

LEGISLATIVE BILL 71

Approved by the Governor April 15, 2024

Introduced by Sanders, 45; Albrecht, 17; Briese, 41; Linehan, 39; Murman, 38; Lippincott, 34; Dover, 19; Ballard, 21.

A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to education; to amend sections 79-530, 79-531, 79-532, 79-533, 79-1101, and 79-1103, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, and section 79-1003, Revised Statutes Cumulative Supplement, 2022; to change provisions relating to the involvement of parents and guardians in the education of their children; to require each public school district to develop and adopt a policy relating to the rights of each parent and guardian to access testing information and curriculum and excuse their child from certain instruction or activities; to provide powers and duties to the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education; to redefine terms under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act; to restate legislative intent, redefine a term, and change provisions relating to early childhood education; to provide a process for a parent or guardian to request that such person's child repeat a grade under certain circumstances; to eliminate obsolete provisions; and to repeal the original sections.

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

Section 1. Section 79-530, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-530 (1) For purposes of sections 79-530 to 79-533 and sections 5 to 7 of this act, educational decisionmaker means a person designated or ordered by a court to make educational decisions on behalf of a child.

(2) The Legislature finds and declares:

(a) ~~(1)~~ That parental involvement of parents, guardians, and educational decisionmakers is a key factor in the education of children;

(b) ~~(2)~~ That such individuals parents need to be informed of the educational practices affecting their children; and

(c) ~~(3)~~ That public schools should foster and facilitate access by such individuals to parental information about and involvement in educational practices affecting their children.

(3) It is the intent of the Legislature, through the enactment of sections 79-531 to 79-533 and sections 5 to 7 of this act, to strengthen the level of parental involvement and participation by parents, guardians, and educational decisionmakers in the public school system of the state.

Sec. 2. Section 79-531, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-531 (1) On or before July 1, 2025 1995, each public school district in the state shall develop and adopt a policy stating how the district will seek to involve parents, guardians, or educational decisionmakers in the education of their children schools and the rights of each parent, guardian, or educational decisionmaker to: what parents' rights shall be relating to access to the schools,

(a) Access testing information, and curriculum; and matters.

(b) Request that a child be excused from specific instruction or activities.

(2) The policy of each public school district relating to how the district will seek to involve parents in the schools and what rights parents have relating to access to schools that is in effect prior to the effective date of this act shall remain in effect until a new policy is developed and adopted on or before July 1, 2025, pursuant to subsection (1) of this section.

Sec. 3. Section 79-532, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-532 (1) The policy required by section 79-531 shall include, but need not be limited to, the following:

(a) ~~(1)~~ How the school district will provide access to parents, guardians, or educational decisionmakers concerning textbooks; tests; activities information; digital materials; websites or applications used for learning; training materials for teachers, administrators, and staff; procedures for the review and approval of training materials, learning materials, and activities; and other curriculum materials used in the school district;

(b) ~~(2)~~ How the school district will accommodate handle requests by parents, guardians, or educational decisionmakers to attend and monitor courses, assemblies, counseling sessions, and other instructional activities;

(c) ~~(3)~~ Under what circumstances parents, guardians, or educational decisionmakers may ask that their children be excused from testing, classroom instruction, learning materials, activities, guest speaker events, and other school experiences the parents, guardians, or educational decisionmakers may find objectionable;

(d) ~~(4)~~ How the school district will provide access to records of students;

(e) ~~(5)~~ What the school district's testing policy will be; and

(f) ~~(6)~~ How the school district participates in surveys of students and

the right of parents, guardians, or educational decisionmakers to remove their children from such surveys.

(2) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require disclosure of information in violation of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, 20 U.S.C. 1232g, or any federal regulations and applicable guidelines adopted in accordance with such act, as such act, regulations, and guidelines existed on January 1, 2024.

Sec. 4. Section 79-533, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-533 The policy required by section 79-531 shall be developed with parental input from parents, guardians, and educational decisionmakers and shall be the subject of a public hearing before the school board or board of education of the school district before adoption by the board. The policy shall be reviewed annually and either altered and adopted as altered or reaffirmed by the board following a public hearing. Any public hearing under this section shall include a reasonable opportunity for public comments.

Sec. 5. By August 1, 2025, each school district shall make the policy required by section 79-531 accessible on the school district's public website. The policy shall be accessible by a prominently displayed link on such website. If the policy is altered, the new version of the policy shall be made accessible within a reasonable time thereafter.

