



AB 324 – Childcare Professional Development Act

SUMMARY

AB 324 would create guidelines for the early care and education (ECE) professional development and retention system to strengthen, recruit, and retain the ECE workforce.

BACKGROUND

Research shows that quality childcare is critical to a child's development and lifelong wellbeing. Ninety percent of a child's brain develops by age 5, and billions of neural connections are formed daily based on a child's everyday experiences and interactions. The daily interactions and experiences a child has in childcare is directly linked to their brain development and builds the foundation for their future brain function and learning capabilities. However, quality childcare programs are in high demand, and many parents cannot find affordable and quality options for their children. Part of the problem is due to a shortage in the childcare workforce, low wages, educational barriers to entry, and high start-up costs.

In 2000, AB 212 (Aroner) authorized funds from the California Department of Education (CDE) for childcare development staff retention. These funds aim to retain quality staff who have experience working directly with children in state-subsidized, Title 5 child development programs. The funds are used to provide services such as: increased staff wages and benefits, tutoring and mentorship programs, financial aid assistance, career counseling, and professional development.

PROBLEM

Under existing law, there is limited guidance as to how AB 212 funds should be expended. This has led to wide variety in implementation of the funds throughout the state. Large inconsistencies exist in the intentionality of the programs, the resources and support provided to educators, and the measurements of success used. For example, one county uses AB 212 funds to provide coursework reimbursements. Other counties blend their AB 212 funds with other funds to form a more robust professional development program. In 2010, state law was amended to allow Los Angeles County to spend unused AB 212 funds for Title 22 programs, which were not previously eligible. With these funds, Los Angeles County focused on academic credits for degrees.

These inconsistencies have led to varying levels of support and retention of ECE staff. Though AB 212 funds still play a crucial role in the ECE system, it requires clearly defined goals and implementation strategies in order to ensure its success.

THIS BILL

AB 324 requires CDE to develop guidelines for the use of AB 212 funds. The new guidelines will still allow for local flexibility, but will create a standardized, effective, and measurable funding program. These guidelines will prioritize stipends that recruit, strengthen, and retain a quality, diverse ECE workforce.

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