STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 47th Legislature (1999)

SENATE BILL NO. 806 By: Dunlap

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to schools and children; enacting the Children First Act of 1999; providing short title; stating legislative intent; stating legislative findings; defining terms; designating certain programs as school readiness programs; creating Children First Governing Board; stating duties; providing for membership of certain board; creating Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc.; stating duties and powers; providing for funding for certain partnership; providing for staffing; creating certain coalitions; requiring availability of Oklahoma Parents as Teachers Program; requiring certain plan; requiring implementation of certain plan; authorizing certain grant program; requiring evaluation and performance measures; providing for codification; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-111 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

The Legislature finds that:

A. The bridge to opportunity for every child must be anchored in a healthy body and a healthy mind and must lead to the child's readiness to learn in school;

B. It is widely acknowledged that entering school ready to learn is crucial to a child's success both in school and in life;

C. The state's system of public education could better perform its mission of educating its K-12 students if more students enter school healthy and ready to learn;

D. A child's health in both body and mind is essential to the child's ability to learn; and

E. Great strides can be taken to improve school readiness by addressing child care, child health, and school readiness education in one single, accountable continuum.

SECTION 2. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-112 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

This act may be cited as the "Children First Act of 1999". Nothing in this act is intended to impede or curtail the state's ability to draw down federal funds.

SECTION 3. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-113 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. It is the intent of the Legislature that the early childhood health care, child care, and education of children from birth to five (5) years of age or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later, become a top priority. As used in this chapter:

1. "Child care" includes formal and informal arrangements, including but not limited to child care centers, day care homes, private providers, and relative care;

2. "Health care" includes immunizations, screenings, well-baby care, and other preventive health care measures;

3. "Education" includes public and private prekindergarten and other education programs.

B. Recognizing that high-quality early childhood health care, child care, and education experiences increase children's chances of educational success and reduce the need for costly future intervention and remediation, it is the intent of the Legislature that all children in Oklahoma, from birth until they are ready for school, have access to quality early childhood health care, child care, and education to enhance their readiness to succeed in school.

C. Recognizing that parents are responsible for the early childhood health care, child care, and education of their children,

but also recognizing that the condition of children in Oklahoma must be improved, it is the intent of the Legislature that local communities offer assistance to families to improve the early childhood health care, child care, and education of children under five (5) years of age and the school readiness of all children who enter the state's public school system. High-quality early childhood experiences and care should be provided with a minimum of governmental interference.

D. The Legislature finds that for families to move to and maintain economic self-sufficiency, Oklahoma must have an efficient way for these families to access quality early childhood health care, child care, and education services. The Legislature recognizes that significant benefits will accrue to children and families who have efficient access to quality early childhood health care, child care, and education arrangements.

E. It is the intent of the Legislature that all early childhood health care, child care, and education programs and services serving Oklahoma children in the first five (5) years of life or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later, are considered school readiness programs. The Legislature finds that despite the efforts of hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans and increased collaboration among service providers, services for young children remain uncoordinated, uneven in quality, and inaccessible to many. It is the intent of the Legislature that a true continuum of high-quality coordinated, and comprehensive early childhood health care, child care, and education be available to all children from birth to five (5) years of age or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later.

F. The Legislature recognizes new brain development research emphasizing the critical importance of the first years of life in children's emotional, social, and cognitive development, and that these scientific discoveries create an opportunity to apply the

findings to all programs and services for children from birth to five (5) years of age. The Legislature also recognizes that the period of time from birth to three (3) years of age is an optimal time for learning in the areas of motor development, emotional control, vision, social attachment, vocabulary, second language, and logic.

SECTION 4. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-114 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

For purposes of this act, all early childhood health care, child care, and education programs which are funded with state, federal, lottery, or local public funds and which provides services to children from birth to five (5) years of age or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later, shall be school readiness programs and shall work to achieve their part of the goal of children entering school with healthy bodies and healthy minds, ready to succeed in school.