Sec. 6. To the extent practicable, each public school district shall make a reasonable effort to make any learning materials, including original materials, available for inspection by a parent, guardian, or educational decisionmaker upon request.

Sec. 7. If the Commissioner of Education determines that any school district has intentionally refused, in a material manner, to comply with sections 79-530 to 79-533 and sections 5 and 6 of this act, the commissioner shall notify the school district of the noncompliance and allow the school district a reasonable time to comply. If the commissioner determines, after such time has elapsed, that the school district is not in compliance and has not made a good faith attempt to comply, the commissioner shall take appropriate remedial action within the commissioner's authority, up to and including qualifying such noncompliance as a violation of the rules and regulations for the accreditation of schools.

Sec. 8. Section 79-1003, Revised Statutes Cumulative Supplement, 2022, is amended to read:

79-1003 For purposes of the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act:

(1) Adjusted general fund operating expenditures means the difference of the general fund operating expenditures increased by the cost growth factor calculated pursuant to section 79-1007.10, minus the transportation allowance, special receipts allowance, poverty allowance, limited English proficiency allowance, distance education and telecommunications allowance, elementary site allowance, summer school allowance, community achievement plan allowance, and focus school and program allowance;

(2) Adjusted valuation means the assessed valuation of taxable property of each local system in the state, adjusted pursuant to the adjustment factors described in section 79-1016. Adjusted valuation means the adjusted valuation for the property tax year ending during the school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which the aid based upon that value is to be paid. For purposes of determining the local effort rate yield pursuant to section 79-1015.01, adjusted valuation does not include the value of any property which a court, by a final judgment from which no appeal is taken, has declared to be nontaxable or exempt from taxation;

(3) Allocated income tax funds means the amount of assistance paid to a local system pursuant to section 79-1005.01;

(4) Average daily membership means the average daily membership for grades kindergarten through twelve attributable to the local system, as provided in each district's annual statistical summary, and includes the proportionate share of students enrolled in a public school instructional program on less than a full-time basis;

(5) Base fiscal year means the first school fiscal year following the school fiscal year in which the reorganization or unification occurred;

(6) Board means the school board of each school district;

(7) Categorical funds means funds limited to a specific purpose by federal or state law, including, but not limited to, Title I funds, Title VI funds, federal career and technical education funds, federal school lunch funds, Indian education funds, Head Start funds, and funds received prior to July 1, 2022, from the Nebraska Education Improvement Fund;

(8) Consolidate means to voluntarily reduce the number of school districts providing education to a grade group and does not include dissolution pursuant to section 79-498;

(9) Converted contract means an expired contract that was in effect for at least fifteen school years beginning prior to school year 2012-13 for the education of students in a nonresident district in exchange for tuition from the resident district when the expiration of such contract results in the nonresident district educating students, who would have been covered by the contract if the contract were still in effect, as option students pursuant to the enrollment option program established in section 79-234;

(10) Converted contract option student means a student who will be an option student pursuant to the enrollment option program established in section 79-234 for the school fiscal year for which aid is being calculated and who

would have been covered by a converted contract if the contract were still in effect and such school fiscal year is the first school fiscal year for which such contract is not in effect;

(11) Department means the State Department of Education;

(12) District means any school district or unified system as defined in section 79-4,108;

(13) Ensuing school fiscal year means the school fiscal year following the current school fiscal year;

(14) Equalization aid means the amount of assistance calculated to be paid to a local system pursuant to section 79-1008.01;

(15) Fall membership means the total membership in kindergarten through grade twelve attributable to the local system as reported on the fall school district membership reports for each district pursuant to section 79-528;

(16) Fiscal year means the state fiscal year which is the period from July 1 to the following June 30;

(17) Formula students means:

(a) For state aid certified pursuant to section 79-1022, the sum of the product of fall membership from the school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which the aid is to be paid multiplied by the average ratio of average daily membership to fall membership for the second school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which the aid is to be paid and the prior two school fiscal years plus sixty percent of the qualified early childhood education fall membership plus tuitioned students from the school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which aid is to be paid minus the product of the number of students enrolled in kindergarten that is not full-day kindergarten from the fall membership multiplied by 0.5; and

