



# HOUSE BILL 485: Virtual Early Learning Pilot Program.

2019-2020 General Assembly

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<b>Committee:</b>	House Education - K-12. If favorable, re-refer to Appropriations, Education. If favorable, re-refer to Appropriations. If favorable, re-refer to Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House	<b>Date:</b>	April 16, 2019
<b>Introduced by:</b>	Reps. Horn, Fraley, Warren, Lucas	<b>Prepared by:</b>	Samantha Yarborough Staff Attorney
<b>Analysis of:</b>	First Edition		

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**OVERVIEW:** *House Bill 485 would establish UpStart, a virtual early learning pilot program for pre-school age children.*

**BILL ANALYSIS:** Section 1 would require the State Board of Education (State Board), in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction, Office of Early Learning, and the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, to establish a three-year virtual early learning pilot program known as "UpStart." The pilot program would be targeted to at-risk, preschool-age children to develop school readiness skills. The purpose of UpStart would be to do the following:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of giving preschool-age children at-home access to interactive individualized instruction delivered by computers and the Internet to prepare them academically for success in school.
- Test the feasibility of scaling a home-based curriculum in reading, math, and science delivered to all preschool-age children of the State.

This section would also require the State Board to issue a request for proposals (RFP) to contract with a third-party organization (contractor). To be selected, the contractor would need to have demonstrated experience in the delivery of a home-based educational technology program to provide adaptive computer software for literacy and numeracy instruction and an assessment for preschool-age children. The State Board would be required to ensure that the contractor does each of the following:

1. Provides computer-assisted instruction for preschool-age children on a home computer connected by the Internet to a centralized storage facility.
2. Provides technical support to families for the installation and operation of the instructional software.
3. Provides for the installation of computer and Internet access in the homes of low-income families.
4. Has the capability to (i) communicate with parents, (ii) update instructional software, (iii) validate user access, (iv) collect usage data, (v) store research data, and (vi) produce reports for parents, schools, and the General Assembly.
5. Develops and implements a program with the following components:
  - a. Computer-assisted, individualized instruction in reading, math, and science.
  - b. A multisensory reading tutorial program for children needing additional reading instruction.

Karen Cochrane-Brown  
Director



Legislative Analysis  
Division  
919-733-2578

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- c. A validated computer adaptive reading test that accurately indicates reading readiness of children who cannot read and provides easily understood reports for parents and educators.
6. Has the capability to quickly and efficiently modify, improve, and support the product.
7. Collaborates with school district personnel who will provide administrative and technical support of the program.
8. Purchases equipment and service through cooperative purchasing contracts.

Section 2 would require the State Board to select up to 10 local education agencies (LEAs) to participate in UpStart. The LEAs selected by the State Board would have to meet the following:

- Have demonstrated waiting lists for the North Carolina Prekindergarten (NC Pre-K program).
- Be from geographically diverse areas of the State, including representation from tier one, tier two, and tier three counties, as designated by the NC Department of Commerce in 2017.

This section would allow the State Board and LEAs to purchase computers, peripheral equipment, and Internet service for low-income families.

Section 3 would require the contractor to develop and implement UpStart, and require the selected LEAs to solicit family participants through a public information campaign and referrals. Qualifying children would be selected through a random lottery. To be qualified to participate, a preschool-age child would have to be the following:

- 4 years old on or before August 31 of the program year.
- At risk, which is defined to include:
  - A child whose family's gross income is at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.
  - A child of either (i) an active duty member of the Armed Forces who was ordered into active duty in the last 18 months or is expected to be ordered within the next 18 months, or (ii) a member of the Armed Forces who was injured or killed while serving on active duty.

The local North Carolina Partnerships for Children, Inc., partnerships would be allowed to make eligibility determinations. If funds are available, eligibility could be extended to a child whose family's gross income is at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Section 4 would require the State Board to make an annual report on UpStart to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by November 30 of each year of the pilot. The report would include: (i) the extent to which the pilot program is accomplishing the purposes for which it was established; (ii) the number of families selected to participate; (iii) the number of families requesting computers; (iv) the number of computers furnished; (v) the number of families requiring Internet access; (vi) the frequency of use of the instructional software; (vii) any obstacles encountered with software usage, hardware usage, or providing technical assistance; and (viii) student performance on pre-kindergarten and post-kindergarten assessments conducted by LEAs and charter schools for students who participated in UpStart compared to those students who did not.

Section 5 would appropriate \$500,000 in nonrecurring funds for each year of the 2019-2021 biennium to the State Board to provide funding for qualifying preschool-age children to participate in UpStart. For the 2021-2022 fiscal year only, the Director of the Budget would be required to include in the base budget the amount of nonrecurring funds needed to support UpStart. Funds appropriated pursuant to this section would be divided evenly in each fiscal year among the LEAs selected to participate. Any unexpended funds would revert upon the completion of the pilot program.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** This bill would become effective July 1, 2019.