Early Learning Program

Report to the Twenty-seventh Legislature
State of Hawaii
2013

Pursuant to Act 178, Section 8, Session Laws of Hawaii 2012
Relating to the Development of the Early Learning System

Prepared by
State of Hawaii
Executive Office on Early Learning
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BACKGROUND

WHY ARE HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES IMPORTANT?

The past decade has seen a substantial increase in public investment in early learning programs by federal, state, and local governments. Though most programs target economically disadvantaged children, 13 state programs are working to serve all children.

Proven to Help Children Succeed

These investments have been driven by significant research affirming the positive effects of high-quality early learning programs on the physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional outcomes of young children.

Provided with such opportunities, children are more likely to succeed in kindergarten and beyond, and more likely to grow into healthy, capable, and contributing adults. Studies have proven that high-quality programs are especially effective for high-risk children, including low-income and otherwise disadvantaged children, with the great potential to alter their lifetime trajectories.

Society Wins

Well-executed and well-targeted early learning programs have immediate and long-term benefits not only for the children participating in the programs, but also for the societies in which they live. Societies that invest boast higher levels of educational attainment; reduced homelessness, crime, and substance abuse; improved health; and better overall social and economic well-being.

The social and economic benefits to taxpayers far outweigh the costs of such a program, as detailed in Dr. Clive Belfield's 2008 economic analysis that calculated a likely return of \$4.20 for every dollar that is invested in a statewide early learning program for Hawaii's four-year-olds. The early learning sector itself has been identified as a vital economic driver for the State: it employs more than 9,000 residents and enables thousands of parents to participate in the labor force and pursue educational advancement while also preparing the future workforce and contributing to the local economy through purchases and support of other industries.

Today, more than 40 percent of Hawaii's children start kindergarten without having participated in an early learning program. According to kindergarten teachers in our Department of Education, many of them could be developmentally 18-24 months behind their peers who have attended a program. In 2011-2012, a low percentage of kindergarten classes had the majority of their students entering school with the skills and characteristics necessary for school success, including essential reading and math skills (25 percent) and socio-emotional behaviors (47 percent). Hawaii is currently one of only 11 states in the nation that does not offer a state-funded early learning program.

WHAT WE'RE DOING ABOUT IT

We are on the brink of changing this. Governor Neil Abercrombie, recognizing the immensely positive benefits of investing in early childhood development and learning, has made it a top priority for his administration.

The first achievement for this priority was the July 2011 appointment of Terry Lock as the early childhood coordinator in his office. This was followed by the establishment of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) in July 2012 through Act 178 to provide the Cabinet-level leadership and coordination needed to ensure the effective and efficient use of public resources for an early childhood development and learning system for children throughout the state, from prenatal to age five, by eliminating duplication of effort and engineering partnerships with the private sector. Ms. Lock was appointed as EOEL's first director.

Act 178

Act 178, which the Hawaii State Legislature passed and Gov. Abercrombie signed into law in 2012:

- Established EOEL within the Office of the Governor beginning July 1, 2012, with permanent placement in DOE beginning July 1, 2015, for administrative purposes only;
- Established the Early Learning Advisory Board (ELAB) to advise EOEL, replacing the Early Learning Council;
- Repeals DOE's junior kindergarten program at the end of the 2013-2014 school year;
- Requires students to be five years old by July 31 of the school year to enter DOE kindergarten, beginning with the 2014-2015 school year; and
- Requires the development and execution of a plan for the State's early learning system.

EOEL has been tasked with ensuring high-quality early learning opportunities for children as a major step in building Hawaii's early childhood development and learning system.

Next Steps

With the establishment of EOEL, Hawaii can now move forward with the development and implementation of the Governor's Early Learning Program. This blueprint outlines EOEL's plan to achieve its goal of providing our four-year-old children access to high-quality early learning opportunities, preparing them for success.

It is important to note that these plans are contingent upon the successful passage of legislation and subject to change.

THE EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

VISION

All children will be valued, safe, healthy, and ready to succeed.

GOAL

Four-year-old children will have access to high-quality early learning opportunities and be ready to succeed in school.