(b) For the final calculation of state aid pursuant to section 79-1065, the sum of average daily membership plus sixty percent of the qualified early childhood education average daily membership plus tuitioned students minus the product of the number of students enrolled in kindergarten that is not full-day kindergarten from the average daily membership multiplied by 0.5 from the school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which aid was paid;

(18) Free lunch and free milk calculated students means, using the most recent data available on November 1 of the school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which aid is to be paid, (a) for schools that did not provide free meals to all students pursuant to the community eligibility provision, students who individually qualified for free lunches or free milk pursuant to the federal Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq., and the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. 1771 et seq., as such acts and sections existed on January 1, 2021, and rules and regulations adopted thereunder, plus (b) for schools that provided free meals to all students pursuant to the community eligibility provision, the greater of the number of students in such school who individually qualified for free lunch or free milk using the most recent school fiscal year for which the school did not provide free meals to all students pursuant to the community eligibility provision or one hundred ten percent of the product of the students who qualified for free meals at such school pursuant to the community eligibility provision multiplied by the identified student percentage calculated pursuant to such federal provision, except that the free lunch and free milk calculated students for any school pursuant to subdivision (18)(b) of this section shall not exceed one hundred percent of the students qualified for free meals at such school pursuant to the community eligibility provision;

(19) Full-day kindergarten means kindergarten offered by a district for at least one thousand thirty-two instructional hours;

(20) General fund budget of expenditures means the total budget of disbursements and transfers for general fund purposes as certified in the budget statement adopted pursuant to the Nebraska Budget Act, except that for purposes of the limitation imposed in section 79-1023, the general fund budget of expenditures does not include any special grant funds, exclusive of local matching funds, received by a district;

(21) General fund expenditures means all expenditures from the general fund;

(22) General fund operating expenditures means, for state aid calculated for each school fiscal year, as reported on the annual financial report for the second school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year in which aid is to be paid, the total general fund expenditures minus (a) the amount of all receipts to the general fund, to the extent that such receipts are not included in local system formula resources, from early childhood education tuition, summer school tuition, educational entities as defined in section 79-1201.01 for providing distance education courses through the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council to such educational entities, private foundations, individuals, associations, charitable organizations, the textbook loan program authorized by section 79-734, federal impact aid, and levy override elections pursuant to section 77-3444, (b) the amount of expenditures for categorical funds, tuition paid to other school districts, tuition paid to postsecondary institutions for college credit, transportation fees paid to other districts, adult education, community services, redemption of the principal portion of general fund debt service, retirement incentive plans authorized by section 79-855, and staff development assistance authorized by section 79-856, (c) the amount of any transfers from the general fund to any bond fund and transfers from other funds into the general fund, (d) any legal

expenses in excess of fifteen-hundredths of one percent of the formula need for the school fiscal year in which the expenses occurred, (e) expenditures to pay for incentives agreed to be paid by a school district to certificated employees in exchange for a voluntary termination of employment for which the State Board of Education approved an exclusion pursuant to subdivision (1)(h), (i), (j), or (k) of section 79-1028.01, (f)(i) expenditures to pay for employer contributions pursuant to subsection (2) of section 79-958 to the School Employees Retirement System of the State of Nebraska to the extent that such expenditures exceed the employer contributions under such subsection that would have been made at a contribution rate of seven and thirty-five hundredths percent or (ii) expenditures to pay for school district contributions pursuant to subdivision (1)(c)(i) or (1)(d)(i) of section 79-9,113 to the retirement system established pursuant to the Class V School Employees Retirement Act to the extent that such expenditures exceed the school district contributions under such subdivision that would have been made at a contribution rate of seven and thirty-seven hundredths percent, and (g) any amounts paid by the district for lobbyist fees and expenses reported to the Clerk of the Legislature pursuant to section 49-1483.

For purposes of this subdivision (22) of this section, receipts from levy override elections shall equal ninety-nine percent of the difference of the total general fund levy minus a levy of one dollar and five cents per one hundred dollars of taxable valuation multiplied by the assessed valuation for school districts that have voted pursuant to section 77-3444 to override the maximum levy provided pursuant to section 77-3442;

(23) Income tax liability means the amount of the reported income tax liability for resident individuals pursuant to the Nebraska Revenue Act of 1967 less all nonrefundable credits earned and refunds made;

(24) Income tax receipts means the amount of income tax collected pursuant to the Nebraska Revenue Act of 1967 less all nonrefundable credits earned and refunds made;

