



## Executive Office on Early Learning

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) has been created to guide the development of a comprehensive and integrated statewide early childhood development and learning system. The goal is to ensure that all of Hawai'i's children, prenatal to age five, are healthy, safe and ready for school. Research has shown that early childhood programs in the first critical years of life build resilience, stave off the need for more expensive services later, and lead to a stronger future for the individual and a firmer economic base for the State.

The Office was established by Act 178 (passed as Senate Bill 2545) and signed into law by Gov. Neil Abercrombie in June 2012. Establishment of a Cabinet-level agency to lead and coordinate implementation of the early childhood system is a major step forward.

Right now, there exists a fragmented patchwork of public and private early childhood development and learning programs throughout Hawai'i. EOEL is coordinating with these providers to streamline efforts and be more cost effective.

Guiding the work of the Office is the Hawai'i Early Childhood Action Strategy—Taking Action for Hawai'i's Children—inspired by a national research-based work, The Pathways Initiative. Our strategy, geared towards young children prenatal to age 8, is tailored for Hawai'i by incorporating decades of work by local early childhood advocates. From this framework, the action strategy sets desired outcomes for young children along the lines of healthy and welcomed starts, on-track development, support for families, school readiness/ early learning, and proficient learners by the third grade. Taking Action was developed in partnership with key-stakeholders statewide and details strategies on how EOEL can work to achieve the desired outcomes.

EOEL is consulting with community groups, statewide organizations and stakeholders involved in early childhood development and learning policy, advocacy, programs and development. The Office will collect, analyze, interpret and release data relating to early childhood development and learning in Hawai'i. EOEL will encourage family engagement and promote awareness of early childhood development and learning opportunities to families and the general public.

The Early Learning Advisory Board (ELAB) for the Office is composed of 19 key public and private stakeholders (including Head Start, the University of Hawai'i, Kamehameha Schools and the Department of Education). ELAB is responsible for making recommendations to EOEL, cutting through bureaucracy and promoting collaboration across agencies and stakeholders that serve young children. The board serves as an independent voice for children's health, safety, development and learning.



## Taking Action for Hawai'i's Children: Overview

In Summer 2012, The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) engaged partners across the State to define desired outcomes for Hawaii's children and families. The strategy focuses on children, prenatal to age 8, across the domains of healthy, safety, care and education. This initiative has led to the creation of an early childhood action strategy, "Taking Action for Hawai'i's Children," because our keiki deserve the best.

The strategy is outcomes driven; when we know what we want, we can better determine how we'll get there. The goal is to create conditions of well-being for Hawai'i's families and children so our young ones can succeed. In this strategy, the focus was on understanding what current conditions are and identifying how conditions can be improved.

Inspiration for the action strategy was taken from a national, research-based framework, "Pathways to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade," by Lisbeth B. Schorr and Vicky Marchand (The Pathways Initiative, June 2007). The goals for the action strategy have been adapted for Hawaii, based on decades of work among island-based, culturally appropriate early childhood advocates:

- Goal 1: Healthy and welcomed starts
- Goal 2: Health and development is on track
- Goal 3: A family centered system where all families are supported and supportive
- Goal 4: Access to high-quality childcare and education
- Goal 5: Continuity in early childhood experiences
- Goal 6: Effective teaching and learning in kindergarten to third grade (K-3) classrooms

It is our firm belief that meeting these goals will improve the lives of Hawai'i's young children and increase their chances of success, both in and out of the classroom.

Within our State, a patchwork system of public and private programs and services, administered by multiple agencies is in place, and they often work in silos. To improve the coordination of efforts, EOEL was established with the authority and responsibility to make fiscal, policy and program decisions regarding early childhood in Hawai'i. The action strategy provides EOEL with the framework needed to develop a comprehensive early childhood development and learning system and meet desired outcomes.

