

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

An Act To Promote Social and Emotional Learning and Development for Young Children

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §254, sub-§20 is enacted to read:

20. Statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program. Beginning September 1, 2020, the commissioner shall implement a statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program to provide support, guidance and training to improve the abilities and skills of early care and education teachers and providers working in public elementary schools, child care facilities as defined in Title 22, section 8301-A, subsection 1-A, paragraph B, family child care settings and Head Start programs serving infants and children who are 8 years of age or younger who are experiencing challenging behaviors that put the infants or children at risk of learning difficulties and removal from early learning and education settings, and to improve the abilities and skills of families and foster parents with infants or children who are 8 years of age or younger in the home who are experiencing challenging behaviors that put the infants or children at risk of learning difficulties and removal from early learning and education settings.

Sec. 2. Early childhood consultation program. By September 1, 2020, the Department of Education shall develop, establish and implement an early childhood consultation program under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 254, subsection 20, referred to in this section as "the program," to enable trained consultants with expertise in the areas of early childhood development and mental health to work on-site with early care and education teachers and providers working with children to aid them in the use of low-cost or no-cost evidence-based strategies that reduce challenging behaviors in children and promote social-emotional growth; to provide guidance to parents about effective ways to address their children's behavioral difficulties; and to connect children and families to programs, resources and supports that will assist them in their development and success, while addressing barriers to accessing these resources and supports. The department shall design the program in consultation with the national Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, a project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and key stakeholders in the State, including mental health professionals delivering mental health consultation within the State. In developing the program, the department shall:

1. Develop standards and guidelines to ensure that the program is implemented with primary consideration given to the core elements of evidence-based services as adapted for the State's unique rural character. The guidelines must include effective strengths-based strategies and plans that support children's success across learning environments. The standards must include knowledge of research-informed infant and early childhood mental health practices, family circumstances that affect children's behavior and mental health, developmental science and milestones, mental health, trauma-informed approaches, adverse childhood experiences, sensory processing issues, poverty, disability and community supports, resources and services available to a child and the child's family to alleviate family stress;

2. Explore enhancing cross-sector professional development capacity in the State through partnerships with entities such as the national Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children, a project funded by the United States Department of Education;

3. Develop a plan for consultants to establish connections for individualized on-site coaching as requested by teachers, caregivers and families. The plan may include professional development in the form of group training and communities of practice that include professionals, such as home visitors or child welfare staff, who work with young children and families. The plan must reinforce and extend the supports provided by early childhood mental health consultants to people providing professional development in early childhood and public school settings;

4. Develop a system for collecting and analyzing implementation data and selected outcomes to identify areas for improvement, promote accountability and provide continuous quality improvement and service delivery to improve child outcomes by providing feedback, including feedback from department staff and community consultation staff;

5. Develop a plan for establishing, training and certifying a roster of community-based qualified mental health consultants with the specialized knowledge, skills and experience to effectively coach families, teachers, providers and program directors to promote a child's social and emotional health and reduce challenging behaviors. The training must include training related to the following: trauma; adverse childhood experiences; resilience; trauma-informed practices; child development from birth to 8 years of age; effects of substance use; sensory processing issues; needs of children with disabilities, including special education law; the State's child protection and foster care system; other disciplines such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy and mental health therapy; and public and private supports and services, including the Women, Infants and Children Special Supplemental Food Program of the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966; the Child Development Services System under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 7209; the division within the Department of Health and Human Services concerned with children's behavioral health services; case management; and entitlement programs. Consultants must also receive training that is regionally appropriate to understand the programs, resources and supports in their region or community in order to link children, families and professionals to them. The training must also include training in cultural competence to ensure consultants understand the needs of the ethnically diverse communities they may be serving and the unique services needed to support those populations;

6. Develop a plan for supervision of early childhood consultation and outreach staff that includes administrative, clinical and reflective supervision;

7. Develop a plan in conjunction with staff from the Child Development Services System under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 7209 for how early childhood consultants can support children, families and staff who intersect with the Child Development Services System, particularly as the plan relates to children who are referred for behavior issues; and

8. Develop a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health and Human Services to determine how mental health consultants can support children and families involved in the State's child protection and foster care system.

Sec. 3. Early implementation. The Department of Education shall provide support, guidance and training under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 254, subsection 20 in 5 locations prior to implementation of the statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program in Title 20-A, section 254, subsection 20.

Sec. 4. Report. The Department of Education shall submit a report by January 1, 2021 to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters regarding the status of the statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 254, subsection 20 and the program's ability to provide support and guidance to families, early care and education teachers and providers working with children. The joint standing committee may submit legislation related to the report to the First Regular Session of the 130th Legislature.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Commissioner of Education to implement, beginning September 1, 2020, a statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program to provide support, guidance and training to families, early care and education teachers and providers working in public elementary schools, child care facilities, family child care settings and Head Start programs serving infants and young children who are experiencing challenging behaviors that put them at risk of learning difficulties and removal from early learning settings. The bill requires the Department of Education to design and implement the program and to report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters on the implementation of the statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program.