



An Early Learning Program for Hawaii

Helping to Improve Our Educational System

An early learning program that aligns with the K-12 system is key to ensuring that more children are going to school prepared and ready to learn. Early learning provides essential building blocks for children to develop the skills they need to be successful in kindergarten and beyond.

Early learning feeds into an educational pipeline, assisting with improving student outcomes in grades K-12.

A [video](#) produced by the Hawaii P-3 Initiative explains how early learning programs can work collaboratively with the public K-12 system to strengthen a child's preschool through college learning experiences.

Local efforts to reform K-12 that involve early learning have already borne fruit. As part of Race to the Top reform efforts, zones of school innovation established in two communities are providing children with access to preschool programs and have already yielded better results in the elementary school grades.

Early learning systems have also impacted K-12 system elsewhere in the nation. The [New York Times](#) recently shared that the radical transformation of the Union City, N.J., system – located in a poor community with all the ingredients for failure – was due in large part to the establishment of a publicly-funded pre-kindergarten program.

Building Our State's Early Learning System

Currently, certain early care and education programs in Hawaii are required to meet baseline standards through the Department of Human Services' child care licensing process. Other programs may not be required to meet any type of State requirements. Though many providers prefer to set higher standards for their programs in areas such as staff qualifications and curriculum, these higher standards, although encouraged, are not required by the State.

Research tells us that the quality of a program is essential to achieving our collective goal of providing services that best prepare our children to enter school – ultimately setting them on a course toward lifelong success. An effective State-funded program – which essentially builds a system of early learning – needs to create a consistent baseline for higher quality by requiring participating providers to adhere to high-quality criteria. This is how we can be assured of outcomes that will make a difference in the lives of our keiki and state.

The Governor's Proposal

The Governor's 2013 legislative package includes three bills that comprise the phases of an effective, comprehensive early learning system for Hawaii's children:

- The School Readiness Program (HB862 / SB1093);
- The Constitutional amendment (HB853 / SB1084); and
- The Early Childhood Education Program (HB864 / SB1095).

The School Readiness Program will ensure that late-born four-year-old children will have access to early learning services. The Program is designed to work with public and private providers. Contract agreements will be made with programs who choose to participate and will focus on raising the level of quality beyond DHS licensing.

Qualifying criteria are being developed, noting that the Program is still in its planning stages; both legislation and funding must be approved by the Legislature before the Program can be implemented. Our goal for implementation is Fall 2014.

Note: The Constitutional amendment is not needed to implement the School Readiness Program; however, participating providers cannot be held accountable to educational outcomes.

Rebutting Concerns that the Effects of Early Learning Fade

Though there is concern that the benefits of high-quality early learning fade by the end of the second grade*, [solid research rebuffs](#) this claim. Results demonstrate that state-funded early learning programs make at least incremental improvements, which add up year-by-year and produce significantly better lives.

The [Chicago Longitudinal Study](#) also found evidence of early learning's positive impact on areas such as student achievement for 14-year-olds, special education placement, grade retention, and high school completion. These are outcomes we want for our keiki.

It is also important to note that the gains made through early learning must be sustained with efforts made in the K-12 system. Learning standards must be consistent across the board so every child is prepared to face the challenges ahead.

**Concerns may be tied to the recent Head Start Impact Study, which illuminated two things: inconsistency in program standards and children's long-term outcomes. However, it is important to note the following:*

- *The study compared Head Start participation with access to all other early education programs, and not with no access to early learning opportunities, a comparison that would have demonstrated significant differences.*
- *It is erroneous to consider this finding as an indication that the impact fades over time, when in fact the control group is catching up once they are exposed to formal schooling.*
- *Head Start programs varied in quality of academic instruction, which confirms the need to establish consistent learning standards in the programs of the Executive Office on Early Learning.*
- *The study acknowledges that positive outcomes are possible later in life for Head Start participants.*

If You Want To Provide Testimony

This update provides information to help you understand the immediate and long-term plans of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL), which you can draw from for your testimony if you wish. For a summary of amendments made to the bills by each legislative committee, visit www.capitol.hawaii.gov and click on the committee reports associated with each bill draft.

You can submit testimony by doing the following:

- Go to www.capitol.hawaii.gov.
- Click on the “Submit Testimony” button.
- Enter the measure number (e.g., SB1093).
- Fill out the requested information fields under “Enter Information” and follow the prompts.
- Testimony should be submitted at least 24 hours in advance of the hearing.
- Please consider testifying in person as well as submitting testimony online.

How to stay connected? Visit EOEL’s [website](#) for regular newsletter announcements. *Be My Voice! Hawai’i* will also assist in keeping supporters informed with regular information on hearing notices and other updates.

Mahalo for your continued interest!