Right now, in light of Act 178, EOEL's efforts are concentrated on achieving Goal 4, specifically developing a statewide network of early learning programs to replace Junior Kindergarten, which will be phased out at the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Because the kindergarten entry age

will be changed to 5 years old by July 31 starting in the 2014-2015 school year, many children will be affected. In the short term, EOEL strives to serve these children through a school readiness program; the long-term goal is to have an early learning program that serves all of Hawai'i's 4-year-olds. We will look to the Hawai'i Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS) to help everyone with a stake in early childhood development be on the same page in terms of understanding what can be expected of our keiki at each age and stage. We will need to establish strong partnerships with providers to ensure that the school readiness and early learning programs are high-quality, effective and accessible.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the Executive Office on Early Learning?**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) was established in June 2012 and is headed by Director Terry Lock. EOEL is charged with creating a comprehensive early childhood development and learning system for Hawai'i's keiki, prenatal to age five. The Office is partnering with public and private organizations to align policies, programs and services that support and benefit Hawai'i's families and children across the domains of health, safety, development, school readiness and education. EOEL is advised and supported by the Early Learning Advisory Board (ELAB), which is made up of key-stakeholders.

### **What is the goal of EOEL?**

The long-term goal of EOEL is to develop and oversee a statewide early childhood development and learning system for Hawai'i's young children. We want families and children to have access to high-quality health and developmental services and early learning programs, so we give our children every opportunity to get a good start in life.

### **Why is the State getting involved?**

Presently, in Hawai'i, there is a fragmented patchwork of health and developmental services and early learning programs for young children, offered by public and private agencies and funded by different levels of government and the private sector. Having an "umbrella" to house and coordinate the various providers would streamline services and increase cost efficiency.

### **What does Act 178 do?**

Signed into law by Governor Abercrombie in summer 2012, the law mandates the following:

- Establishes EOEL and sets standards for the director of the office;
- Establishes ELAB to replace the Early Learning Council, as an advisory body to EOEL;
- Repeals the existing junior kindergarten program for 4- and early 5-year-olds at the end of the 2013-2014 school year;
- Requires that beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, students must be at least 5-years-old on July 31 of that school year to attend kindergarten.

EOEL is tasked with developing an implementation plan—including projected financials—in order to ensure a seamless transition between junior kindergarten to the school readiness program in the 2014-2015 school year.

### **Why is junior kindergarten being repealed?**

The junior kindergarten program made few inroads in the school system and was never uniformly implemented across all schools. Some of the junior kindergarten classes were combined with standard kindergarten classes, which put Hawai'i's students in a learning disadvantage. The school readiness program will champion consistent standards, programming and follow-through.

### **Why is the kindergarten entry age being changed to 5?**

We want our children to reach their fullest potential on day one of kindergarten. As the law currently stands, Hawai'i's children are some of the youngest in the nation to enter kindergarten. They need to start off on equal footing. That can only happen if we level the playing field, which we've done by changing the kindergarten entry age to five. With all the major studies done on the first few years of a child's life, we understand the importance of preparing our children so they are ready to learn and can thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

### **Why is early learning important?**

Children are our most precious resource. With 85% of their brain development occurring before the age of five, we must do all that we can to ensure that they are equipped—cognitively, physically, emotionally and socially—and ready to enter kindergarten and learn.

### **What do studies show of children who participate in quality early learning programs?**

Research has proven that children who participate in a quality, pre-K program do better in elementary school and beyond. They are more likely to graduate from high school, get a good job, are less likely to be involved in crime and rely on social programs.

### **What does school readiness mean?**

According to the School Readiness Task Force (Act 13, 2003), "young children are ready to have successful learning experiences when there is a positive interaction among the child's developmental characteristics, school practices, and family and community support." We want to ensure that they enter kindergarten healthy, socially developed and cognitively prepared to learn and succeed. We also must do our part to ensure that those who teach and care for our children are themselves equipped so they can help our keiki succeed.

### **What is the Hawaii Early Childhood Action Strategy?**

The Action Strategy, Taking Action for Hawai'i's Children, is inspired by the Pathways Initiative, national research-based work, and tailored for Hawai'i based on decades of work here on early child readiness. In it, we outline the desired goals for our young children, prenatal to age 8—welcomed starts, support for families, early learning and school readiness, healthy, proficient learners by third grade—and strategize, in detail, how to get there. The strategy is the vehicle for getting efforts off the ground and keeping us on track so we achieve our desired outcomes. For an overview of the strategy visit [earlylearning.hawaii.gov](http://earlylearning.hawaii.gov).

### **Is EOEL working on all of these goals at once?**

Right now, EOEL is concentrating its efforts on developing a statewide early learning program to ensure a smooth transition out of Junior Kindergarten and into an early learning program. Before that happens, we're easing into a school readiness program before we fully implement the early learning program.



## Notable Quotes

*“Early childhood education must be the initial step on the education ladder. Failure to act now virtually ensures that our children will fall behind.”*

- Gov. Neil Abercrombie, 2012 State of the State speech.