SECTION 5. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-115 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. There is created a Children First Governing Board to operate as the board of directors of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., with responsibility for adopting and maintaining coordinated programmatic, administrative, and fiscal policies and a common set of early childhood health care, child care, and education standards for all school readiness programs, while allowing a wide range of programmatic flexibility and differentiation. The governing board shall determine guidelines for granting programmatic waivers to any of its policies and standards. The governing board shall establish goals for early childhood development leading to school readiness and policies that lead to the achievement of these goals, including strict oversight of their implementation. The

governing board shall develop a strategic plan for accomplishing these goals.

B. As a condition for receiving funds appropriated to the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., the members of the Children First Governing Board shall include the Governor, the State Superintendent of Education, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Director of the Department of Human Services, and the Commissioner of Health. The governing board shall also include six voting members who shall not be members of the Legislature, two appointed by the Governor, two by the President of the Senate, and two by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who shall have expertise in early childhood health care, child care, or education. These members shall serve four-year staggered terms.

C. The governing board has complete fiscal control over the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., and is responsible for all corporate operations. The governing board is responsible for the prudent use of all public and private funds and shall ensure that the use of such funds is in accordance with all legal and contractual requirements.

D. The governing board shall recommend the feasibility of combining funding streams for school readiness programs into a Children First School Readiness Trust Fund, and shall be responsible for the administration of the trust fund.

SECTION 6. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-116 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. The Legislature hereby creates the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc. (Children First Partnership), which shall be a public-private nonprofit organization.

B. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall establish one or more corporate offices, at least one of which shall be located in Oklahoma County.

C. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., is the principal responsible organization for the enhancement of school readiness for the state's children. It shall be the responsibility of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., to provide leadership for enhancement of school readiness in Oklahoma by aggressively establishing a unified approach to Oklahoma's efforts of enhancement of school readiness; by aggressively seeking potential new school readiness programs; and by aggressively assisting in the retention and expansion of effective existing school readiness programs. In support of this effort, the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., may develop and implement specific programs or strategies that address the creation, expansion and preservation of Oklahoma's school readiness programs. This approach must ensure the effective use of federal, state, local, and private resources in reducing the need for school readiness programs.

D. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall have specific responsibility for implementing policies developed by the governing board, monitoring progress toward achievement of the goals established by the governing board assessing gaps in current early childhood health care, child care, and education statewide, recommending quality standards and monitoring their implementation, approving children first plans, facilitating local implementation, providing technical assistance to Children First Coalitions, and recommending common eligibility requirements for similar programs while seeking a diversity of programs to meet the varieties of need, within the guidelines established by the governing board. When recommending quality standards, the Children First Partnership shall take into consideration standards consistent with the nationally recognized standards for early childhood education programs in conjunction with the numbers of children needing and eligible for school readiness program services who are not being served. The

Children First Partnership shall make recommendations regarding changes in state law, rule, or agency policy that may assist Children first Coalitions in improving the early childhood health care, child care, and education of children from birth to five (5) years of age or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later.

E. The Children First Partnership shall have all powers necessary to carry out the purposes of this section, including but not limited to the power to receive and accept grants, loans, or advances of funds from any public or private agency and to receive and accept from any source contributions of money, property, labor, or any other thing of value, to be held, used, and applied for the purposes of this section.

F. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be an independent nonpartisan body and shall not be identified or affiliated with any one agency, program, or group.

G. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be financed through an annual appropriation made for this purpose by the Legislature.

H. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be staffed by an executive director and professional and support staff and draw upon state agency personnel and resources as needed to implement policy and manage interagency agreements necessary to create a more coherent system of school readiness programs for the state’s youngest children.

I. The executive director shall serve at the pleasure of the governing board, shall supervise the affairs and activities of the Children First Partnership and staff, and, consistent with the recommendations of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., and needs of local Children First Coalitions, shall be responsible for contracting for technical assistance and support

during fiscal years 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 to assist counties in creating Children First Coalitions and developing local plans.

