

# Early Education for All Americans: President Obama's Plan

Southern Early Childhood Association



**SECA Policy Brief**  
**June 2013**

## Introduction

*“In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children....studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let’s do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind.”* President Barack Obama, State of the Union, February 12, 2013

In the 2013 State of the Union Address, President Obama proposed to expand access to high-quality preschool for all children in the United States. Not only a remarkable venue to put forward such a plan (and the first time in recent history that early childhood education had received such notoriety), the plan encompassed many of the guiding principles for the field that have been the hallmark of debate around early childhood education and its role in the educational system in the United States.

The President proposed:

- Providing High-Quality Preschool for Every Child
- Growing the Supply of Effective Early Learning Opportunities for Young Children
- Extending and Expanding Evidence-Based, Voluntary Home Visiting

The President has stated that his proposal would be budget neutral and has proposed a 94-cents-per pack increase in the federal tax on cigarettes to fund the initiative.

## The Plan Components

### 1) Preschool for All

“The President’s proposal will improve quality and expand access to preschool, through a **cost sharing partnership with all 50 states**, to extend federal funds to expand high-quality public preschool to reach all low-and-moderate income four-year-olds from families at or below 200% of poverty. The U.S. Department of Education will allocate dollars to states based on their share of four-year-olds from low-and-moderate income families and funds would be distributed to local school districts and other partner providers to implement the program. The proposal would include an incentive for states to broaden participation in their public preschool program for additional middle class families, which states may choose to reach and serve in a variety of ways, such as a sliding-scale arrangement.” In order to access federal funds, state would be required to meet “quality benchmarks that are linked to better outcomes

for children”. These benchmarks would require 1) state standards for early learning, 2) qualified teachers for all preschool classrooms and 3) comprehensive assessment and data systems.

The proposal would require “common and consistent standards across all programs, including:

- Well-trained teachers who are paid comparably to K-12 staff.
- Small class sizes and low adult-to-child ratios.
- A rigorous curriculum.
- Comprehensive health and related services.
- Effective evaluation and review of programs.”

This funding could also be utilized **to expand the availability of full-day kindergarten**. This would occur only after the state had provided preschool education to low-and-moderate income four-year-olds.

The President is also proposing to **expand the investment in Head Start** to support a “greater share of infants, toddlers and three-year-olds in America’s Head Start Centers while state preschool settings will serve a greater share of four-year-olds.”

Source: *Fact Sheet President Obama’s Plan for Early Education for All Americans*, The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov>. Retrieved 6/6/2013

**First Year Funding Estimates for the SECA States: The President’s Preschool for All Initiative**

<b>State</b>	<b>President’s Program Estimate</b>	<b>State Match</b>	<b>Estimated Number of Children Served</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	\$43,000,000	\$4,300,000	5,257
<b>Arkansas</b>	\$35,500,000	\$3,500,000	4,333
<b>Florida</b>	\$165,600,000	\$16,600,000	20,242
<b>Georgia</b>	\$108,900,000	\$10,900,000	13,315
<b>Kentucky</b>	\$41,300,000	\$4,100,000	5,041
<b>Louisiana</b>	\$48,100,000	\$4,800,000	5,880
<b>Mississippi</b>	\$21,400,000	\$2,100,000	2,608
<b>North Carolina</b>	\$102,200,000	\$10,200,000	12,488
<b>Oklahoma</b>	\$35,500,000	\$3,500,000	4,337
<b>South Carolina</b>	\$60,800,000	\$6,100,000	7,428
<b>Tennessee</b>	\$64,300,000	\$6,400,000	7,861
<b>Texas</b>	\$308,000,000	\$30,800,000	37,644
<b>Virginia</b>	\$51,900,000	\$5,200,000	6,340
<b>West Virginia</b>	\$12,200,000	\$1,200,000	1,484

Source: *Press Release, Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education*, The White House, 6/4/2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning>

## 2) Investing in High-Quality Infant and Toddler Care

The President has proposed a new program, the **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership**, to assist states in expanding availability to high-quality infant and toddler programs. The program would award funds through Early Head Start on a competitive basis to “enhance and support early learning settings, provide new full-day, comprehensive services that meet the needs of working families, and prepare children for the transition into preschool. This strategy—combined with an expansion of publicly funded preschool education for four-year-olds will ensure a cohesive and well-aligned system of early learning for children from birth to age five.”