(25) Limited English proficiency students means the number of students with limited English proficiency in a district from the most recent data available on November 1 of the school fiscal year preceding the school fiscal year in which aid is to be paid plus the difference of such students with limited English proficiency minus the average number of limited English proficiency students for such district, prior to such addition, for the three immediately preceding school fiscal years if such difference is greater than zero;

(26) Local system means a unified system or a school district;

(27) Low-income child means a child under nineteen years of age living in a household having an annual adjusted gross income for the second calendar year preceding the beginning of the school fiscal year for which aid is being calculated equal to or less than the maximum household income pursuant to sections 9(b)(1) and 17(c)(4) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(1) and 42 U.S.C. 1766(c)(4), respectively, and sections 3(a)(6) and 4(e)(1)(A) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. 1772(a)(6) and 42 U.S.C. 1773(e)(1)(A), respectively, as such acts and sections existed on January 1, 2021, for a household of that size that would have allowed the child to meet the income qualifications for free meals during the school fiscal year immediately preceding the school fiscal year for which aid is being calculated;

(28) Low-income students means the number of low-income children within the district multiplied by the ratio of the formula students in the district divided by the total children under nineteen years of age residing in the district as derived from income tax information;

(29) Most recently available complete data year means the most recent single school fiscal year for which the annual financial report, fall school district membership report, annual statistical summary, Nebraska income tax liability by school district for the calendar year in which the majority of the school fiscal year falls, and adjusted valuation data are available;

(30) Poverty students means the unadjusted poverty students plus the difference of such unadjusted poverty students minus the average number of poverty students for such district, prior to such addition, for the three immediately preceding school fiscal years if such difference is greater than zero;

(31) Qualified early childhood education average daily membership means the product of the average daily membership of students who will be eligible or required to attend kindergarten the following school year and are enrolled in an early childhood education program approved by the department pursuant to section 79-1103 for such school district for such school year multiplied by the ratio of the actual instructional hours of the program divided by one thousand thirty-two if: (a) The program is receiving a grant pursuant to such section for the third year; (b) the program has already received grants pursuant to such section for three years; or (c) the program has been approved pursuant to subsection (5) of section 79-1103 for such school year and the two preceding school years, including any such students in portions of any of such programs receiving an expansion grant;

(32) Qualified early childhood education fall membership means the product of membership on October 1 of each school year of students who will be eligible or required to attend kindergarten the following school year and are enrolled in an early childhood education program approved by the department pursuant to section 79-1103 for such school district for such school year multiplied by the ratio of the planned instructional hours of the program divided by one thousand thirty-two if: (a) The program is receiving a grant pursuant to such section

for the third year; (b) the program has already received grants pursuant to such section for three years; or (c) the program has been approved pursuant to subsection (5) of section 79-1103 for such school year and the two preceding school years, including any such students in portions of any of such programs receiving an expansion grant;

(33) Regular route transportation means the transportation of students on regularly scheduled daily routes to and from the schools such students attend;

(34) Reorganized district means any district involved in a consolidation and currently educating students following consolidation;

(35) School year or school fiscal year means the fiscal year of a school district as defined in section 79-1091;

(36) Sparse local system means a local system that is not a very sparse local system but which meets the following criteria:

(a)(i) Less than two students per square mile in the county in which each high school is located, based on the school district census, (ii) less than one formula student per square mile in the local system, and (iii) more than ten miles between each high school and the next closest high school on paved roads;

(b)(i) Less than one and one-half formula students per square mile in the local system and (ii) more than fifteen miles between each high school and the next closest high school on paved roads;

(c)(i) Less than one and one-half formula students per square mile in the local system and (ii) more than two hundred seventy-five square miles in the local system; or

(d)(i) Less than two formula students per square mile in the local system and (ii) the local system includes an area equal to ninety-five percent or more of the square miles in the largest county in which a high school is located in the local system;

(37) Special education means specially designed kindergarten through grade twelve instruction pursuant to section 79-1125, and includes special education transportation;

(38) Special grant funds means the budgeted receipts for grants, including, but not limited to, categorical funds, reimbursements for wards of the court, short-term borrowings including, but not limited to, registered warrants and tax anticipation notes, interfund loans, insurance settlements, and reimbursements to county government for previous overpayment. The state board shall approve a listing of grants that qualify as special grant funds;

(39) State aid means the amount of assistance paid to a district pursuant to the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act;

