

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: *HB 479aa

52nd Legislature, 1st Session, 2015

Tracking Number: .200260.1

Short Title: Continue K-3 Plus Program for Some Schools

Sponsor(s): Representatives David E. Adkins, Nora Espinoza, and Others

Analyst: Heidi L. Macdonald

Date: March 6, 2015

AS AMENDED

House Floor Amendment 1 strikes the statement that the provisions of this act apply school year 2015-2016 and subsequent years.

The House Education Committee amendment:

- **changes the time frame for the Public Education Department’s accepting applications from school year 2015-2016 to the “summer 2015 K-3 Plus program.”**

Original Bill Summary:

HB 479 amends the *Public School Code* to allow applications for a K-3 Plus program from schools with a D or F grade the previous year, or schools that improved their school grade with the K-3 Plus program and choose to continue the program.

Further, HB 479 applies to the school year 2015-2016 and subsequent years. For school year 2015-2016 specifically, the Public Education Department (PED) may accept applications from schools that meet the new criteria and withhold its decision on the applications until HB 479 becomes law.

The bill also changes the student demographics intended to be served by the K-3 Plus program. Currently, the program is for “*disadvantaged* students in kindergarten through third grade” [emphasis added]; HB 479 redirects to the program to “*students* in kindergarten through third grade” [emphasis added].

*Finally, HB 479 has an emergency clause.

Fiscal Impact:

HB 479 does not contain an appropriation.

Fiscal Implications:

For FY 16, CS/HB 2 & 4, the *General Appropriation Act of 2015* (as passed on the House floor on February 24, 2015) includes \$22.2 million from the General Fund to support the K-3 Plus program.

According to the PED bill analysis:

- HB 479 allows the 17 schools with a D or F school grade that improved their school grade to a C or higher in school year 2013-2014 to continue their K-3 Plus program eligibility should these schools wish to continue the program;
- the estimated cost for these schools would be approximately \$1.7 million for school year 2015-2016; and
- this figure could be the potential cost per year moving forward, contingent on the number of K-3 Plus schools improving their grades to a C or higher.

It should be noted, however, that the number of newly eligible schools could be even higher than the PED estimate because the bill would apply not only to D and F schools that improve their grade but also to B and C schools that improve their grade.

K-3 Plus Education Annual Report for the 2013-2014 School Year

According to the *K-3 Plus Education Annual Report for the School Year 2013-2014*, during the summer of 2013, 142 schools and two state charter schools implemented K-3 Plus programs. There were 11,639 students served with an average attendance rate by school of 90 percent.

This report also states that K-3 Plus effectively targets high-risk students. Students participating in K-3 Plus are more likely to: qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; be Hispanic, Native American, and/or English language learners; or have been retained at least once. Of the 11,639 students served during the summer of 2013 the composition of students was as follows:

K-3 PLUS PARTICIPANTS		STATEWIDE
Target Group	Percent	Percent
Hispanic	72	62
Native American	12.6	11
English language learners	27	22

Substantive Issues:

By extending eligibility for the K-3 Plus program to those schools “that improved their school grade with the K-3 plus program,” HB 479 implies that the program accounted for the increase in the school’s grade under the *A-B-C-D-F Schools Rating Act*. While K-3 Plus has been shown to be an effective program (see “Background,” below), it is possible that other factors may have contributed to the grade increase. Even so, to the extent that K-3 Plus was a factor, offering the program for another year may contribute to continued school improvement and support increased student achievement.

According to the PED analysis:

- it is unclear for schools with improved school grades whether the continued eligibility is contingent on continuous participation or whether a school could opt out one year and be eligible the next; and
- striking the term “disadvantaged” does not affect a school’s eligibility for the program.

Finally, the \$1.7 million needed for those 17 schools that PED identifies could negatively impact the schools that are eligible under the current K-3 Plus program requirements.

Background:

History of the K-3 Plus Program

In 2003, legislation was enacted to create the Kindergarten Plus pilot project in four school districts as a three-year study administered by PED. Kindergarten Plus extended the school year 40 days for participating kindergarteners for the purpose of demonstrating that additional time in kindergarten narrows the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and other students.

