

TESTIMONY ON SB 2151
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
May 19, 2016
by Tara Bitz, Early Childhood Administrator
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Mr. Chairman and members of the education committee:

My name is Tara Bitz and I am the Early Childhood Administrator for the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to provide a report on SB 2151.

The Early Childhood Education Grant program was established by the 2015 64th Legislative Assembly to assist North Dakota's communities with public, private, nonprofit or partnership entities offering early care and education a chance to enhance their programs through community collaboration.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) is working collaboratively with the North Dakota Department of Commerce (Commerce) regarding the implementation of SB 2151. Department collaboration developed program guidance, a grant application, and project resources and were made available online through both Commerce and NDDPI.

The state level collaborative team has met regularly during the planning year to ensure the project requirements were developed and disseminated to the field with a process in place to take field inquiries and submission of grant applications.

During the 2015-2016 planning year, the superintendents of each school district were required to call and hold a coalition meeting to decide if they were applying or not and identify their coalition by November 30, 2015. The NDDPI and Commerce team worked collaboratively to disseminate the information to all early care and education entities through electronic notices, newsletters, attending a variety of education and early childhood association meetings, and statewide conference sessions.

Eligible applicants were requested to estimate the number of 4 year olds qualifying to receive free or reduced meals as well as all other 4 year olds that will be served by the program. This cumulative number will provide a comprehensive view of the program. This information establishes the funding basis for the award. To date, the state team has jointly reviewed applications and will be conducting a final review of grantees to determine funding levels prior to grant awards being issued June 1, 2016.

Grants will be awarded and disbursed on a quarterly reimbursement basis. To ensure accountability, payments will be supported by grantees providing quarterly reports demonstrating the aggregate number of 4 year olds served during the quarter as provided through the NDDPI's State Automated Reporting System (STARS). Commerce will establish quarterly funding disbursement reviews.

The NDDPI has built data collection measures into the STARS where grantees will be required to report early childhood student enrollment data. School districts accessing the grant will provide their data into PowerSchool and programs not affiliated with a public school will complete their data collection requirements directly through STARS. Those data fields will feed into STARS enrollment, allowing NDDPI to share monthly aggregate program data with Commerce in order to make the quarterly payments.

At the close of the application process on April 1, 2016, it is encouraging to report the Department of Commerce received 49 applications ranging from school districts, child care centers, and Head Start programs.

Thank you, I welcome questions or you may contact me for further information.