*“Research shows that 85 percent of a child’s brain development takes place before the age of five and that children who have quality early experiences are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college and contribute to the economy.”*

- Gov. Neil Abercrombie, 2012 State of the State speech.

*“Studies have shown that high quality early learning programs directly impact young children’s physical, social-emotional, language and cognitive growth and development. High-quality early learning programs are critical to children’s readiness for kindergarten and the elementary grades.”*

- Administration testimony on behalf of SB2545

*“Hawai’i did a study through the Good Beginnings Alliance and saw that for every dollar spent implementing quality early learning programs, we’ll save \$4.20 for educational and social interventions down the road.”*

- Terry Lock, Director Executive Office of Early Learning

*“We’re one of 11 states who do not have a pre-kindergarten program. The rest of the states have begun a pilot or actually already have programs that affect lots of children. For instance, Georgia has been doing this for 20 years and they have served about 75 percent of their 4-year-olds....Many states are moving toward a universal pre-kindergarten or preschool for 4-year-olds.”*

- Terry Lock, Director Executive Office of Early Learning

*“It’s so important to take the total experience a child has in the early years to a higher level.”*

- Terry Lock, Director Executive Office of Early Learning

*“To create optimal environments for children we also have to ensure that the adults teaching them are paid equitably. There’s been a whole workforce out there making sure our children are safe and nurtured and they themselves aren’t recognized and are subsidizing the costs with low pay. I believe the state really has to step up here too, otherwise we can’t really do what’s optimal for our children.”*

- Terry Lock, Director Executive Office of Early Learning

*“It’s not going to be perfect. We’re going to learn as we develop this. And it’s not going to be a free program. The plan right now is to have shared responsibilities (for the cost) with the families.”*

- Terry Lock, Director of the Executive Office on Early Learning

*“Access to quality early education is a social justice issue in Hawai‘i. School readiness is an equity issue that cut along income lines in our State.”*

- Deborah Zysman, Executive Director of Good Beginnings Alliance

*“Preschools provide children the opportunity to understand structure, how to socialize with peers, learn academics and skills necessary to thrive in kindergarten.”*

- Sayoko Yamaguchi, Director of Calvary Chapel West O‘ahu Preschool

*“The research is clear that keiki who have had early learning experiences before kindergarten are more likely to succeed in school, in careers, and in life.”*

- Karen C. Lee, Executive Director of Hawai‘i P-20 Partnerships for Education

*“We are at a critical crossroads, we have the opportunity to invest in the future of our State through early education or set the state for future economic crisis by leaving our most vulnerable population without the educational opportunities necessary to be innovators, thinkers and creators.”*

- Dr. Kanoë Nāone, CEO of INPEACE

*“Early education not only gives children a good foundation on which to grow, but it gives them the confidence to succeed. As a parent and a Hawai‘i resident, I can’t think of a better way to spend my tax dollars.”*

- Tim Johns, HMSA senior vice president

*“Early education is the key, and will build better communities, better businesses, more successful families and help prevent future problems.”*

- Keith Vieira, Starwood Hotels

*“As Dr. Maria Montessori observed and brain research now confirms, the period between birth through six years of age is a particularly sensitive for human growth. Research has clearly demonstrated that high-quality early childhood education makes a difference in academic, social and even financial outcomes for students.”*

- Patsy Tom, Montessori Hawai‘i

*“Quality early childhood education is key for a child’s academic and life success. Language acquisition, thinking-skills development and development good habits are all most profound in the early years.”*

- Ronn Nozoe, Deputy Superintendent of the Hawai‘i State Department of Education

*“The Governor has made early learning a top priority in the biennium budget recognizing that if we do not offer quality early learning experiences for the children of Hawai‘i, we will not only pay the cost in future remedial services and criminal justice costs but also because we have a moral obligation to our keiki and their families to provide them with every opportunity for school success. Research clearly indicates what that entails and we fail our community by not making it happen.”*

- Robert Peters, Chair of the Early Learning Advisor Board



## Early Learning Program Success in Other States

State supported early learning, or preschool, programs have been implemented in 39 states across the country, with varying degrees of success. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has determined that in order for a program to be successful, it must be effective, accessible and high quality. NIEER tracks early learning programs throughout the United States and has.