(40) State board means the State Board of Education;

(41) State support means all funds provided to districts by the State of Nebraska for the general fund support of elementary and secondary education;

(42) Statewide average basic funding per formula student means the statewide total basic funding for all districts divided by the statewide total formula students for all districts;

(43) Statewide average general fund operating expenditures per formula student means the statewide total general fund operating expenditures for all districts divided by the statewide total formula students for all districts;

(44) Teacher has the definition found in section 79-101;

(45) Tuition receipts from converted contracts means tuition receipts received by a district from another district in the most recently available complete data year pursuant to a converted contract prior to the expiration of the contract;

(46) Tuitioned students means students in kindergarten through grade twelve of the district whose tuition is paid by the district to some other district or education agency;

(47) Unadjusted poverty students means the greater of the number of low-income students or the free lunch and free milk calculated students in a district; and

(48) Very sparse local system means a local system that has:

(a)(i) Less than one-half student per square mile in each county in which each high school is located based on the school district census, (ii) less than one formula student per square mile in the local system, and (iii) more than fifteen miles between the high school and the next closest high school on paved roads; or

(b)(i) More than four hundred fifty square miles in the local system, (ii) less than one-half student per square mile in the local system, and (iii) more than fifteen miles between each high school and the next closest high school on paved roads.

Sec. 9. Section 79-1101, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-1101 (1) The Legislature finds and declares that: (a) Early childhood education programs can assist children in achieving their potential as citizens, workers, and human beings and can strengthen families; (b) early childhood education has been proven to be a sound public investment of funds not only in assuring productive, taxpaying workers in the economy but also in avoidance of increasingly expensive social costs for those who drop out as productive members of society; (c) the key ingredient in an effective early childhood education program is a strong family development and support component because the role of the parent is of critical importance; (d) while all children can benefit from quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood education experiences, such experiences are especially important for at-risk infants and children; (e) current early childhood education programs serve only a fraction of Nebraska's children and the quality of current

programs varies widely; (f) well-designed early childhood education programs increase the likelihood that children who participate will enter school prepared to achieve high standards; (g) effective early childhood education programs require staff with knowledge about child growth, development, and learning and family systems; and (h) both public and nonpublic programs which meet recognized standards of quality can address the growth, development, and learning needs of young children.

(2) ~~(2)(a)~~ It is the intent of the Legislature and the public policy of this state to encourage schools and community-based organizations to work together to provide high-quality early childhood education programs for infants and young children which include family involvement, with the goal of assuring that every family in Nebraska has access to such programs for, at the minimum, both the school year prior to the school year for which the child will be eligible to attend kindergarten and the school year prior to the school year for which the child will be required to attend kindergarten if such child has not already enrolled in kindergarten. The purposes of sections 79-1101 to 79-1104.05 are to provide state assistance to selected school districts, cooperatives of school districts, and educational service units for early childhood education, to encourage coordination between public and private service providers of early childhood education and child care programs, and to provide state support for efforts to improve training opportunities for staff in such programs.

~~(b) It is the further intent of the Legislature that any additional funds appropriated on or after January 1, 2014, for FY2014-15 for early childhood education grants pursuant to section 79-1103 be used to assist schools and community-based organizations in working together to expand the access to such high-quality early childhood education programs for children for the school year prior to the school year for which the child will be eligible to attend kindergarten and that the unobligated balance of any such funds be reappropriated for such purpose for FY2015-16 and FY2016-17.~~

(3) For purposes of sections 79-1101 to 79-1104.05:

(a) Board of trustees means the Early Childhood Education Endowment Board of Trustees;

(b) Early childhood education program means any prekindergarten part-day or full-day program or in-home family support program with a stated purpose of promoting social, emotional, intellectual, language, physical, and aesthetic development and learning for children from birth to compulsory kindergarten-entrance age and family development and support;

(c) Endowment agreement means an agreement between the State Department of Education and an endowment provider entered into pursuant to section 79-1104.01; and

(d) Endowment provider means an endowment that has met the criteria described in section 79-1104.01 and that has entered into an endowment agreement.