In 2006, LESC-endorsed legislation was enacted to amend the statute to extend the Kindergarten Plus pilot project to a six-year study and to expand the project beyond the original four school districts to allow applications by any other school district with high-poverty schools, where 85 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

In 2007, legislation endorsed by the LESC was enacted to create K-3 Plus, a six-year pilot project that extends the school year in kindergarten through third grade by at least 25 instructional days, starting up to two months earlier than other classes.

Patterned after Kindergarten Plus, the K-3 Plus pilot project was designed to demonstrate that increased time in kindergarten and the early grades narrows the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and other students, increases cognitive skills, and leads to higher test scores for all participants. K-3 Plus, which is administered by PED, provides additional time on literacy, numeracy, and social skills development of the participants.

In 2012, LESC-endorsed legislation was enacted to convert K-3 Plus from a pilot project to an established program in PED.

2014 Interim

During the July 2014 meeting, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) staff provided testimony on the following:

- an overview of previous Start Smart K-3 Plus Project findings; and
- FY 15 legislative appropriations for K-3 Plus.

LESC staff summarized USU evaluator testimony from December 2012. With a caveat that some of the data are preliminary, the USU evaluator stated that strong and statistically significant outcome effects of the Start Smart K-3 Plus Project were found in broad reading, broad writing, basic math, and expressive vocabulary. In terms of kindergarten readiness, the evaluator noted that participants in the intervention group had received higher percentile ranks than those in the control group. The USU testimony in 2012 also identified several lessons that the research staff had learned, among them that:

- early notification of families helps because in the second year the sample size was doubled by sending information to families sooner; and
- student participation requires student and family interest and availability, schools that offer the program, and resources to run the program.

Noting that the results remain preliminary for several reasons, including incomplete attendance data, the USU evaluator testified during the 2014 interim that, in terms of readiness for kindergarten, the K-3 Plus program has shown statistically significant increases for:

- expressive vocabulary by approximately 5.0 percentile points;
- letter-word identification by approximately 11 percentile points;
- applied problems by approximately 4.0 percentile points; and
- basic writing by approximately 12 percentile points.

For beginning-of-first-grade effects, the evaluator noted statistically significant increases for:

- expressive vocabulary by approximately 4.0 percentile points;
- letter-word identification by approximately 12 percentile points;
- applied mathematical problems by approximately 6.0 percentile points; and
- basic writing by approximately 11 percentile points.

The evaluator further testified that the emerging picture is one of evidence that K-3 Plus boosts student achievement in a variety of areas in kindergarten and grade 1 at the beginning of the school year; however, if the study ended now, it would still be unknown whether:

- the program is as effective in grades 2 and 3 as in kindergarten and grade 1;
- end-of-year comparisons show the same effects as these beginning-of-year results;
- the effectiveness of K-3 Plus varies across students of certain types and settings of certain types; and
- complete attendance data would yield different results.

Turning to the FY 15 legislative appropriations for K-3 Plus, LESC staff testified that the program is currently funded as an appropriation to the statutorily created K-3 Plus Fund, administered by PED. The *General Appropriations Act of 2014* included:

- \$21.28 million appropriated for the K-3 Plus program; and
- language requiring that PED use the final unit value set for school year 2013-2014 as the basis for funding 2014 K-3 Plus programs in June, July, and August.

Staff testimony emphasized that statute requires K-3 Plus programs to be funded at no less than 30 percent of the unit value per student based on enrollment at each individual school program on the 15th instructional day of the program. Based on a final unit value for school year 2013-2014 of \$3,817.55, each participating student would generate at least \$1,145.26.

Committee Referrals:

HEC
SEC/SPAC

Related Bills:

HB 41aa *School Grade Promotion & Retention*
SB 66 *School Grade Promotion & Retention*
SB 149 *Early Literacy Act*
SB 468 *Reading Success Act*