PURPOSE

- To prepare children for school.
- To provide access to high-quality preschool that addresses children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development.
- To assist low-income and working families.
- To reduce poverty.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

High-quality early learning improves readiness for school and positions children for success. To benefit Hawaii's children, the Early Learning Program, which will involve voluntary participation of families, will address:

- Affordability and access;
- Shared responsibility between families and the State;
- Partnerships with the private sector to build resources and funding; and
- Quality.

Starting with building the workforce and addressing the teacher shortage, the Program will take some time to reach its goal. There are also not enough facilities to accommodate more of our four-year-olds. A mix of public and private early learning providers are needed for this to work, and building their capacity to become high-quality centers of early learning versus simply child care is key. A sliding fee scale based on families' need will help pay for the investment. This is no easy task, and community by community there will need to be significant buy-in by the public and private sectors to elevate our children's success rates.

CONTEXT OF THE EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

The Program will be administered by EOEL and is part of the plan being developed with stakeholders to focus on the outcomes we all want for our young children.

The Program will be part of a cohesive continuum of early childhood development and learning experiences for children from the prenatal to early school years.

- 1. Action Strategy.** EOEL is charged with coordinating and completing an action strategy that will help shape the State's policy agenda on behalf of children, from prenatal to third grade. The goal is to create partnerships and align policies and programs to improve health, safety, and school readiness and success. The first step is to engage partners across the state to define desired outcomes for children and families and identify critical strategies that will need to be prioritized, sequenced, and implemented over the next three years. Six workgroups have been involved in looking at child outcomes. Access to high-quality early learning opportunities, which the Program aims to provide, is a critical component in achieving the three overarching goals of this action strategy: children's health and development on track, kindergarten readiness, and proficiency by third grade.
- 2. From Birth to Higher Education.** EOEL, DOE, and the University of Hawaii (UH) system make up Hawaii's P-20 Partnerships for Education (P-20) and share the common goal of improving Hawaii's educational outcomes in an increasingly global economy. P-20 is one approach that has proven successful to strengthening the education pipeline from early childhood through higher education so that all students achieve career and college success.

The prenatal to third grade (P-3) component of P-20 is an approach to ensuring that young children have a seamless and high-quality educational experience from birth to age eight, or third grade, and links school readiness initiatives with school improvement efforts – valued by Gov. Abercrombie and his administration as an important aspect of an early learning system. P-3 focuses on partnering DOE elementary schools with a network of community-based early learning programs.

- 3. Change in Kindergarten Entry Age.** A State-funded early learning program is needed to:
 - Address the gap in early learning services for late-born four-year-olds when the entry age for kindergarten changes (a child will have to be five years old by July 31 of the school year); and
 - Eventually serve more four-year-olds.

PROGRAM DESIGN ELEMENTS

- 1. Governance and leadership through EOEL.** EOEL, in partnership with ELAB, provides the vehicle to focus on how best to deliver services for children and families beyond the fragmented, individual program or funding stream approach. This allows for increased coordination between several departments, including DOE, UH, the Department of Health (DOH), and Department of Human Services (DHS), to develop and align policies, funding, programs, and practices that will affect the children, families, and community partners who participate in the Early Learning Program. EOEL will also partner with other government agencies, private foundations, businesses, and other community organizations. Collaboration and joint planning, shared resources, and shared information could result in greater impact of State funds on a clear set of common goals for children's development and learning.
- 2. Shared responsibility** of families and the State to pay for costs. When both the families and the State are invested in this effort, more benefit will be realized.
- 3. School day/school year schedule** (~30 hrs/wk, 10mos/yr). This mirrors the DOE schedule.

