

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2019

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HOUSE PRINCIPAL CLERK

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HOUSE BILL DRH30218-LUa-3

Short Title: Virtual Early Learning Pilot Program. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Horn, Fraley, Warren, and Lucas (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A VIRTUAL EARLY LEARNING PILOT PROGRAM FOR
3 PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **SECTION 1.(a)** Pilot Program. – The State Board of Education (Board), in
6 consultation with the Department of Public Instruction, Office of Early Learning, and the
7 Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education,
8 shall establish a three-year virtual early learning pilot program known as "UpStart." The pilot
9 program shall be targeted to "at-risk," preschool-age children to develop school readiness skills
10 and created to: (i) evaluate the effectiveness of giving preschool-age children access, at home, to
11 interactive individualized instruction delivered by computers and the Internet to prepare them
12 academically for success in school; and (ii) test the feasibility of scaling a home-based curriculum
13 in reading, math, and science delivered by computers and the Internet to all preschool-age
14 children in the State.

15 **SECTION 1.(b)** Contractor Requirements. – In establishing the pilot program, the
16 Board shall develop and issue a request for proposal (RFP) to contract with a third-party
17 organization (contractor). The contractor shall have demonstrated experience in the delivery of a
18 home-based educational technology program to provide adaptive computer software for literacy
19 and numeracy instruction and an assessment for preschool-age children. The Board shall ensure
20 that the contractor selected to conduct the pilot program does each of the following:

- 21 (1) Provides computer-assisted instruction for preschool-age children on a home
22 computer connected by the Internet to a centralized file storage facility.
- 23 (2) Provides technical support to families for the installation and operation of the
24 instructional software.
- 25 (3) Provides for the installation of computer and Internet access in homes of
26 low-income families that cannot afford the equipment and service.
- 27 (4) Has the capability of doing the following through the Internet:
28 a. Communicating with parents.
29 b. Updating the instructional software.
30 c. Validating user access.
31 d. Collecting usage data.
32 e. Storing research data.
33 f. Producing reports for parents, schools, and the General Assembly.
- 34 (5) Develops and implements a program consisting of the following components:
35 a. Computer-assisted, individualized instruction in reading,
36 mathematics, and science.



- 1 b. A multisensory reading tutorial program for children needing
- 2 additional reading instruction.
- 3 c. A validated computer adaptive reading test that accurately indicates
- 4 reading readiness of children who cannot read and provides easily
- 5 understood reports for parents and educators.
- 6 (6) Has the capability to quickly and efficiently modify, improve, and support the
- 7 product.
- 8 (7) Collaborates with school district personnel who will provide administrative
- 9 and technical support of the program.
- 10 (8) Purchases equipment and service through cooperative purchasing contracts.

11 **SECTION 2.(a)** School District Participation in Pilot Program. – The Board shall
12 select up to 10 local education agencies (LEAs) to participate in the pilot program. The LEAs
13 selected for participation in the pilot program shall have demonstrated waiting lists for the North
14 Carolina Prekindergarten (NC Pre-K) program. LEAs shall be from geographically diverse areas
15 in the State, with representation from tier one, tier two, and tier three counties. For purposes of
16 this section, tier one, tier two, and tier three counties shall have the same designations as those
17 established by the N.C. Department of Commerce's 2017 County Tier Designations.

18 **SECTION 2.(b)** Equipment. – The Board or an LEA may purchase computers,
19 peripheral equipment, and Internet service for low-income families who cannot afford them.

20 **SECTION 3.** Family Participation in Pilot Program. – The contractor selected to
21 develop and implement the pilot program and the LEAs selected to participate in the pilot shall
22 solicit family participants through a public information campaign and referrals from participating
23 LEAs. Qualifying children shall be selected through a random lottery. For purposes of this pilot
24 program, a preschool-age child is eligible for participation in the program based on the following:

- 25 (1) Is 4 years of age on or before August 31 of the program year.
- 26 (2) Is at risk, which shall be defined to include the following:
 - 27 a. A child whose family's gross income is at or below one hundred
 - 28 percent (100%) of the federal poverty level.
 - 29 b. A child of either the following: (i) an active duty member of the Armed
 - 30 Forces of the United States, including the North Carolina National
 - 31 Guard, State military forces, or a reserve component of the Armed
 - 32 Forces, who is ordered to active duty by the proper authority within
 - 33 the last 18 months or is expected to be ordered within the next 18
 - 34 months or (ii) a member of the Armed Forces of the United States,
 - 35 including the North Carolina National Guard, State military forces, or
 - 36 a reserve component of the Armed Forces, who was injured or killed
 - 37 while serving on active duty.

38 Eligibility determinations for participation in the pilot program may be made by local North
39 Carolina Partnerships for Children, Inc., partnerships. If funds are available, in addition to the
40 children defined as "at risk" in this section, the pilot program may also serve a child whose
41 family's gross income is at or below one hundred thirty percent (130%) of the federal poverty
42 guidelines.

43 **SECTION 4.** Annual Report. – The Board shall make a report on the pilot program
44 to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by November 30 of each year for the
45 duration of the pilot program. The report shall include the following:

- 46 (1) The extent to which the pilot program is accomplishing the purposes for which
- 47 it was established.
- 48 (2) The number of families selected to participate in the pilot.
- 49 (3) The number of families requesting computers.
- 50 (4) The number of computers furnished.
- 51 (5) The number of families requiring Internet access.

- 1 (6) The frequency of use of the instructional software.
2 (7) Any obstacles encountered with software or hardware usage or in providing
3 technical assistance to families.
4 (8) Student performance on pre-kindergarten and post-kindergarten assessments
5 conducted by LEAs and charter schools for students who participated in the
6 pilot program in comparison to those students who did not participate in the
7 pilot program.

8 **SECTION 5.** Appropriation. – There is appropriated from the General Fund to the
9 State Board of Education the sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring
10 funds for each year of the 2019-2021 fiscal biennium to provide funding for qualifying
11 preschool-age children to participate in the pilot program established by this act. For the
12 2021-2022 fiscal year only, the Director of Budget shall also include in the base budget, as
13 defined by G.S. 143C-1-1(d)(1c), the amount of nonrecurring funds needed to support the pilot
14 program. Funds appropriated pursuant to this section shall be divided evenly in each fiscal year
15 among the LEAs selected to participate in the pilot program. Upon completion of the pilot
16 program, any unexpended funds shall revert back to the General Fund.

17 **SECTION 6.** Effective Date. – This act becomes effective July 1, 2019.