Sec. 10. Section 79-1103, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

79-1103 (1)(a) The State Department of Education shall establish and administer the Early Childhood Education Grant Program. Upon the effective date of an endowment agreement, administration of the Early Childhood Education Grant Program with respect to programs for children from birth to age three shall transfer to the board of trustees. If there is no endowment agreement in effect, the department shall request proposals in accordance with this section for all early childhood education programs from school districts, individually or in cooperation with other school districts or educational service units, working in cooperation with existing nonpublic programs which meet the requirements of subsection (2) of section 79-1104. If there is an endowment agreement in effect, the board of trustees shall administer the Early Childhood Education Grant Program with respect to programs for children from birth to age three pursuant to section 79-1104.02 and the department shall continue to administer the Early Childhood Education Grant Program with respect to other prekindergarten programs pursuant to sections 79-1101 to 79-1104.05. All administrative procedures of the board of trustees, including, but not limited to, rules, grant applications, and funding mechanisms, shall harmonize with those established by the department for other prekindergarten programs.

(b) The first priority shall be for (i) continuation grants for programs that received grants in the prior school fiscal year and for which the state aid calculation pursuant to the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act does not include early childhood education students, in an amount equal to the amount of such grant, except that if the grant was a first-year grant the amount shall be reduced by thirty-three percent, (ii) continuation grants for programs for which the state aid calculation pursuant to the act includes early childhood education students, in an amount equal to the amount of the grant for the school fiscal year prior to the first school fiscal year for which early childhood education students were included in the state aid calculation for the school district's local system minus the calculated state aid amount, and (iii) for school fiscal year 2007-08, continuation grants for programs for which the state aid calculation pursuant to the act includes early childhood education students, but such state aid calculation does not result in the school district receiving any equalization aid, in an amount equal to the amount of the grant received in school fiscal year 2006-07. The calculated state aid amount shall be calculated by multiplying the basic funding per formula student for the school district by the formula students attributed to the early childhood education programs pursuant to the Tax Equity and

Educational Opportunities Support Act.

(c) The second priority shall be for new grants and expansion grants for programs that will serve at-risk children who will be eligible or required to attend kindergarten the following school year. New grants may be given for up to three years in an amount up to one-half of the total budget of the program per year. Expansion grants may be given for one year in an amount up to one-half of the budget for expanding the capacity of the program to serve additional children.

(d) The third priority shall be for new grants, expansion grants, and continuation grants for programs serving children younger than those who will be eligible or required to attend kindergarten the following school year. New grants may be given for up to three years in an amount up to one-half the total budget of the program per year. Expansion grants may be given for one year in an amount up to one-half the budget for expanding the capacity of the program to serve additional children. Continuation grants under this priority may be given annually in an amount up to one-half the total budget of the program per year minus any continuation grants received under the first priority.

(e) Programs serving children who will be eligible or required to attend kindergarten the following school year shall be accounted for separately for grant purposes from programs serving younger children, but the two types of programs may be combined within the same classroom to serve multi-age children. Programs that receive grants for school fiscal years prior to school fiscal year 2005-06 to serve both children who will be eligible or required to attend kindergarten the following school year and younger children shall account for the two types of programs separately for grant purposes beginning with school year 2005-06 and shall be deemed to have received grants prior to school fiscal year 2005-06 for each year that grants were received for the types of programs representing the age groups of the children served.

(2) Each program proposal which is approved by the department shall include (a) a planning period, (b) an agreement to participate in periodic evaluations of the program to be specified by the department, (c) evidence that the program will be coordinated or contracted with existing programs, including those listed in subdivision (d) of this subsection and nonpublic programs which meet the requirements of subsection (2) of section 79-1104, (d) a plan to coordinate and use a combination of local, state, and federal funding sources, including, but not limited to, programs for children with disabilities below six five years of age funded through the Special Education Act, the Early Intervention Act, funds available through the flexible funding provisions under the Special Education Act, the federal Head Start program, 42 U.S.C. 9831 et seq., the federal Even Start Family Literacy Program, 20 U.S.C. 6361 et seq., Title I of the federal Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, 20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq., and child care assistance through the Department of Health and Human Services, (e) a plan to use sliding fee scales and the funding sources included in subdivision (d) of this subsection to maximize the participation of economically and categorically diverse groups and to ensure that participating children and families have access to comprehensive services, (f) the establishment of an advisory body which includes families and community members, (g) the utilization of appropriately qualified staff, (h) an appropriate child-to-staff ratio, (i) appropriate group size, (j) compliance with minimum health and safety standards, (k) appropriate facility size and equipment, (l) a strong family development and support component recognizing the central role of parents in their children's development, (m) developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum, practices, and assessment, (n) sensitivity to the economic and logistical needs and circumstances of families in the provision of services, (o) integration of children of diverse social and economic characteristics, (p) a sound evaluation component, including at least one objective measure of child performance and progress, (q) continuity with programs in kindergarten and elementary grades, (r) instructional hours that are similar to or less than the instructional hours for kindergarten except that a summer session may be offered, (s) well-defined language development and early literacy emphasis, including the involvement of parents in family literacy activities, (t) a plan for ongoing professional development of staff, and (u) inclusion of children with disabilities as defined in the Special Education Act, all as specified by rules and regulations of the department in accordance with sound early childhood educational practice.

