

March 11, 2009

**H 539. MERGE SMART START/MORE AT FOUR.** Filed 3/11/09. *TO MERGE THE "MORE AT FOUR" PROGRAM WITH THE NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN, INC.*

*Transfer and Merger.* Transfers all components of the *More at Four* program in the Office of School Readiness from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), *except* for (1) the teacher licensure function and (2) the personnel positions funded with grants from the United States Department of Education. Directs the Division of Child Development of DHHS to facilitate the merger of the *More at Four* program with the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (Partnership). Directs the Partnership to administer the program through the local partnerships. Directs DHHS to eliminate all the positions no longer needed by DHHS for the administration of the *More at Four* program and to make the remainder of the funds for administration of the program available to the Partnership. Requires DHHS to implement a plan to expand *More at Four* program standards within existing resources to include four-star and five-star-rated centers and schools serving four-year-olds. Also directs DHHS to develop guidelines for these programs. Provides that the *NC Prekindergarten Program Standards* initiative is to recognize the four-star and five-star-rated centers that meet equivalent *More at Four* standards as high quality pre-k classrooms. Directs that classrooms meeting these standards are to have access to training and workshops for *More at Four* programs.

*Income eligibility.* Requires the *More at Four* program to establish income eligibility requirements for the 2009-11 fiscal biennium that do not exceed 75% of the state median income. Provides that up to 20% of the children who are enrolled may have a family income in excess of 75% of the median income if the children have other risk factors. Also provides that any age-eligible child of (1) an active duty member of the armed forces who is ordered to active duty within the last 18 months or will be ordered within the next 18 months or (2) a member of the armed forces injured or killed while serving on active duty is eligible for the *More at Four* program.

*Funding.* Requires the Partnership to meet its funding set asides and percentages based upon the Partnership's allocation only for the 2009-11 fiscal biennium. Provides that any funding transferred from the *More at Four* program to the Partnership is to be a designated funding stream for high quality pre-k programs.

*Miscellaneous changes.* Amends GS 143B-168.10 to expand the findings of the General Assembly regarding the need in the state for early childhood initiatives.

Requires the Partnership to submit a report by February 1, 2011, to the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services, the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Education, and the Fiscal Research Division. Specifies information that must be included in the report.

Repeals GS 143B-168.12(a)(1)(n), which provided that the Director of the *More at Four* program be included on the 26-member Board of Directors of the Partnership.

Effective July 1, 2009.

**Intro. by Rapp, Glazier, England, Lucas.**

GS 143B