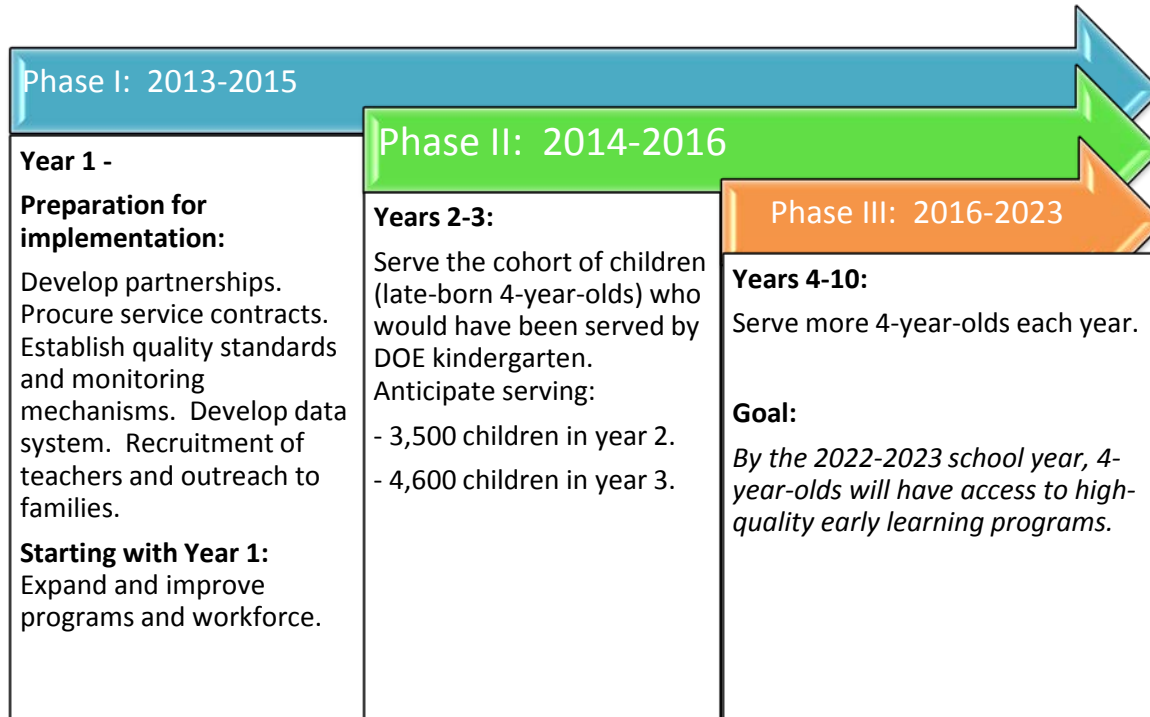
4. **Delivery through a mix of public and private early learning providers** to maximize use of the public and private sectors' capacity to provide services while offering families the choice of a setting or program that suits their needs and values.
5. **Graduated implementation** to build funding and capacity of facilities and workforce, and phase in quality benchmarks for programs. As other states have learned, better access requires considerable time for both public and private collaborators to plan, develop, and review. This is especially the case with increasing early learning program capacity and raising the level of quality. It also takes time for states to commit funding.
 - a. **Funding.** The private sector – organizations and the families who send their preschool-aged children to private programs – has been the principal investor in Hawaii's existing early learning system, based on the recent fiscal mapping project conducted by The Finance Project. Private-sector providers, who until now have been primarily responsible for educating our youngest keiki, cannot reach more of the children in need of the programs without more resources to improve access and quality. State resources for early learning are lacking and must be built up. As we increase the number of children participating in the Early Learning Program, the overall State investment must increase. The Program will also continue to build on partnerships with donors, philanthropists, and the business community.
 - b. **Physical capacity.**
 - i. Improve existing capacity. According to a recent EOEL survey of Head Start and private providers, about 40 percent of those surveyed will need improvements in their facilities to expand their services to more children, such as plumbing and upgrades in playground surfaces and equipment. New classroom furnishings and curriculum supplies will also be needed.
 - ii. Expand with new facilities. Improvements of existing capacity are not sufficient to accommodate the four-year-olds who will be served.
 - c. **Workforce capacity.** An adequately sized and qualified workforce is essential to the provision of high-quality early learning opportunities. There is a shortage of teachers who possess the qualifications likely to be required of programs that participate in the Early Learning Program. Thus, as those currently in the workforce upgrade their qualifications and more individuals are recruited to become teachers, accessible and affordable higher education opportunities and appropriate compensation are needed. In the survey conducted by EOEL, preschool directors indicated the need to:
 - i. Recruit staff with additional qualifications such as a college degree or specialized coursework (indicated by more than half of the directors surveyed), and provide professional development even for well-qualified staff to address the unique learning needs of older four-year-olds;
 - ii. Better understand kindergarten readiness expectations to help children be successful when they enter; and
 - iii. Develop new approaches that will offer stimulating and challenging experiences for children continuing in their programs for another year. About a third of all providers will need assistance to make changes in their curricula.
 - d. **Quality benchmarks.** Most states have steadily increased their quality standards over time, gradually phasing in selected benchmarks such as requiring teachers to have bachelor's degrees while developing accessible and affordable higher education pathways for them.

