

Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office

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FISCAL NOTE

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H.270 - Access to Publicly Funded Prekindergarten

As passed by the House and amended by Senate Education

Act 62, signed into law in 2007, reaffirmed a long-standing practice of state and local support for publicly funded prekindergarten education for three- to five-year-old children. While not a mandatory program for districts or children, current law allows interested communities to provide limited early education services in quality settings. The Agency of Education (AOE) estimates that roughly 36% of age-eligible children attended a qualified prekindergarten program in FY2012 at a cost of \$14.6 million or \$3,600 per child.

H.270 would amend current law beginning in FY2016 by:

- (1) Requiring districts that do not currently operate a program to provide access to prekindergarten education.
- (2) Requiring all districts to offer 10 hours per week of prekindergarten education for 35 weeks annually.
- (3) Providing parents with the option of enrolling their child in a private program or a public program offered by another district; however, school districts may limit the geographic boundaries within which the district would pay tuition.

These changes to current law would increase spending from the education fund by roughly \$1.0 to \$1.5 million in FY2016.

Universal Access. Most districts currently provide access to prekindergarten programs. AOE estimates if 60% of the children living in districts that do not currently provide access to a prekindergarten program, the statewide cost of prekindergarten programs would increase by roughly \$1.2 million in FY2016; however, it is unlikely that enrollment would reach this level in FY2016.

10 Hours/Week. Some districts that currently offer prekindergarten education may provide fewer than 10 hours per week. Under H.270, all districts would be required to

offer 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually to each child whom a parent wishes to enroll in a prekindergarten program. This requirement may raise the cost of prekindergarten programs in some districts, but it would not significantly affect the cost of prekindergarten education statewide.

Parental Choice. Parents who want to enroll their child in a prekindergarten program are currently limited to the program offered by their child's district of residence. Under H.270, parents would also have the option of enrolling their child in a private program or a public program offered by another district. If parents choose a prekindergarten program offered by either of these alternative providers, the district of residence would pay tuition for their child. School districts may choose to limit the geographic boundaries within which the district shall pay tuition by paying tuition solely to those prequalified providers that are located within the district's prekindergarten district. Prekindergarten districts would be determined by AOE, the Agency of Human Services in consultation with the school board and other interested parties. AOE and the Agency of Human Services would set a statewide tuition rate annually; however, the agencies could adjust the statewide rate to account for regional differences in the cost of prekindergarten education. A district of residence would not pay tuition for more than the actual number of hours or weeks per year that a child enrolls or for weeks that are not coterminous with the district's academic year. This provision of H.270 could potentially increase the cost of prekindergarten education in districts that offer a public prekindergarten program within the district.