SECTION 7. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-117 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

The Children First Partnership shall implement a program which may be phased in to:

1. Facilitate the provision of quality early childhood health care, child care, and education to children from birth to five (5) years of age or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later;

2. Provide eligibility criteria for a single sliding fee scale for all school readiness programs and arrange for the collection of fees from families in an amount determined by the governing board in accordance with the following priorities:

a. children of participants in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program who are the only children eligible for services funded through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program,

b. children under five (5) years of age who are:

(1) children determined to be at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation and who are currently clients of the Division of Children and Family Services in the Department of Human Services,

(2) children at risk of welfare dependency, including children of teen parents, and children from other families at risk of welfare dependency due to a family income of less than one hundred percent (100%) of the federal poverty level. The Children First Partnership shall recommend to the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference by

July 1, 2000, how to convert provision of services to children of teenage parents, and

(3) children of working families whose family income is equal to or greater than one hundred percent (100%), but does not exceed one hundred fifty percent (150%), of the federal poverty level, and

c. children who meet the eligibility requirements for the prekindergarten early intervention program;

3. In accordance with the parental choice and payment arrangement provisions of this act, establish participation criteria that include a single or simplified point of entry to the school readiness program services system in each county. These programs shall share the waiting lists for unserved children so that a count of eligible children is maintained without duplication. Participation criteria shall require parents to be provided a choice of school readiness program settings and locations, including but not limited to settings and locations in licensed, registered, church-sponsored, school-based, or relative care programs;

4. Partner with Children First Coalitions to provide, by direct service agreement, contract agreement, or voucher, school readiness program services meeting standards established by the Children First Partnership and the parental choice and payment arrangement provisions of this act;

5. Make available the Oklahoma Parents as Teachers Program whenever feasible and as early as possible in the child's development;

6. Establish, with consultation from appropriate professional organizations, standards and performance measures for school readiness program services and providers appropriate to children from birth to five (5) years of age or until the child attains school readiness, whichever is later. The standards and performance

measures must include, at a minimum that each coalition's children first plan must:

a. help prepare preschool children to enter kindergarten ready to learn, as measured by the school readiness screening instrument,

b. provide extended-day and extended-year services when needed,

c provide coordinated staff development and teaching opportunities,

d provide expanded access to community services and resources for families to help achieve economic self-sufficiency, and

e serve at least as many children as were served prior to implementation of the program;

7. Develop age-appropriate screening instruments, utilizing the latest brain development research, that provide clear and objective data to measure school readiness;

8. Prepare a plan for broadly publicizing and implementing the system for measuring school readiness in such a way that all children in children first plan programs or whose parents or guardians bring them to a children first program location for screening upon payment of a nominal fee have the opportunity to undergo the screening by three and one-half (3 1/2) years of age, with follow-up screening at four and one-half (4 1/2) years of age and, for purposes of evaluation and tracking, assess all kindergarten screenings of children who have been in children first plan programs. The plan must include a way to make the screening and the training required to administer it available to public and private providers of school readiness programs, and a way to utilize the Oklahoma Parents as Teachers Program or other available methods to make the screening available for a nominal fee to children who do not participate in such programs;

9. Establish a method for collecting data from the screening and establish guidelines for studying the data so that the measurement, the data collection, and the study of the data serve the statewide goal that all children will be ready for school. The criteria for determining which data to collect should be the usefulness of the data to state policymakers and program administrators in administering programs and allocating state funds;

10. Develop and implement a plan to publicize the Children First Partnership, its school readiness expectations, available school readiness program services, eligibility requirements for the sliding fee scale, and procedures for enrollment; and to provide the public with information as to the details of the programs offered by qualified providers, performance measures for the programs, and school readiness outcomes;

11. As appropriate, enter into contracts with one-stop career centers, local school boards, child care resource and referral agencies, and other agencies to provide onsite information, referrals, and other services to enhance the goals of the Children First Partnership; and