- 6. Adherence to Early Learning Program standards and demonstration of continuous quality assurance.** Research demonstrates that only high-quality programs are effective in producing positive outcomes for children, both in the near- and long-term, so quality should be a critical component of any early learning program. Program standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what program quality should entail, create awareness of the areas in which programs are succeeding and where they are falling short as far as quality, and guide continuous quality improvement activities. Once states establish their standards, they also establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure providers are accountable to the requirements as well as offer support for continuous improvement.
- 7. Use of the P-3 approach** to improve alignment and integration of early learning programs with K-12, as the first link to the P-20 educational pipeline.
- 8. Public engagement and family outreach and recruitment,** especially those who are hard to reach due to geography or lack of awareness and engagement, and would most benefit from the Early Learning Program. There needs to be increased awareness and understanding of:
 - a. The importance of the earliest years of a child’s life and how those years set the foundation for overall development and success in school and beyond; and
 - b. The change in kindergarten entry age.
- 9. Coordination with other agencies and programs to provide comprehensive services for early childhood development and learning,** including before-/after-school/inter-session care, and health and social services. Children and families have needs for services beyond the school day.
 - a. Working families need before- and after-school child care.
 - b. Children and families need a comprehensive system of supports and services. Promotion of nutrition, oral health, behavioral health, and parenting is needed. Preschool directors say they need additional help to provide such services as developmental screenings, referrals for health and social services, parenting classes, and more intensive follow-up with parents on children’s issues. This is particularly important in serving at-risk and vulnerable children.
- 10. Data to inform sound policy and improve practices.** A coherent and high-quality early learning system to meet our children’s needs requires access to statewide information that accurately reflects their early learning needs and the diverse communities they live in. Data should be systematically collected, maintained, and analyzed. Current challenges include the following:
 - a. Data is mostly collected about programs and for individual agencies for specific purposes, resulting in data that is unmatched and difficult to use for assessment of the overall availability and effectiveness of early learning programs in relation to the needs for services across the state;
 - b. There is limited data on the workforce, professional development system, and fiscal resources that support the early learning system, including public and private sector funding and family payments for services; and
 - c. Data that is collected on the children who participate in early learning programs does not allow tracking of the impact, and assessment of the long-term effectiveness, of the programs.
- 11. Evaluation of the Early Learning Program** to determine to what extent and how well its objectives are being carried out by EOEL, to aid in the establishment of priorities for improvement and other decision making.

IMPLEMENTATION: NUTS AND BOLTS

The following sections explain how these design elements have been incorporated into the implementation of the Early Learning Program.

Timeline for Implementation



Enroll Children and Families and Providers in the Program

The following details how families and existing early learning providers can participate in the Early Learning Program.

Regarding Children and Families:

- Child Eligibility

- **Family Income.** An important aspect of an early learning system is affordability for families benefiting their children. Because many middle-income families, especially those who are just entering the middle class, also struggle to meet the cost of early learning on their own, the Early Learning Program will support not only low-income but middle-income families as well.

