



Strong Start for Children Act

FAQ

What does this bill do?

This legislation creates a new funding stream to help states and communities improve and expand high quality, full-day preschool programs for four year olds. States also have the flexibility to use a portion of the funds for infants and toddlers. States that commit to meeting high quality standards will receive funding based on the number of young children at or below 200% of poverty; states that are still building quality systems can compete for development grants to help them meet the criteria for larger amounts of funding.

Who will be served under this bill?

The bill funds voluntary preschool programs for children living in families at or below 200% of poverty. Children will be offered high quality, full-day, full-year programs taught by highly qualified teachers. Programs must meet children’s needs for cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development; provide comprehensive services, including access to nutrition, health, and social services; and include activities to engage and educate parents.

How does this bill ensure a return on investment?

Nobel Prize-winning economist Dr. James Heckman’s research shows that high quality early childhood education programs targeted to disadvantaged children can produce returns of 7-10% per year for the life of the child. In order to produce those returns, however, programs must offer high quality, developmentally appropriate education. This bill gives states flexibility in how programs meet quality standards, but establishes high standards based on cutting-edge research and decades of learning about what helps young children learn and succeed.

Don’t the effects of Head Start and other preschool programs “fade out” over time?

Several studies that examine the short-term impacts of Head Start have found that by the early elementary school years, children who attended one year of Head Start are no longer ahead of their peers academically. But long-term studies of Head Start graduates, including a 2009 study by Demming, show significant, life-changing effects of participation in Head Start. These include higher high school graduation rates; increased rates of college education and employment; and improved health. Last month, ten early childhood researchers released a “meta-analysis” of 84 studies of early childhood education programs for low income children conducted over the past 40 years. They found that:

- Large-scale public preschool programs can have substantial impacts on children’s early learning
- Long-term benefits occur despite short-term convergence of test scores
- Quality preschool education is a profitable investment
- A second year of preschool shows additional benefits
- Higher-quality preschool programs are linked to larger impacts
- Important benefits are seen with targeted comprehensive services.



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Why create a new program? Doesn't this duplicate other state and federal programs?

Despite decades of research showing the effectiveness of high quality early childhood education programs, Head Start and state pre-K currently serve only about half of all eligible four year olds. Early Head Start serves only about 4% of eligible infants and toddlers. States are facing revenue shortfalls, and while some are making tough choices to maintain or expand their preschool programs, others have had to cut back. This bill establishes a new funding stream for a federal-state partnership to provide early childhood education. States and communities will be able to maintain their existing governing structures and delivery systems for early childhood education. This bill will help states and communities improve and expand access to high quality early education that produces economic returns for us all.

What will happen to Head Start under this proposal?

Head Start is integral to the effort to provide high quality early childhood education to disadvantaged children, and that will not change. Under this bill, any provider that can meet the quality standards is eligible to apply for funding. Many Head Start programs are uniquely positioned to compete for, and win, funds to provide high quality services to young children. Under current law, Head Start programs receive resources to serve four year olds based on a community needs assessment. Over time, if substantially all four year olds are receiving high quality preschool, programs may re-allocate the Head Start resources they receive for four year olds to expand services to younger children. The decision to shift resources will be made on a case-by-case basis, subject to community needs.

How will this legislation be paid for?

Congress is currently considering important questions about budget priorities and ways to promote short- and long-term economic growth. High quality early childhood education is an investment that pays for itself in a very short period of time. The President proposed a \$.94/per pack increase in the tobacco tax to pay for a \$100 billion/ten year investment in high quality early childhood education. This proposal is strongly supported by the public, with seven in ten voters polled – including 64% of self-identified Tea Party voters – supporting an increase in the tobacco tax to pay for investments in early childhood education. Congress may decide to consider other approaches to paying for the initiative. However, one thing is clear: high quality early childhood education for disadvantaged children generates a higher return than almost any other investment our country can make.

What is the prospect of passing this legislation?

Across the country, “red” and “blue” states, Republican and Democratic governors, are recognizing the importance of early childhood education. State legislatures from Alabama to Washington are making difficult budget decisions to invest in preschool. We are encouraged that this bill has received bipartisan support. In a poll conducted last July, seven out of ten voters polled supported significant investments in early childhood education that did not add to the deficit. Even 64% of self-identified Tea Party voters said they would support such a proposal. Two out of three voters said they thought Congress should act immediately to expand early childhood education, without delay. We urge Congress to respond by making early childhood education a priority in current budget negotiations, and by enacting this bill.