**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, TO ENACT THE “VIRTUAL EARLY LEARNING PILOT PROGRAM ACT” BY ADDING ARTICLE 3 TO CHAPTER 16, TITLE 59 SO AS TO PROVIDE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL CONTRACT WITH AN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER TO PROVIDE A HOME‑BASED EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY PILOT PROGRAM FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, TO PROVIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PROGRAM AND ASSOCIATED PARTIES, TO PROVIDE NO MORE THAN TEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE PILOT PROGRAM, TO PROVIDE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL CONTRACT WITH AN INDEPENDENT, QUALIFIED EVALUATOR TO EVALUATE THE VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, AND TO PROVIDE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS, AMONG OTHER THINGS; TO DESIGNATE EXISTING SECTIONS OF THE CHAPTER AS ARTICLE 1, ENTITLED “GENERAL PROVISIONS”; AND TO REDESIGNATE THE CHAPTER AS “VIRTUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS”.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act must be known and may be cited as the “Virtual Early Learning Pilot Program Act.”

SECTION 2. Chapter 16, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Article 3

Virtual Early Learning Pilot Program

Section 59‑10‑310. For the purposes of this article:

(1) ‘Pilot program’ means the pilot program for literacy and numeracy instruction and assessment established in this article.

(2) ‘Low‑income household’ means a household with an annual income below two hundred percent of the poverty threshold established by federal guidelines.

Section 59‑10‑320. (A) The State Board of Education shall contract with an educational technology provider, selected through a request for proposals process, to provide a home‑based educational technology pilot program for literacy and numeracy instruction and assessment for preschool children. The pilot program must include requirements that:

(1) the contractor provides:

(a) computer‑assisted instruction for preschool children on a home computer connected by the Internet;

(b) technical support to families for the installation and operation of the instructional software; and

(c) installation of computer and Internet access for families in low‑income households that cannot afford the equipment and service;

(2) the contractor must be capable of using the Internet to:

(a) communicate with parents;

(b) update the instructional software;

(c) validate user access;

(d) collect usage data;

(e) store research data; and

(f) produce reports for parents, schools, and the General Assembly;

(3) provides for:

(a) computer‑assisted, individualized instruction in reading, mathematics, and science;

(b) multisensory reading tutoring; and

(c) a validated computer adaptive reading test that is an accurate indicator of reading readiness of children who cannot read;

(4) the contractor can quickly and efficiently modify, improve, and support the product;

(5) the contractor works in cooperation with school district personnel who shall provide support in identifying eligible preschool children to participate in the pilot program;

(6) the contractor cooperates with the school district to solicit families to participate in the pilot program; and

(7) the duration of the pilot program is five years with an option to extend the contract for additional years or to expand the pilot program to a greater number of preschool children, subject to the appropriation of money by the General Assembly.

(B) The State Board of Education shall request and receive applications from school districts interested in participating in the project. The board, with guidance from the department, shall develop criteria for selecting districts to participate. No more than ten districts may participate in the program.

Section 59‑10‑330. (A) A school district participating in the pilot program shall provide support in identifying eligible preschool children to participate in the pilot program. The contractor shall make the final determination as to which families are selected to participate.

(B) The contractor and the school districts shall collaborate to conduct a public information campaign to solicit families to participate in the pilot program and also shall seek referrals for families to participate in the pilot program from schools in participating districts.

(C) A family selected to participate in the pilot program must reside in the school district in which they are selected to participate and in which school‑aged children residing in the household attend public school. Children selected to participate must represent different socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, and regions of the State, including urban and rural areas. At least thirty percent of the preschool children selected to participate must be from low income families.

(D) A low income family that cannot afford a computer and Internet service to operate the instructional software may obtain a computer and peripheral equipment on loan and receive Internet service at no cost to them for the duration of the family’s participation in the pilot program.

(E) The contractor shall make the home‑based educational technology program available to families at an agreed upon cost if the number of families who would like to participate in the pilot program exceeds the number of participants funded by the legislative appropriation.

Section 59‑10‑340. (A) The State Board of Education shall contract with an independent, qualified evaluator, selected through a request for proposals process, to evaluate the virtual educational technology program for preschool children.

(B) No more than five percent of the funds appropriated by the General Assembly for the early learning pilot program may be used for the evaluation of the pilot program, excluding funds used to provide computers, peripheral equipment, and Internet service to families.

Section 59‑10‑350. (A) Annually before October first, the State Board of Education shall report on the pilot program to the Governor, the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, and the Chairman of the House of Representatives Education and Public Works Committee.

(B) The report must:

(1) address the extent to which the pilot program is accomplishing the purposes for which it was established as specified in Section 59‑10‑320; and

(2) include the following information:

(a) the number of families:

(i) volunteering to participate in the pilot program;

(ii) selected to participate in the pilot program;

(iii) requesting computers; and

(iv) furnished computers;

(b) the frequency of use of the instructional software;

(c) obstacles encountered with software usage, hardware, or providing technical assistance to families; and

(d) student performance on prekindergarten and kindergarten readiness assessments conducted by school districts and charter schools for students who participated in the home–based educational technology program and those who did not participate in the pilot program. This must include testing data regarding effectiveness of the computer software used in the pilot program.”

SECTION 3. The existing provisions of Chapter 16, Title 59 are designated as Article 1, entitled “General Provisions”.

SECTION 4. Chapter 16, Title 59 is redesignated “Virtual Education Programs”.

SECTION 5. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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