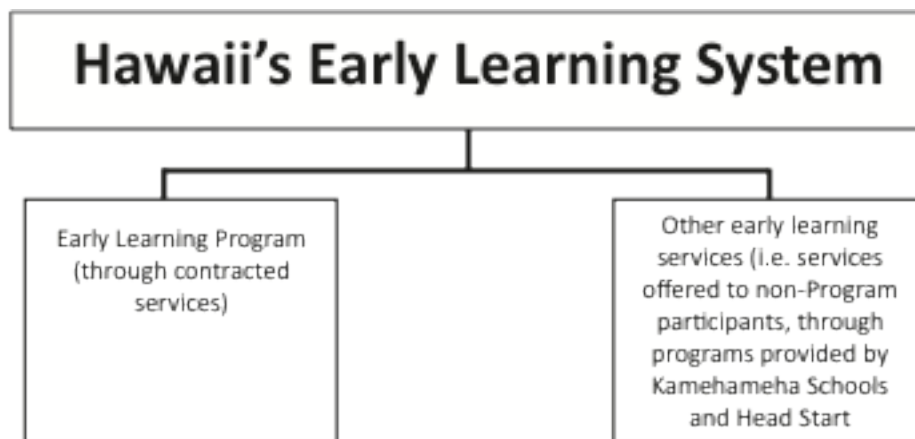
The State and participating families will share in the responsibility for costs through a sliding fee scale based on family income. The cost for low-income families will be fully covered by the State to remove financial barriers that may prevent access for the portion of our population that would benefit most from early learning programs, but these families will be asked to give in the form of in-kind contributions.

- **Additional Risk Factors for Eligibility Priority.** In determining priorities for enrollment, consideration will also be given to children with special needs, such as children with developmental delays or disabilities, in foster care, in homeless families, who are English language learners, or at risk for child abuse and neglect.

- Application and Enrollment
 - To provide equitable access for eligible children, families of all eligible children must be aware of the opportunity available to them. EOEL will conduct intensive outreach activities.
 - EOEL intends to simplify the application and enrollment process for families as much as possible.
 - A selection process may be designed to address situations in which the anticipated number of eligible children in an area outnumbers the spaces or funding available to serve them.
 - Upon enrollment of the child with a participating provider in the Early Learning Program, families will enter into agreements that include a commitment to ensure their child's regular attendance and their own involvement in family engagement activities.

Regarding Providers:

The goal is to include the following settings through contracts for services: center-based preschools, DOE school-based preschools, group child care homes, family child care homes, and family-child interaction learning programs.



1. EOEL will develop a contracting process that includes RFPs, contracting, contract auditing, quality improvement, and data management, that involves:
 - Individual early learning programs;
 - DOE. EOEL will contract with DOE for DOE school-based early learning services; and
 - DHS. EOEL may contract with DHS for delivery of subsidies to DHS-licensed child care providers on behalf of families.
2. Individual early learning providers will submit proposals for services indicating:
 - Number of classrooms available and number of eligible children (a minimum of 10) who can be served;
 - DHS licensure (except in the case of DOE); and
 - Plans to meet and maintain quality standards established by EOEL.
3. Providers that have been selected to participate in the Early Learning Program will accept participating children into their programs.

Build Physical Capacity

Some of the methods EOEL will explore to expand facilities include:

- Working with DOE to identify unused classrooms that can be converted for early learning and facilitating partnerships between principals and program directors to use the spaces;
- Seeking capital improvement project (CIP) funds to:
 - Add more Pre-Plus facilities – those developed and built by the State on DOE elementary school campuses and operated by private preschool providers – in areas where need is indicated; and
 - Assist private providers who wish to expand in areas where the Early Learning Program has identified the greatest need for services;
- Encouraging partnerships between Head Start providers and other providers to increase opportunities for Head Start-eligible children in areas where Head Start programs are lacking;
- Encouraging partnerships in which DOE special education preschool teachers teach full-inclusion classrooms in private early learning settings. This expands on DOE's creation of full-inclusion classrooms in which special education preschoolers are joined by typically developing children from the community, a strategy that is already providing additional spaces for four-year-olds. The typically developing children learn empathy and can serve as role models for the special education students;
- Identifying and publicizing the low-cost loan and grant opportunities available to providers, such as those offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Program; and
- Initiating discussions between DHS and DOE to address barriers that DOE encounters in meeting DHS licensing standards.

