



**First Five Years Fund**

# **Efforts to Support Federal Early Childhood Education Programs and Opportunities**

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## Child Care And Development Block Grant Act Regulations (CCDBG)

CCDBG plays an essential role in providing access to child care for low-income families who otherwise could not afford it. With champions on both sides of the aisle, CCDBG's 2014 reauthorization included many momentous changes to the law. Specifically, the new law mandates significant health and safety requirements for providers in order ensure programs are high-quality. The subsequent proposed regulations emphasize helping parents make informed decisions about their choice of care modality (center-based, family child care, etc.), as well as providing families with information that is vital to supporting children's development. Additionally, the law required more of teachers in order to support professionalizing the early childhood workforce. The proposed regulations leverage the intent of the pre-existing law, to provide care so parents could work, in order to positively impact children during the formative years. Translating the proposed regulations into practice will require a significant increase to CCDBG funding through annual appropriations. Implementing the law to fidelity will require significant efforts by states and communities to align best practices across all early learning programs (child care, HS, Pre-K, etc.).

## Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Early Learning Provisions

The explicit elevation of early learning throughout the language of the most prominent education law, coupled with the significant shift of authority to states and districts, means that the federal government has a critical responsibility to provide clear and ongoing guidance and regulations on how state plans recognize and invest in early learning programs with fidelity to the intent of the law as passed by Congress. Following ESSA's enactment, ED has engaged stakeholders, facilitated listening sessions across the country, proposed rulemaking, and issued guidance in order to equip states and districts with information and resources to assist them in implementing the new law. ESSA also authorizes a new, competitive Preschool Development Grant program (PDG), to be jointly administered by ED and HHS. The first program of its kind in any iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESSA's PDGs build on the "legacy" program to help support access to high-quality preschool opportunities for children, while emphasizing coordination and expansion of early learning services. Now authorized by law, it is necessary to ensure that this hard-fought legislative win is funded with sufficient resources to allow for a new competition once the fourth and final year of the legacy program comes to a close.

In order to make good on ESSA's promise that every student is college and career ready, ED's final regulations should promote clarity on ESSA's early learning vision that spans from birth to age six, as defined by the Higher Education Act (HEA). By elevating the importance of high-quality early learning for children under age six, states and districts will have a clear pathway, both at this critical time of writing state plans, and in growing their existing efforts to develop and implement a high-quality continuum of early learning and care that promotes school readiness.

Building on what is required by law, the Federal Government plays a significant role in disseminating non-regulatory guidance that highlights opportunities for states and districts to allocate funding to early learning programs and meaningfully promoting early learning coordination within communities. ED's guidance for early learning, *'Expanding Opportunities to Support our Youngest Learners'*, starts where funds may be used to support early learning and elaborates what those investments can look like for states and districts. ED articulates three primary opportunities: 1. Expanding access to high-quality early learning, 2. Ensuring alignment, collaboration and coordination both across programs and from preschool to third grade, and 3. Supporting educators.

## **Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule (HSPPS)**

HS serves more than 1 million children from birth to age five who come from low-income families by providing comprehensive early learning and care to help children enter kindergarten ready to learn. The final rule on the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) builds on the legacy of HS by making strides to increase the positive impact of HS on children's lives. The HSPPS, which align with the HS Act of 2007, go into effect beginning November 7, 2016, with staggered compliance dates for larger changes to the final rule. Research shows that high-quality early learning programs, such as HS, are more effective at supporting children's successful outcomes when the dosage is both frequent and consistent. With increased instructional time in the classroom, children will benefit from more high-quality teacher-child and peer-to-peer interactions. An increase in duration of services will also provide improved alignment with family work schedules. Both HS and EHS center-based programs will gradually phase in full-day, full-year services with local flexibility in terms of coordinating with community needs and local school districts. Along with the transition to full-day, full-year services, the HSPPS reflects an overall shift to outcomes-based standards, diverging from its previous, process-based approach. In reducing the administrative burden, the HSPPS final rule elevates family partnership, classroom standards, child attendance, positive learning environments, and aligns with the CCDBG Act of 2014 requirements. Greater alignment with CCDBG reduces barriers for programs entering into an Early Head Start—Child Care Partnership (EHS—CCP). The systems level shift in the HSPPS promotes more effective integration of federal early learning programs, and it encourages effective bridging of HS with elementary schools to ensure children's successful transition to kindergarten. It is imperative that funding for HS is sufficient to effectively implement the HSPPS without compromising the capacity for slots.