Based on NIEER studies and research, here's a glimpse of the success other states have had with their early learning programs:

**Georgia.** In 1995, Georgia became the first state to extend voluntary preschool education to all 4-year-olds, regardless of family income. The pre-K program is supported by lottery receipts and was expanded based on research that its state-funded preschool pilot program had positive results for early academic skills.

**Oklahoma.** Oklahoma ranks second in the nation to offer free, voluntary access to the Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program, which is offered in 98 percent of the state's school districts, with 38,441 children enrolled.

**Vermont.** Vermont is third in the nation in access rankings for 4-year-olds; just a decade ago, the state was ranked 18th in access.

**West Virginia.** In the 2012-2013 school year, the West Virginia Universal Pre-K System, which offers pre-kindergarten programs, was expanded to all school districts and will enable the state to meet its goal of universal, voluntary access. West Virginia ranks fifth in the nation for providing access to 4-year-olds.

16 states serve more than 31 percent of all 4-year-olds, six of which serve more than 51 percent of that age group.

On average, states spend \$4,061 per child on early learning although spending per state varied greatly—New Jersey spent the most. What states spend per student is dependent on multiple variables including teacher salary, hours of service and student-teacher ratio.

So where does Hawai'i rank? Hawai'i is one of 11 states without a state-funded and coordinated early learning program. Countless studies have shown that children who participate have the chance of being successful in school and life and in the long run, societies benefit from their success through economic productivity and decreased costs to government. Investing in a high-quality early learning program is one of the wisest decisions Hawai'i can make.



## Terry Lock, Executive Office on Early Learning Director

In June 2012 Gov. Neil Abercrombie asked Terry Lock to take on one of the most challenging jobs in the State – develop a statewide plan to create and ensure superior learning environments for Hawai'i's approximately 17,000-18,000 four-year olds – a plan that will boost their lives enormously and help ensure the State's economic future.

“Forty-two percent of our children come to kindergarten without any preschool experience,” said the Director of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL)— an educator whose 36 years of experience includes teaching, innovation, program development and administration of early childhood programs both in Hawai'i and on the Mainland.

“Teachers are already saying many of these children are a year or two behind the ones who have gone to preschool. We have to change this. We need the best possible plan that's best for all our children.”

Barely six months into the job, Lock is already at work forging a blueprint for a comprehensive, high-quality program for 4-year-olds that encompasses both public and private preschools, and provides state subsidies for families based on a sliding income scale aligned with federal poverty guidelines. That report will be ready for scrutiny by the 2013 Hawai'i State Legislature.

It will stipulate that families with the fewest resources will not be charged for preschool; those with middle-incomes will pay part of the cost; and those in higher income brackets will pay the going rate. Currently that's expected to be around \$880 a month for a 6-hour-a-day, five-day-a-week, developmentally appropriate, 10-month-a-year preschool program.

“This program will support the whole child in terms of their physical, social, emotional, linguistic and intellectual well-being,” said Lock. “This will be done through stimulating and nurturing experiences.

“What's recommended as far as accreditation is a 1-to-10 ratio of teacher to children,” said Lock. “That's 20 children in a classroom with a teacher and an assistant teacher.”

With a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Development from the University of Hawai'i-Manoa; and a Master's degree in Human Development with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education and specialization in Parent/Community Work, from Pacific Oaks College in California, Lock gladly signed on to tackle something that's been an elusive goal for the past three decades.

Now, with strong backing from the Governor and a powerful consortium of community, business and educational leaders - and with Lock's determined leadership - the efforts are gaining new momentum.

“The opportunity to make a difference for the children in our State is really what motivates me,” said Lock, whose background also includes management of the Kamehameha Schools’ Community-Based preschools, project management for Head Start programs in Washington D.C., and coordination of Maui County’s early care and education system for children from birth to age five.

Lock expects the plan’s full implementation to take a decade and require consistent and long-term support from the State Legislature, with an annual price-tag of around \$130-\$150 million coming out of the state general fund. That money will be a major investment in launching a long-term, well-trained, dynamic workforce to create economic stability.

While there’s a complex matrix of how many children will be added each year, Lock speaks about it as easily as if she were reading a favorite recipe. She knows the percentages of children subsidized now, how that will change over time, and how it’s critically important to start with low- and middle-income families.

“It will start with late-born children first, including about one-fifth of 4-year-olds with birthdays from August 1 to Dec. 31 ... This first group will be turning five within the program’s first five months.”