**The President proposes \$1.4 billion in additional funding for this program.**

Source: *Fact Sheet President Obama’s Plan for Early Education for All Americans, The White House*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov>. Retrieved 6/6/2013

## 3) Expanding Effective Parent and Family Support.

The proposal expands the Administration’s evidence-based home visiting initiative. The current initiative includes “voluntary programs that provide nurses, social workers, and other professionals to meet with at-risk families in their homes and connect them to assistance that impacts a child’s health, development, and ability to learn.”

**First Year Funding Estimates for the SECA States: Expanding Effective Parent and Family Support**

<b>State</b>	<b>President’s Program Estimate</b>	<b>Number of Annual Births to Low-Income Mothers</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	\$8,100,000	22,515
<b>Arkansas</b>	\$7,400,000	13,019
<b>Florida</b>	\$13,200,000	56,127
<b>Georgia</b>	\$10,800,000	39,329
<b>Kentucky</b>	\$7,900,000	18,810
<b>Louisiana</b>	\$8,300,000	21,648
<b>Mississippi</b>	\$7,700,000	12,107
<b>North Carolina</b>	\$10,400,000	43,322
<b>Oklahoma</b>	\$7,600,000	17,354
<b>South Carolina</b>	\$8,100,000	23,035
<b>Tennessee</b>	\$8,900,000	28,540
<b>Texas</b>	\$20,000,000	126,521
<b>Virginia</b>	\$8,000,000	20,033
<b>West Virginia</b>	\$6,900,000	4,929

Source: *Press Release, Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education, The White House, 6/4/2013*, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning>

# The Political Realities of the South

On June 5<sup>th</sup>, The White House asked advocates to “spread the word about President Obama’s plan to provide high-quality preschool for every kid in America.” An Op-Ed from Gail Collins followed the next day, June 6, 2013, in the *New York Times*.

In the Op-Ed, Ms. Collins went down memory lane, recalling that a similar push for universal preschool had been a bipartisan effort with then Senator Walter Mondale in the lead. President Nixon vetoed the bill. That was 42 years ago.

*Ms. Collins cautioned that “nothing major is going to happen for early childhood education without an enormous groundswell of public demand. This is a cause that’s extremely popular in theory. But its advocates have no power to reward or punish. Lawmakers who labor on behalf of preschool programs may get stars in heaven, but they don’t get squat in campaign contributions. And the ones who eliminate money for infant care programs have no fear whatsoever that they’ll lose an election over it.”*

*Source: Power to the Preschoolers, Gail Collins, Op-Ed, New York Times, Retrieved 6/6/2013*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/06/opinion/collins-power-to-the-preschoolers.html?ref=todayspaper&r=0>

The political realities of moving the President’s agenda forward in the South are complicated and Ms. Collins singled out Republican Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky as reflective of those complexities. Senator McConnell represents a “tobacco” state and a significant increase in the cigarette tax would affect that industry. Not to mention that Republicans are for the most part taking stances against tax increases and Senator McConnell reflects that position. The reality in Kentucky is that the Head Start programs in his state are shrinking because of budget cuts and sequestration with Audubon Area Community Services closing 12 classrooms and laying off 42 staff members.

If you’d like to read more about these concerns, go to the following issues of *Public Policy Notes*.

## *Public Policy Notes/February 2013*

[http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/file/Public%20Policy%20Docs/Public%20Policy%20Notes/PPN\\_feb\\_2013.pdf](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/file/Public%20Policy%20Docs/Public%20Policy%20Notes/PPN_feb_2013.pdf)

## *Public Policy Notes/April 2013*

[http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/file/Public%20Policy%20Docs/Public%20Policy%20Notes/PPN\\_Apr\\_2013.pdf](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/file/Public%20Policy%20Docs/Public%20Policy%20Notes/PPN_Apr_2013.pdf)

For advocates in the South, we’ll need a carefully crafted message and concerted effort. The region has led the nation in expanding pre-K to eligible children (Oklahoma and Georgia are two great examples.) so we understand the value. We’ll now need to convince our Congressional representatives that this is one investment worth making.