Build a Qualified Workforce

EOEL will assess needs and design effective strategies to ensure that the Early Learning Program and the entire early learning system in Hawaii can rely on a well-qualified and appropriately compensated workforce, building on the work of Hawaii Careers with Young Children, including:

- Conducting a study to assess the capacity and effectiveness of Hawaii's higher education institutions to support workforce preparation and professional development of the early childhood workforce. The findings will help guide next steps in offering opportunities for early learning staff to advance their education and careers;
- Establishing a higher education subsidy program. The subsidy program aims to assist individuals who are pursuing their associate's degrees and bachelor's degrees, up to 100 individuals each on an annual basis, or getting much-needed early childhood coursework. This will give a boost to potential and current educators; and
- Building a network of community-based services to staff, including local outreach and recruitment efforts, academic and career advisement, and job-embedded training opportunities and technical assistance on such topics as highly effective learning environments and teaching strategies for at-risk children.

Ensure Adherence to Early Learning Program Standards and Demonstration of Continuous Quality Assurance

In developing program standards, EOEL will explore using research-based policies and benchmarks of high-quality programming such as those identified by National Institute for Early Education Research:

Policy	Quality Benchmark
Early learning standards*	Comprehensive
Teacher degree	Bachelor's
Teaching specialized training	Specializing in pre-kindergarten
Assistant teacher degree	Child Development Associate or equivalent
Teacher in-service	At least 15 hours each year
Maximum class size	20 or fewer
Staff-child ratios	1:10 or better
Screening, referral, and support services	Vision, hearing, health, and one other support service
Meals	At least one each day
Monitoring	Conduct site visits

**EOEL will use the new Hawaii Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS), a comprehensive, research-based set of early learning standards that address the following areas of child development: physical well-being, health, and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; cognitive and general knowledge; and language and literacy. HELDs will help identify the expectations of knowledge and behavior for children from birth through kindergarten entry.*

EOEL will also develop standards for family engagement. Partnering with families is critical to children’s success as learners and students, as families are children’s first teachers.

Participating providers will be required to meet program standards established by EOEL or design plans detailing how they intend to reach these standards within a given timeline.

Participating providers will also agree to engage in continuous quality assurance activities that are eventually assessed, monitored, and supported by a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Nationally, QRIS has become an essential strategy in early learning system development by aligning standards across sectors, driving quality improvement, assuring accountability, and communicating quality levels to consumers seeking early childhood services. With Hawaii's QRIS, EOEL will establish a pathway tied to QRIS levels to encourage providers to move from a starting level to reach the target standards within a designated period of time. QRIS participation will provide significant benefits to providers, including coaching resources, targeted technical assistance, and incentives and rewards.

Hawaii is in the early stages of piloting and evaluating a QRIS. The results of the evaluation, expected to be completed in 2014, will guide next steps in the QRIS’ development. While its final design may differ from its pilot-phase design, EOEL believes the future QRIS should be sufficiently funded to incorporate critical elements needed to support participating providers of the Early Learning Program, such as coaching and financial awards for reaching and maintaining progressively higher levels of quality. EOEL will establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure providers are accountable to the requirements as well as receiving support for continuous improvement.

Employ the P-3 Approach

Participating providers will be encouraged to use the P-3 approach in their programs, which incorporates eight broad elements:

- Ensuring resources for cross-sector work between pre-kindergarten and K-3;
- Assuring administrator and teacher quality and capacity;
- Assuring effective teaching strategies;
- Aligning and balancing instructional tools (e.g., standards, curricula, instruction, and assessments);
- Ensuring appropriate learning environments;
- Implementing data-driven improvements;
- Working to engage and partner with families; and
- Assuring access, transitions, and pathways.

EOEL is working with P-3 to develop, for incorporation into the Program:

- A curriculum guide and other resources based on HELDS; and
- A kindergarten entry assessment. In the interim, EOEL can review the results of the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA) to determine outcomes. HSSRA is conducted and reported each year by the Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) in partnership with DOE and consists of a report on children's readiness to learn successfully upon entry into kindergarten and another report on schools' readiness successfully support learning of its entering kindergartners. The effectiveness of the Early Learning Program should be reflected in these two reports.