Graduated implementation through 2023 allows time for the development of additional pieces of the infrastructure, she says, as well as training for personnel. The Governor is expected to ask the State Legislature this year for \$28.9 million for the first year of implementation - the 2014-15 school year. Of that money, \$22.9 million would be aimed at covering the annual cost per child, \$5.2 million will be used to build capacity, and the remainder will go toward management and coordination.

Though the major studies assessing the results of enriched early learning programs show rapid strides in children over both the short and long-term, Lock notes that many of the studies have involved high-risk children, often those living in poverty. “Researchers have looked at the long-term investment and what you invest in and what the savings will be,” she said. “This means fewer drop-outs, less juvenile delinquency, fewer needs for Special Education.” But she notes that all children benefit from early enrichment with their peers in a nurturing learning environment.

While the Maui-born Lock, both a mother and a grandmother, has spent a lifetime working for the rights of young children for high quality early education, when she first went to college she had no idea where her career path would lead. It was an emotionally wrenching experience working with troubled teens through the Hawai‘i court system that helped propel her to study early learning in graduate school.

“I had this vision it would be really interesting to find out how to provide support to these teenagers,” she remembers, “but as I worked with them I kept thinking ‘We have to start earlier.

This is challenging. They have set habits. And they had experienced lots of different trauma in their lives.”

In sharing with her professor her observations and her interest in further studies in human development, he pointed her toward graduate work at Pacific Oaks College and Children’s School in Pasadena, Ca., noting that in order to get a degree in human development she would also have to work with children in preschool.

Under the mentorship of a gifted teacher, Mae Varon, now in her 80s, and with whom Lock remains good friends, the way forward grew clear. “She treated children with such dignity,” remembers Lock. “It made me see things in a whole new way. In the 1970s we didn’t have that kind of research around brain development yet, but I was amazed at how these children, given the tools and opportunities, could carry on these almost adult conversations with me. They were asking a lot of questions, and being given the opportunity to learn. I began to get really curious. I began to realize these weren’t just people with little bodies. They had minds and ideas that made me see their potential and you could talk to them in full sentences.”

Lock was hooked. After graduate school she went on to work with children in the Los Angeles inner city, then married and moved to Washington D.C. where she again taught inner city children. Only when she and her husband Stephen, a computer programmer now retired, began their own family, did they choose to move back home to Hawai’i. They settled first on Maui where Lock joined the faculty at Maui Community College as an instructor and Child Development Associate Advisor. She had already spent a year teaching at the University of Maryland and assisting with the administration of the early childhood education program there.

Lock recognizes the complexity of developing a program in Hawai’i that will weave together existing infrastructure and facilities, including private preschools, with others to be developed within the public school system. Currently there are far too few facilities and qualified teachers to serve the entire 4-year-old population. Only 9,098 spaces statewide are now available.

But none of these challenges exhaust her; quite the opposite. Her voice seems always filled with enthusiasm. After all, this is the woman who met her husband on a culturally-based international college study program as they flew between Tokyo and Taiwan, and then fell in love writing letters over the next two years.

“He told me he was from St. Louis,” she says with a laugh. “I said ‘Missouri?’ And he said, ‘No, high school.’”



## Glossary

**Act 178.** Law passed by the Hawai'i State Legislature in 2012 that established the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) to assist the State in meeting its goal of providing a viable early learning system. The law also established the Early Learning Advisory Board (ELAB) to replace the Early Learning Council; repealed the DOE Junior Kindergarten Program at the end of the 2013-2014 school year; requires students to be 5 years old by July 31 to enter DOE kindergarten, beginning with the 2014-2015 school year; and requires an implementation plan and projected financials in order to ensure seamless transition from the Junior Kindergarten program to the Hawaii Preschool Program in the 2014-2015 school year.

**Child outcomes.** Usually refers to a child's long-term success, in academic achievement and in other areas of life. EOEL's proposed child outcomes include health development, school readiness and math and reading skills on track in third and fourth grade. Long-term life outcomes include improved financial well-being, high school completion, and avoidance of incarceration or other negative social circumstances.

**Comprehensive supports and services.** Services provided to families and children to support the family's effort to care for children. Services may include health, nutrition, dental care, parenting education, social services, employment or training, and family involvement.

**Developmentally appropriate.** Activities, curriculum or other activities that are based on the developmental and individual characteristics of each child.

