



ISSUE BRIEF

INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

Research proves that quality early childhood education programs help improve children's school readiness and can help close achievement gaps that exist among children even before they enter school. Research also finds that children who participate in high-quality programs demonstrate greater interest in learning, are less likely to repeat a grade or require special education classes, and are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college. For every dollar invested in prekindergarten programs, the return can be as high as \$16, making it both smart education and economic policy. States have recognized the benefits of early childhood education and as many as 40 fund preschool for three and four-year-olds. However, recent fiscal conditions threaten to derail some of this progress.

From 2006 to 2011, NSBA and its Center for Public Education collaborated with Pre[k] Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States, to engage school boards in support of high quality, voluntary prekindergarten education. Partnerships with state school boards associations promoted greater access to voluntary, high-quality prekindergarten programs in the belief that such programs will propel schools' efforts to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps.

As a legacy to these accomplishments, NSBA and the Center administered The Pre-K Coalition through funding from the Pew Center on the States. It brought together the most influential national education organizations to develop common goals for pre-k policy and raise awareness about the importance of early learning:

- American Association of School Administrators
- American Federation of Teachers
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Education Association
- National School Boards Association

The coalition has developed consensus policy statements and recommendations on a number of key early education issues to inform federal policy and legislation: <http://prekcoalition.org>.

RECENT LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS

Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC)— The RTT-ELC was established to provide competitive awards to states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, learning standards, and workforce development. RTT-ELC grants are in the second year of implementation, with a third year proposed in the President's FY 2013 budget:

FY 2011 - \$500 million in funds were awarded to 9 states in December 2011: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington. The grant award period began December 2011 and ends in December 2015.

FY 2012 – Approximately **\$540 million** is available for RTT awards, a significant amount of which is expected to go for Early Learning Challenge grants. The Department is authorized to award FY 2012 RTT funds *directly to local school districts*, rather than going through their respective state agencies. While details have yet to be worked out, the Department intends to use FY 2012 RTT funds for both a district level competition and another round of Early Learning Challenge grants.

FY 2013 – The Department recommends **\$850 million** for RTT, with a significant portion dedicated to early learning.

New Office of Early Learning - The Department established an Office of Early Learning within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). The new Office will oversee the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grants and coordinate early learning programs across the Department.

Senate and House ESEA Reauthorization bills -

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee - The HELP Committee approved a bill in October 2011 to reauthorize the ESEA, which includes several provisions to incorporate pre-K. For example, Title I would allow LEAs to include early childhood education and care in local plans, report cards and funding allocation decisions. Titles II (Teacher and Principal Effectiveness) and III (Migrant Education) have provisions to incorporate early childhood education and care as an allowable use of funds. Title IV integrates early childhood education into the comprehensive literacy, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and the Parent Resource Center program. Title V specifies that early childhood education and care have a role in Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation and charter school grant programs, and Title VII specifies that early childhood education and care are permissible activities under the Alaska Native Education program.

Title IX (General Provisions) may have the greatest impact, however, as it expands the definition of “free public education” (FPE) in a way that could create a federal mandate for LEAs to provide pre-k education, even to the extent of superseding state law on the matter. Sec. 9101 re-defines FPE to include preschool education, state law notwithstanding. Free public education must be provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without tuition charge, therefore possibly subjecting LEAs to an unfunded mandate to provide preschool education. It is unlikely that the HELP Committee bill will become law in the near future, but NSBA is carefully analyzing its provisions for impact on local school districts.

House Education and Workforce Committee - The bill approved by the House Committee retains, but does not expand, early learning options in the ESEA. Pre-K remains an allowable use of Title I funds, including Migratory children ages 3 – 21. In Title III, Family engagement grants may be used for technical assistance for parents in early childhood education programs.

NSBA POSITION

NSBA has long recognized the benefits of high quality pre-k and supports a voluntary role for local school districts. NSBA’s 2011 Delegate Assembly established a national policy on this issue, that urges the federal government to grant flexibility to school districts to establish preschool programs for all three and four year-olds through a separate funding stream, that develops, coordinates, and enhances the quality and availability of preschool programs. NSBA also supports p-16 collaboration among the various sectors of education and

with business, industry, and government to enhance teaching and learning opportunities so that all students are prepared to live in and contribute to a vibrant society. NSBA is advocating for inclusion of voluntary pre-k education as a component of federal education programs, including the ESEA reauthorization and other bills and initiatives.

However, the current federal funding crisis means that new initiatives threaten to come at the expense of existing resources. Therefore, it is important for any federal policy on pre-k to support the school district role in early learning options and be 1) voluntary; 2) separately funded so as not to reduce services to children who currently receive federally funded assistance; and 3) respect the variation in local circumstances and local authority to address them by permitting flexibility in the use of federal funds.

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