(3) The department shall make an effort to fund programs widely distributed across the state in both rural and urban areas.

(4) The department, in collaboration with the board of trustees if an endowment agreement is in effect, shall provide a report evaluating the programs to the State Board of Education and the Legislature by January 1 of each odd-numbered year. The report submitted to the Legislature shall be submitted electronically. The Education Committee of the Legislature shall hold a public hearing regarding the report. Up to five percent of the total appropriation for the Early Childhood Education Grant Program for grants administered by the department may be reserved by the department for evaluation and technical assistance for the programs.

(5) Early childhood education programs, whether established pursuant to this section or section 79-1104, may be approved for purposes of the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act, expansion grants, and continuation grants on the submission of a continuation plan demonstrating that the program will meet the requirements of subsection (2) of this section and a proposed operating budget demonstrating that the program will receive resources from

other sources equal to or greater than the sum of any grant received pursuant to this section for the prior school year plus any calculated state aid as calculated pursuant to subsection (1) of this section for the prior school year.

(6) The State Board of Education may adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to implement the Early Childhood Education Grant Program, except that if there is an endowment agreement in effect, the board of trustees shall recommend any rules and regulations relating specifically to the Early Childhood Education Grant Program with respect to programs for children from birth to age three. It is the intent of the Legislature that the rules and regulations for programs for children from birth to age three be consistent to the greatest extent possible with those established for other prekindergarten programs.

Sec. 11. (1) For purposes of this section:

(a) Academic needs means that a child is at least one year below grade level and behind the child's typically developing peers in reading, English, and language arts such that the child does not possess the necessary academic skills required to succeed in reading, English, and language arts at grade level for the next grade the student would otherwise advance to;

(b) Excessive absenteeism means that the child was absent fifty percent or more of the school year and includes excused absences, unexcused absences, and absences due to suspension or expulsion. Absences due to approved school-related activities, such as field trips, competitions, athletic events, and testing, are not included; and

(c) Illness means that the child experienced a severe mental or physical illness resulting in hospitalization of two or more weeks during the school year.

(2)(a) A parent or guardian shall have the right to have such parent's or guardian's child repeat a grade in kindergarten through fourth grade due to academic needs, illness, or excessive absenteeism.

(b) A parent or guardian shall have the right to have such parent's or guardian's child repeat a grade in fifth through twelfth grade due to excessive absenteeism.

(3) A parent or guardian requesting such parent's or guardian's child repeat a grade pursuant to subdivision (2)(a) or (b) of this section shall request and have a meeting with the school district superintendent or the superintendent's designee of the school district such child attends to discuss the parent's or guardian's decision to have the child repeat a grade and such parent or guardian shall provide evidence of academic needs, illness, or excessive absenteeism that would authorize the parent or guardian to have such child repeat a grade. At such meeting, the superintendent or superintendent's designee shall identify any alternative educational opportunities, including remedial instruction if applicable, and verify any special education supports available to such child. If the child's parent or guardian still intends to have such child repeat a grade, such parent or guardian shall complete a form prescribed by the State Department of Education and return such form to the school district such child attends. Upon completion of the form and if all requirements pursuant to this subsection are met, the school district shall have the child repeat the child's grade for the next school year.

(4) A school district shall submit any form filed with such school district relating to a request by a child's parent or guardian to have such child repeat a grade with the State Department of Education. Data regarding such students shall be collected under subsection (2) of section 79-528.

(5) The State Board of Education may adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to carry out this section.

Sec. 12. Original sections 79-530, 79-531, 79-532, 79-533, 79-1101, and 79-1103, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, and section 79-1003, Revised Statutes Cumulative Supplement, 2022, are repealed.