**Early Learning Advisory Board (ELAB).** State advisory board for EOEL established by Act 178 (2012), which replaced the former Early Learning Council. ELAB is comprised of 19 members representing state agencies, state-related entities, private agencies and representatives of early childhood constituent groups.

**Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).** State office established by Act 178 (2012), charged with coordinating health and education efforts on behalf of Hawai'i's young children, prenatal to age eight. EOEL is partnering with private and State agencies to align policies and programs that improve child outcomes in regards to health, safety, school readiness and success. Current efforts are focused on developing a universal early learning program for all of Hawai'i's 4-year-olds. The long-term goal is to establish a comprehensive early childhood system.

**Hawai'i Early Childhood Action Strategy.** Launched in summer 2012, this initiative, "Taking Action for Hawai'i's Children," defines the desired outcomes for children and families—healthy and welcomed starts, on track development, a family centered system, access to child care and education, continuity in childhood experiences and effective teaching and learning in K-3

classrooms. The Action Strategy provides EOEL with a roadmap to coordinating programs and efforts in the public and private sector to meet the desired outcomes and develop a comprehensive early childhood system.

**Hawai'i P-20 Partnership.** Created in 2003 as a partnership between Good Beginnings Alliance, the Department of Education and the University of Hawai'i System. With EOEL now a partner, P-20 promotes the connection of an "education pipeline" to improve student achievement at all levels of education from "P" (provisions to early learning) to "20" (higher education and beyond).

**Hawai'i P-3 Initiative.** P-3 is part of the P-20 continuum that focuses on learning that spans Pre-K (birth to 5) and the early grades (K-3). The initiative includes ensuring the following eight elements: resources that work cross sector (Pre-K and K-3), administrator quality and capacity, teacher and teaching quality, aligning instructional tools (standards, curricula, instruction and assessments), appropriate learning environments, implement data-driven improvements, engage and partner with families and assuring access, transitions and pathways.

**Preschool.** Early learning programs for children 3- to 5-years-old prior to entering kindergarten, or the period of life that occurs before attending elementary school.

**School readiness.** Young children are ready to have successful learning experiences when there is a positive interaction among the child's developmental characteristics, school practices and support from family and the community. (Act 13, Hawai'i State Legislature, 2002)

**Universal preschool program.** Publicly funded preschool for all 3- and 4-year-old children.

**Universally accessible early learning program.** Sufficient capacity to serve all 4-year-old children who may want to attend an early learning program.



## NEWS RELEASE

**NEIL ABERCROMBIE**  
GOVERNOR

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Jan. 9, 2013

### **Governor Outlines School Readiness Program and Budget Needs**

HONOLULU -- The State of Hawaii is committed to giving its keiki the best opportunity for school success and a strong early childhood education program is a proven way toward that, Gov. Neil Abercrombie affirmed at a press conference today at Seagull School's Early Education Center.

Through the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL), a comprehensive and methodical approach is under way to get the first phase of a high-quality State-funded program in place by school year 2014-15.

"Education is a top priority for my administration," Gov. Abercrombie said. "I'm pleased to say that the Executive Office on Early Learning, under the direction of Director Terry Lock, is carrying out my mandate for a comprehensive program, which will meet or exceed the best in the nation."

The Abercrombie Administration has included \$32.5 million for EOEL in the biennium budget for a school readiness program. In the first year, \$3.5 million would be for critical planning and program development. In the second year, \$28.9 million would support school readiness opportunities for about 3,500 4-year-olds who would not be eligible for kindergarten due to a new birthdate cutoff of July 31, starting in 2014. Eventually, the goal is a statewide early childhood education program for more 4-year-olds.

The school readiness program is part of the Hawaii Early Childhood Action Strategy -- "Taking Action for Hawaii's Children" -- that EOEL is developing to help shape the State's policy agenda on behalf of children. The action strategy also includes goals for health and development of children, support for families, and continuity in early childhood experiences. "We are focusing on understanding what the current early childhood development and learning conditions are and identifying how they can be improved," said Gov. Abercrombie.

"Now that the action strategy is defined and we have the developmental milestones outlined in the Hawaii Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS), we have identified the best outcomes-based criteria for children to be used in the school readiness program," said Lock. "The HELDS provide age and stage expectations for children, birth through kindergarten."

To learn more about the state's school readiness program, visit: <http://earlylearning.hawaii.gov/>.

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