12. Provide a report on an annual basis to the governing board, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

SECTION 8. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-118 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall assist in establishing a Children First Coalition in each county or combination of counties and shall encourage the strongest coalitions obtainable. The coalitions shall be comprised of private nonprofit agencies or a partnership of public entities, private nonprofit

organizations, and individuals with strong demonstrated interest and leadership, and shall include the school district or districts and the existing central agencies for subsidized child care, as well as parents who are or have been parents of children in the programs, including parents of children with disabilities. One Children First Coalition shall be established in each county, except that two or more counties may join together under a Children First Coalition, but no more than one coalition may be established in any county. Each Children First Coalition shall develop a children first plan to be submitted to the Children First Partnership for approval. Each coalition shall provide for the following services as part of its children first plan:

1. Identification of existing public and private school readiness program services, including services by public and private employers, and the development of a resource file of those services. These services may include family day care, public and private child care programs, Head Start, prekindergarten-early intervention programs, services for children with developmental disabilities, full-time and part-time programs, before-school and after-school programs, vacation care programs, parent education, and related family support services. The resource file shall include but not be limited to:

a. type of program,

b. hours of service,

c. ages of children served,

d. number of children serve,

e. significant program information, including participation requirements and performance measures,

f. fees and eligibility for services, and

g. availability of transportation,

2. Establishment of a referral process which responds to parental need for information and which is provided with full

recognition of the confidentiality rights of parents. Referrals may not be made to an unlicensed child care facility or arrangement unless there is no requirement that the facility or arrangement be licensed;

3. Maintenance of ongoing documentation of requests for service tabulated through the internal referral process. The following documentation of requests for service shall be maintained by each Children First Coalition:

a. number of calls and contacts to the Children First Coalition by type of service requested,

b. ages of children for whom service was requested,

c. time category of child care requests for each child,

d. special time category, such as nights, weekends, and swing shift,

e. reason that the services are desired, and

f. name of the employer and primary focus of the business,

4. Provision of technical assistance to existing and potential providers of school readiness program services. This assistance may include but is not limited to:

a. information on initiating new school readiness program services and program and budget development and assistance in finding such information from other sources,

b. information and resources which help current school readiness program services providers to maximize their ability to serve children and parents in their community, and

c. information and incentives which could help current or planned school readiness program services offered by public or private employers seeking to maximize their ability to serve the children of their working parent

employees in their community, through contractual or other funding arrangements with businesses;

5. Assistance to families and employers in applying for children first school readiness program subsidy, including but not limited to funding sources derived from subsidized child care, Head Start, prekindergarten early intervention programs, private scholarships, and the federal dependent care tax credit. Such assistance shall be designed to ensure that coalition funds are expended in the manner and for the purpose required by the funding source;

6. Within federal reimbursement requirements, assistance to state agencies in determining the market rate for school readiness programs;

7. Assistance in negotiating discounts or other special arrangements with program providers;

8. Annual provision to the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., of the following information regarding licensed and registered school readiness program facilities:

a. type of program,

b. hours of service,

c. ages of children served,

d. fees and eligibility for services, and

e. performance and school readiness outcomes.

B. The coalition shall operate under the direction of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., and shall be responsible for monitoring all providers' success in achieving the legislatively mandated performance standards and school readiness outcome measures. No public funds shall be paid to a provider unless the provider agrees to allow the coalition access to fulfill its monitoring responsibilities.

C. As part of its children first plan, each coalition shall select and designate an entity with demonstrated capacity in fiscal

management to serve as fiscal agent for receipt of block grant funding and to ensure that coalition funds are expended in the manner and for the purpose required by the funding source. The fiscal agent may be either a for-profit or a not-for-profit private entity, or may be a public entity that does not also serve as a provider of school readiness programs. The fiscal agent must be approved by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc. The fiscal agent shall be required to provide all administrative and direct funding services as determined by the coalition. The cost of these services shall be negotiated between the fiscal agent and the coalition.

D. The coalition shall require its children first program to comply with the parental choice and payment arrangement provisions of this act.

E. Each coalition shall assume responsibility for recommending phasing out duplicative coordinating bodies, increasing collaboration among service providers, coordinating services for young children, increasing program quality and accessibility, and providing a seamless service delivery system with a true continuum of coordinated school readiness program services, available to all children under five (5) years of age living in the county or counties.

