

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2009

H

1

HOUSE BILL 539

Short Title: Merge Smart Start/More at Four. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Rapp, Glazier, England, Lucas (Primary Sponsors); Allen, Allred, Blue, Bordsen, Brisson, Burr, Carney, Cleveland, Cotham, Current, Dickson, Dockham, Earle, Farmer-Butterfield, Fisher, Frye, Goforth, Grady, Haire, Hall, Harrell, Harrison, Holliman, Howard, Hughes, Hurley, Insko, Johnson, Jones, Justice, Justus, Lewis, McElraft, McLawhorn, Moore, Neumann, Owens, Parmon, Samuelson, Spear, Stam, Starnes, Steen, Stevens, Tarleton, Tucker, Underhill, Wainwright, R. Warren, Wilkins, and Williams.

Referred to: Education, if favorable, Finance, if favorable, Appropriations.

March 12, 2009

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

1 AN ACT TO MERGE THE "MORE AT FOUR" PROGRAM WITH THE NORTH
2 CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN, INC.

3 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

4 **SECTION 1.(a)** All components of the "More at Four" program in the Office of
5 School Readiness except for (i) the teacher licensure function and (ii) the personnel positions
6 funded with grants from the United States Department of Education, are transferred from the
7 Department of Public Instruction to the Department of Health and Human Services, effective
8 July 1, 2009. This transfer shall have all the elements of a Type I transfer as defined in
9 G.S. 143A-6.
10

11 The Division of Child Development of the Department of Health and Human
12 Services shall facilitate the merging of the "More at Four" program with the North Carolina
13 Partnership for Children, Inc. The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., shall
14 administer the program through the local partnerships.

15 The Department of Health and Human Services shall abolish all positions not
16 needed by the Department for the administration of the "More at Four" program and shall make
17 available to the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., the remainder of the funds for
18 administration of the program.

19 **SECTION 1.(b)** The Department of Health and Human Services shall implement a
20 plan to expand "More at Four" program standards within existing resources to include four- and
21 five-star rated centers and schools serving four-year-olds and develop guidelines for these
22 programs. The "NC Prekindergarten Program Standards" initiative shall recognize four- and
23 five-star rated centers that choose to apply and meet equivalent "More at Four" program
24 standards as high quality pre-k classrooms. Classrooms meeting these standards shall have
25 access to training and workshops for "More at Four" programs.

26 **SECTION 2.** For the 2009-2011 fiscal biennium, the "More at Four" program shall
27 establish income eligibility requirements for the program not to exceed seventy-five percent
28 (75%) of the State median income. Up to twenty percent (20%) of children enrolled may have
29 family incomes in excess of seventy-five percent (75%) of median income if they have other
30 designated risk factors. Furthermore, any age-eligible child of: (i) an active duty member of
31 the armed forces of the United States, including the North Carolina National Guard, State



1 military forces, or a reserve component of the armed forces, who is ordered to active duty by
2 the proper authority within the last 18 months or expected to be ordered within the next 18
3 months; or (ii) a member of the armed forces of the United States, including the North Carolina
4 National Guard, State military forces, or a reserve component of the armed forces, who was
5 injured or killed while serving on active duty, shall be eligible for the program.

6 **SECTION 3.** For the 2009-2011 fiscal biennium, the North Carolina Partnership
7 for Children, Inc., is required to meet funding set asides and percentages associated with the
8 North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., program based upon the Partnership's allocation
9 only. Any funding transferred from the "More At Four" program to the North Carolina
10 Partnership for Children, Inc., shall be a designated funding stream for high-quality
11 prekindergarten programs.

12 **SECTION 4.** G.S. 143B-168.10 reads as rewritten:

13 **"§ 143B-168.10. Early childhood initiatives; findings.**

14 The General Assembly finds, upon consultation with the Governor, that every child can
15 benefit from, and should have access to, high-quality early childhood education and
16 development services. The economic future and well-being of the State depend upon it. To
17 ensure that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and development
18 services, the General Assembly further finds that:

- 19 (1) Parents have the primary duty to raise, educate, and transmit values to young
20 preschool children;
- 21 (2) The State can assist parents in their role as the primary caregivers and
22 educators of young preschool children; ~~and~~
- 23 (3) There is a need to explore innovative approaches and strategies for aiding
24 parents and families in the education and development of young preschool
25 ~~children.~~ children; and
- 26 (4) There is a need to provide academic prekindergarten programs for at-risk
27 four-year-olds who would otherwise not be served in a high-quality
28 education program in order to help those four-year-olds be prepared
29 developmentally to succeed in school."

30 **SECTION 5.** G.S. 143B-168.12(a)(1)(n) is repealed.

31 **SECTION 6.** The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., shall submit a
32 report by February 1, 2011, to the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on
33 Health and Human Services, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Health and Human
34 Services, the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, the House of Representatives
35 Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, the Senate Appropriations Committee on
36 Education, and the Fiscal Research Division. The report shall include the following:

- 37 (1) The number of children participating in the program.
- 38 (2) The number of children participating in the program who have never been
39 served in other early education programs, such as child care, public or
40 private preschool, Head Start, Early Head Start, or early intervention
41 programs.
- 42 (3) The expected expenditures for the programs and the source of the local
43 match for each grantee.
- 44 (4) The location of program sites and the corresponding number of children
45 participating in the program at each site.
- 46 (5) A comprehensive cost analysis of the program, including the cost per child
47 served by the program.
- 48 (6) A study of how to merge "More at Four" funding with the North Carolina
49 Partnership for Children, Inc., allocation formula. The study should take into
50 account the number of "More at Four" slots filled by counties on a monthly

- 1 basis and a means by which to shift unfilled slots to counties with waiting
2 lists.
- 3 (7) A study of whether the Division of Child Development should create a
4 six-star rating and an adjusted rates system for centers and schools that meet
5 "NC Prekindergarten Program Standards."
- 6 (8) The means by which the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., will
7 address funding set asides based on any new funds received from merging
8 the "More at Four" program with the North Carolina Partnership for
9 Children, Inc.
- 10 (9) The means by which to prevent the supplanting of funding for classrooms
11 serving four-year-olds.
- 12 **SECTION 7.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2009.