Public Engagement and Family Outreach and Recruitment

For the General Public:

A broad communications effort has been and will continue to be undertaken to promote the importance of early learning and create awareness about the Program.

To assist with the extensive statewide communication that is needed, which will involve a variety of media and audiences, EOEL will collaborate with the communications team of the Office of the Governor, various State agencies, and other organizations. For example, GBA's *Be My Voice!* Hawaii campaign has already launched efforts to educate the public about how early learning improves outcomes for children and strengthen the public's will to support investment in high-quality early learning.

For Hard-to-reach Families:

Intensive community outreach and recruitment efforts will be conducted to enroll hard-to-reach families in the Early Learning Program, especially in areas with large percentages of low-income families. Consumer resource and referral services will be made available to provide families with information about the Program and connect them with participating early learning providers who can meet their needs for services.

EOEL intends to partner with community organizations that are best equipped to reach families in their area and possibly already involved in similar outreach and recruitment activities. EOEL will support the expansion of these existing services and help make them available in communities that lack the services.

Establish a Data System

EOEL will continue to collect, analyze, and organize data related to early learning from multiple sources, as it has been doing to craft plans for the Early Learning Program. EOEL’s plans for a data system include:

- Working together with UH, P-20, and the State Longitudinal Database development team as they begin to add information about children in early learning programs to the longitudinal database; and
- Developing systems to manage data on the programs, staff, and children participating in the Early Learning Program to track budgets and expenditures and monitor statistics. It will be important to combine statistical information about the services offered through the Early Learning Program and those of other early learning providers throughout the state and by island, school district, and school complex area, to provide a comprehensive picture of program enrollment and related information. EOEL will request technical assistance from the State’s Office of Information Management and Technology to address these data needs.
 - Some of the types of information EOEL will collect for program monitoring purposes include: program records, classroom quality data, child outcome data, program facilities, safety ratings, program self-assessments and annual reports, and program outcome data.

Evaluate the Early Learning Program

Evaluation will be done starting with the first year of implementation (2014-2015) and every other year thereafter (beginning 2016-2017) to assess the Program’s progress toward its goals and objectives and allow time to implement recommendations for improvement and make mid-course corrections.

INVESTMENT

The Governor has proposed the following investment in the Early Learning Program for the 2013-2015 biennium.

Summary of Investment (in millions)		
Elements	FY 2013-2014	FY 2014-2015
EOEL	\$0.6	\$0.7
Capacity Building & Quality Assurance	\$2.9	\$5.3
Direct Services	n/a	\$22.9 (for 3,472 children*)
Total	\$3.5	\$28.9

**It is estimated that there will be 3,472 late-born four-year-olds throughout the state who will be eligible to participate in the Program in the 2014-2015 school year. This number is based on DOE estimates and takes into account those who are served by early learning providers with their own funding streams.*

Element descriptions:

- EOEL = coordination and management of early learning system
- Capacity building & quality assurance = efforts to increase and improve programs and workforce; public engagement and family outreach and recruitment; subsidies application/eligibility processing; data systems; and evaluation.
- Direct services = school-day/school-year for four-year-olds, with priority for late-borns in FY15 and FY16, with sliding fee scale or family participation requirements. More four-year-olds to be added beginning FY17.

TIMELINE

January – May 2013

- Develop partnerships with potential early learning providers as Program participants.
- Research options for the provider contracting system.
- Develop procurement process.
- Work with higher education institutions to develop the early learning workforce.
- Develop program standards.
- Develop family engagement standards.
- Create data system architecture (e.g., for family eligibility and application process).

June – December 2013

- Establish administrative rules to begin implementation of the Program.
- Issue requests for proposals for contracted services with early learning providers.
- Recruit teachers to build a qualified workforce for the Program.
- Set up higher education subsidy program.
- Finalize program standards.
- Finalize family engagement standards.

January – May 2014

- Award contracts to early learning providers to become Program participants.
- Conduct outreach and recruitment to enroll families in Program.

June – August 2014

- Families confirm participation in a participating program.
- Begin the first day of school through the Program!

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