## **Head Start Act Reauthorization (HSA) (pending)**

HS has a 50-year legacy as one of the core federal early learning programs to provide high-quality opportunities to children and families across the country. Reauthorization should support and elevate the program's provision of continuous, comprehensive, early learning and care opportunities for children from birth through age five. In addition, it should foster efforts to expand access to HS for children and families most in need (currently only half of those eligible receive services). HS is a comprehensive program that addresses the domains critical to a child's development and school readiness. This principle should remain core to the program with an emphasis on ensuring the development of social-emotional skills we know are critical to ensuring young children are prepared for the rigors of school and life. Engaging families is a key piece to continued quality improvement, and improving family engagement from recruitment to kindergarten transition must be prioritized. Reauthorization should also incorporate information that has been gathered to help programs improve quality like data from the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).

## Higher Education Act Reauthorization (HEA) (pending)

Fortifying a high-quality continuum of early learning and care, so that young children grow up to be both college and career ready, requires that postsecondary education legislation complements and supports the work in the early learning and care field. Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) is a significant opportunity to ensure alignment across the HEA programs with the ESSA programs; early childhood education programs, including child care programs; state funded preschool programs; EHS; HS; and special education programs for preschoolers and infants and families. HEA should enhance coordination and alignment across early learning to postsecondary education systems by integrating teacher preparation programs and professional development systems with those working directly in early learning, aligning teacher preparation programs with state early learning standards, and including early childhood educators in provisions of the law regarding access to coaching, mentoring, professional development, and loan forgiveness among the various higher education programs. It is imperative that reauthorization of the HEA focuses on improving both the preparation of and ongoing support for early childhood educators to ensure they are equipped with the necessary tools to positively impact child outcomes in their classrooms. Beyond the capacity for HEA reauthorization to bolster the quality of early learning programs through alignment to early learning legislation, HEA is uniquely positioned to support access to early learning programs by helping undergraduate students who are also parents to access high-quality child care. By reauthorizing the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools Program (CCAMPIS), low-income parents in postsecondary education will have the opportunity to graduate from college, enter the workforce and provide their young child with the early learning opportunities they need to be ready for school.

## Maternal, Infant, And Early Childhood Home Visiting Reauthorization (MIECHV) (pending)

The federal home visiting program, MIECHV, supports trained home visitors, who are representative of a wide range of home visiting models, to address issues that improve maternal and child health, prevent child abuse and neglect, encourage positive parenting, and promote child development and school readiness. Since Congress established MIECHV in 2010, children and families from 825 counties across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five territories have participated in voluntary home visiting made possible by the federal/state partnership with longstanding bipartisan support. The federal investment in home visiting spurred additional state investment, and since its inception, ten states—Arkansas, Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, and Vermont—have passed legislation that create similar accountability for their state home visiting investments. Following a six-month extension in 2015, Congress passed the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015, which extended MIECHV for an additional two years through 2017. Local flexibility is a hallmark of MIECHV, which leverages states' capability to identify local needs and maximize effectiveness in improving outcomes. High-quality home visiting works, and is vital to a thriving continuum of high-quality early learning. Extending MIECHV in 2017 must be a national priority; by improving and supporting newborn and maternal health, home visiting significantly impacts academic performance, reduces crime and domestic violence, encourages self-sufficiency within families and builds the foundation for a better prepared workforce and a stronger economy.