F. 1. Funds appropriated for a county or counties for the prekindergarten early intervention program, the subsidized child care program, and other state funded school readiness programs for preschool children may be transferred to the county's or counties' Children First Coalition account in the Children First School Readiness Trust Fund. For the purpose of block grant funding to benefit the Children First Coalition in implementing its children first plan. Additional funds, including state appropriated incentive funds, may be placed in the trust fund for purposes of this paragraph.

2. Each coalition shall be eligible to receive block grant funding from its account in the Children First School Readiness Trust Fund and programmatic waiver authority if available, conditioned on the submission of an approved children first plan designed to increase the number of children ready to succeed at the time of entry into kindergarten. The State Auditor and Inspector shall conduct compliance audits and an annual financial audit of each coalition's block grant funding.

3. To increase school readiness, block grant funding and programmatic waiver shall be used by the coalitions to improve health outcomes, increase the availability and accessibility of school readiness programs, and provide family support and parent education and development services.

SECTION 9. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-119 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. Children First Coalitions shall receive coalition initiation grants to develop children first plans, and block grant funding to implement approved plans designed to enable a county or counties to achieve the outcomes specified in this act. The plans must reflect strategies and activities for achieving these outcomes through enhancing the quality of school readiness program services that are adequate and appropriate for the outcome desired; increasing the level of services available so that those children in need of identified services will have access to such services; and creating incentives to integrate the various systems of children's school readiness program services so that all the systems work together as one to achieve the identified outcomes.

B. Children First plans submitted by a Children First Coalition are subject to review and approval by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc.

C. To determine county priorities for coordinated school readiness programs, each plan submitted by a Children First Coalition shall include:

1. An assessment of current public, private, and charitable resources available within the county for children from birth to five (5) years of age;

2. An assessment of unmet school readiness program needs for children from birth to five (5) years of age and an assessment of school readiness program needs of children five (5) years of age and older;

3. An assessment of kindergarten readiness as administered in the past by the school district or districts, together with the plans, timeframes, and goals for the administration of the new school readiness instrument or instruments to be administered to children in the Children First Coalition's programs at three and one-half (3 1/2) years of age and four and one-half (4 1/2) years of age and to be administered to students in kindergarten by the school district; and

4. A method for school readiness program service systems integration; demonstration of methods for achieving the outcomes set out in this act. Demonstration of methods for meeting the needs of particular subgroups of the population, including migrant children, children with special needs, and minorities; and methods for administering and maintaining accountability in the integrated systems.

D. Children first plans submitted by a Children First Coalition shall adhere to the minimum standards established by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., and shall address improvements in the quality of current and new programs, including but not limited to components for providing developmentally appropriate curricula; small group sizes; ratios; increased staff training; and lower staff turnover rates.

E. Additional areas to be given priority consideration in any children first plan submitted by a Children First Coalition include family involvement; business and private sector involvement; business and private sector involvement; implementation of a single or simplified point of entry and unified waiting list for school readiness programs; provision of full-day, full-year, and night services, where needed and appropriate; and inclusion of children with disabilities.

F. Children First Coalitions shall integrate childhood health care, child care, and education systems in their children first plans, starting with the systems that are currently most involved in collaboration with each other and consistent with local needs and priorities.

SECTION 10. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-120 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. Children First Coalitions that are approved by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be eligible for a $25,000 initiation grant to support the Children First coalition in developing its children first plan. Upon approval by the Children First Partnership of any coalition's children first plan that clearly shows enhancement in the quality and standards of the school readiness programs without diminishing the number of children served in the programs, the Children First Partnership shall award the coalition a cash incentive bonus on a per-student served basis, subject to appropriation.

B. Children First Coalitions that have their children first plans approved by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., by July 1, 2000, shall receive children first block grant funding beginning July 1, 1999, to begin a phase-in implementation of their children first plans. Children first block grant funding for these

counties shall continue from year to year consistent with funding so designated in the General Appropriations Bill.

