



JEB BUSH
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

Office of the Governor

THE CAPITOL
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-0001

www.flgov.com
850-488-7148
850-487-0801 fax

July 9, 2004

Ms. Glenda E. Hood
Secretary of State
Florida Department of State
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Secretary Hood:

By the authority vested in me as Governor of Florida, under the provisions of Article III, Section 8, of the Constitution of Florida, I do hereby withhold my approval of and transmit to you with my objections, House Bill 821, enacted during the 106th Session of the Legislature of Florida since statehood in 1845, convened under the Constitution of 1968, during the Regular Session of 2004, and entitled:

An act relation to early childhood education...

House Bill 821 designs the structure for the Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten Program (VPK) by establishing the program within the Department of Education and emphasizing administration of the program at the local level with regional child development boards. The bill establishes a board array of choices for parents; creates accountability standards and opportunities for a variety of providers, including public, private, faith-based, and family child care homes, to participate in the program; and emphasizes the importance of delivering a program that focuses on early childhood literacy. The bill also makes several changes to the School Readiness Program, which will remain at the Agency for Workforce Innovation.

I believe that reading is the most powerful skill a child can learn, as it influences success in school and improves the overall quality of life. For this reason, in 2002 I supported passage of the constitutional amendment to give parents of four-year-olds in Florida the choice of placing their children in a high-quality early learning program beginning the 2005 school year. That amendment was passed by a wide margin. Parents and voters amendment specifically demands "high quality," because research tells us that only a high quality learning opportunity leads to improved educational outcomes for children. We must also make it possible for parents to choose the best educational setting for their children form a wide variety of high-quality private, faith-based and public providers. It is important there, that create a system concerned with performance standards, outcome measures and a curriculum that facilitates early literacy.



Ms. Glenda E. Hood

July 9, 2004

Page Two

The 2004 Legislature devoted considerable energies in pursuit of the necessary quality standards and, indeed, made progress> but they did not go far enough. I am respectful of their efforts, but believe that we must do more to produce a prekindergarten program that truly helps children get ready to read and succeed. I will work diligently with the Florida Legislature over the coming months to make that happen.

Throughout the legislative process, I expressed a number of concerns regarding certain provision of House Bill 821. My concerns persist and lead me to my decision to withhold my approval of this bill.

- First and foremost, as was done during the enactment of the A+ Plan, the legislation should set broad goals and parameters and allow appropriate agencies to implement policies to meet them. The State Board of Education should be entrusted, after appropriate study and analysis, to establish performance measures and standards. The proper venue for day-to-day oversight of this program, for ensuring its integrity and the integrity of its providers, and for measuring outcomes lies with the Department of Education under the direction of the State Board of Education.
- Although this bill includes provisions designed to ensure the safety and welfare of children participating in the program, I believe child safety and welfare can better be protected by ensuring that a sufficient number of adults are present in each classroom.
- The bill appears to restrict the ability of executive agencies to implement the VPK program collaboratively across agency lines. Any attempt to faithfully implement the program should not constrain communication and collaboration between the Department of Education, at the Agency for Workforce Innovation, and the Department of Children and Families.
- The bill could do more to promote a highly skilled workforce for VPK programs. Committed and well trained staff will help VPK succeed. Toward that end, I support language that enhances the quality and emerging literacy focus of child Development Associate (CDA) programs, establishes professional development goals and provides articulation to associate degree programs for CDA graduates from accredited community colleges and vocational training programs.
- The legislation should also permit all types of providers, including public, private, faith-based, and family child care homes, to participate in all the VPK choices afforded to parents. VPK program choices should not be limited to only one type of provider.

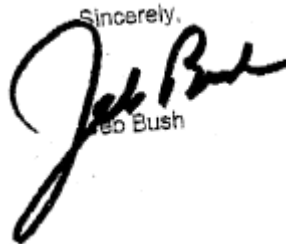
Many Floridians have urged me to sign the bill, even with its inadequacies, so that the implementation process could move forward. I want to assure them that I am committed to ensuring the program's success and that this administration will do everything possible within current law to prepare for implementation of the VPK program in Florida over the coming months.

Ms. Glenda E. Hood
July 9, 2004
Page Three

Specifically, I am requesting the immediate preparation of all impacted agencies. In the coming months, the Department of Education, under the direction of the State Board of Education, will refocus the statewide school readiness assessment on emerging literacy skills, develop literacy-focused curriculum standards, and lay the foundation for program integrity and accountability measurement. The Florida Partnership for School Readiness and Agency for Workforce Innovation will accelerate preparation of the statewide, single point of entry system for enrolment and continue to encourage local school readiness coalitions to consolidate administrative functions. The department of Children and Families will pursue improvement in the quality and consistency of Child Development Associate training programs. These agencies will work collaboratively with staff of the Executive Office of the Governor on prekindergarten implementation plans and legislative budget requests for the 2005-2006 fiscal year.

It is my intent to collaborate with the Legislature in the near future in order to build upon the bill's efforts so that Florida can provide for a smooth statewide implementation of the VPK program by the 2005-06 fiscal year.

For the reason provide above, I am withholding my approval of House Bill 821, and so hereby veto the same.

Sincerely,

Jeb Bush