C. Beginning in January 2000, the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall issue a call for Children First Coalition initiation grants every six (6) months until Children First Coalitions have been approved for all counties. Coalitions submitting children first plans that are approved by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be eligible for block grant funding to implement their plans beginning July 1, following plan approval. Children first block grant funding shall be made available for these coalitions contingent upon approval of the children first plans and legislative appropriations for this purpose. Children First block grant funding for these coalitions shall continue from year to year.

SECTION 11. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-121 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. The children first plan shall be provided in a manner that ensures, to the maximum extent possible, parental choice through flexibility in children first program arrangements and payment arrangements, including but not limited to voucher, contract, and direct service provision. According to federal regulations requiring parental choice, a parent may choose an informal child care arrangement.

B. When a voucher is provided, the voucher must bear the name of the beneficiary and the program provider and, when redeemed, must bear the signature of both the beneficiary and an authorized representative of the provider. If it is determined that a provider has provided any cash to the beneficiary in return for receiving the voucher, the Children First Coalition shall refer the matter to the Department of Human Services.

C. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., in consultation with the Department of Human Services, shall establish an electronic disbursement system for the dissemination of funds and vouchers in accordance with this subsection. Fiscal agents shall fully implement the electronic disbursement system within three (3) years after approval of the children first plan unless a waiver is obtained from the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc. The fiscal agent may charge an administrative fee not to exceed one percent (1%) of each voucher to offset administrative costs of the school readiness program.

SECTION 12. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-122 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall have the responsibility for designing the evaluation and performance measures to track the effectiveness of the new children first block grant funding and other funding in meeting the goals of increasing the quality and accessibility of school readiness program services. The performance standards and measurable outcomes established and regularly reviewed by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., under this subsection must also include benchmarks and goals to measure the impact of state school readiness policies and program. Evaluation and performance measures must accommodate the programmatic flexibility of parental choice setting among Children First Coalition providers, including but not limited to settings and locations in licensed, registered, church-sponsored, school-based, or relative care programs.

B. Each Children First Coalition shall require that all school readiness programs that screen children for school readiness utilize the school readiness screening instruments developed by the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., to accurately reflect school readiness as the primary measure of performance.

C. The governing board shall report to the Legislature on the implementation and performance of the Children First Coalitions by March 1 of each year.

SECTION 13. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-123 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

The appointive voting members of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be selected no later than July 15, 1999, and the staff of the children First Partnership shall be selected and in place no later than August 15, 1999. The first full meeting of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall be held no later than October 1, 1999.

SECTION 14. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-124 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

No later than August 1 of each year, the Children First Governing Board shall conduct a Children First Appropriation Allocation Conference. Conference principals shall include representatives of the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, the Department of Health, the Office of the Governor, and the applicable appropriations committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Conference principals shall discuss the forecasts of numbers of children needing school readiness programs as determined by the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference and participate in a joint effort to develop budget allocation proposals that maximize the legislative intent of the Children First Act and ensure that the requirements of the funding sources are met.

SECTION 15. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 10-125 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. The School Readiness Program Estimating Conference shall develop such official information relating to the state's system of school readiness program services, including forecasts of school readiness program needs, as the conference determines is needed for the state planning and budgeting system. Such official information shall include but not be limited to subsidized child care, Head Start, prekindergarten early intervention, prekindergarten disabilities, Even-Start literacy, Early Start, migrant prekindergarten, and Title I prekindergarten needs.

B. The Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., shall provide information on needs and waiting lists for school readiness program services requested by the School Readiness Program Estimating Conference or individual conference principals, in a timely manner.

C. The Office of the Governor, and professional staff, who have forecasting expertise, from the Oklahoma Partnership for Children First, Inc., the Department of Human Services, the Department of Education, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, the Department of Health, the Senate, and the House of Representatives, or their designees, are the principals of the School Readiness Program Education Estimating Conference. The principal representing the Office of the Governor shall preside over sessions of the conference.

SECTION 16. This act shall become effective July 1, 1999.

SECTION 17. It being immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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