

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

New Early Childhood Initiative on the Radar in Washington

On November 13th, a bi-partisan bill, **Strong Start for America's Children Act of 2013** was filed. The bill has bi-partisan sponsors: Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Representative George Miller (D-CA) and Representative Richard Hanna (R-NY). The bill closely mirrors the proposal put forth by President Obama in his 2013 State of the Union address.

On Tuesday, November 19, 2013, the White House and various federal agencies sponsored an invitation-only call to discuss the proposal and ask for grassroots support for its passage. The Executive Director of SECA participated in the call.

The call was moderated by Kyle Lierman of the Office of Public Engagement at the White House. The call featured U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Congressmen Miller and Hanna. Also present were members of the Congressmen's staff, Steven Hicks of the Office of Ear-

ly Learning of the U.S. Department of Education and White House staff. Secretary Duncan made initial remarks, including the statement that he



Sen Harkin, IA



Rep Miller, CA



Rep Hanna, NY

"had no interest in symbolic victories....let's get it done." Congressmen Miller and Hanna both spoke and encouraged participants on the call to begin a grassroots effort to support the legislation.

Questions were asked about the following:

- 1) What type of funding mechanism has been devised to support the

legislation?

- 2) Would the sponsors consider strengthening the parent involvement components? (This was from several adult education organizations.)

- 3) Since the focus of the legislation is on pre-kindergarten, what implications would this have for Head Start?

- 4) What strategies were being designed to move this type of legislation (which requires a significant new federal investment) through what has been a difficult political environment for any type of new initiative?

The answer: it will take all of you at the grassroots level to make it happen. For a summary of the legislation, turn the page!

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For More Info



www.ffyf.org/



usa.childcareaware.org



Rally4babies.org

National Women's Law Center,
www.nwlc.org

Strong Start for America's Children Act: A Summary

Filed on November 13, 2013, the Act closely mirrors the proposal put forth by President Obama in his 2013 State of the Union address. The legislation was filed in the House and Senate and the two bills reflect only minor differences.

Following is information from summaries developed by the National Women's Law Center, the First Five Years Fund and Zero to Three.



- ⇒ The legislation creates a new funding stream to “help states and communities improve and expand high quality, full-day preschool programs for four-year-olds.”
- ⇒ The funds would be available to serve children 4 years of age whose family income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Once a state or locality has made pre-K available to all of its 4-year-olds whose families want them to participate, they can begin to serve three-year-olds in families that meet the income criteria.
- ⇒ States could sub-grant funds to schools or community-based providers such as child care and Head Start programs. Eligible providers would have to meet a set of standards.
- ⇒ These provider standards include:
 - ◆ Teachers who have bachelor's degrees and can demonstrate competence in early childhood education.

- ◆ Maximum class sizes and child-staff ratios (evidence based under the House bill and set at 20 max class size, child-staff ratios of 10:1 under the Senate bill).
- ◆ Full-day programs based on the school schedule.
 - ◆ Curricula and environments that are evidence-based and aligned with the state's early learning guidelines.
- ◆ Teacher compensation at the public school salary scale.
- ◆ Professional development for all staff.
- ◆ Consistent and frequent monitoring and evaluation to promote continuous improvement.
- ◆ Compliance with health and safety standards.
- ◆ Comprehensive services including health and dental services, family engagement, physical activity programs and nutrition.
- ⇒ Funds would be allocated to states based upon the number of 4-year-olds that meet the family income eligibility criteria.
- ⇒ States would be allowed to utilize up to 20% of their funding in the first four years to improve quality.
- ⇒ In order to receive funding, states would be required to have the following (or be working toward it) in place:
 - ◆ Early learning and development standards.
 - ◆ Data systems that link pre-kindergarten assessment data

with elementary and secondary school data.

- ◆ State funded kindergarten.
- ◆ A functioning State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care.
- ◆ Coordination among early childhood programs.
- ◆ Early learning assessments that are “culturally, developmentally and age-appropriate and consistent with the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences.”
- ◆ Performance measures to track and report the state's progress in increasing children's school readiness.
- ⇒ States would be allowed to set aside up to 15% of their funds for infants and toddlers from families that meet the income eligibility standard. States could utilize the funding to pay providers of infant/toddler care that offer full-day, full-year care for working parents and that meet high-quality standards.
- ⇒ Grants would be provided to Early Head Start agencies to partner with center-based and family child care providers, particularly those funded with CCDBG funds and that aim to meet Early Head Start guidelines.



To view copies of the Senate and House bills, go to <http://rally4babies.org/strong-start-america-children-act-2013/> Links to the bills are posted on their website.

Funding Strong Start & The State's Contribution

The bills offer a detailed scheme for allocating funding to the states, including a program of required state matching funding that increases over a period of years.

According to the sponsors and experts on the call on November 19th, the legislation has been filed to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the budget negotiations currently underway. Those negotiations will determine how federal resources are allocated and prioritized. When specifically asked about “where the funding will come from and are we still talking a tobacco tax”, the response was given that all options were on the table and that the sponsors were “open on the

source of revenue”. Congressman Hanna stated that “if we can't get it in the current budget proposal, it will be some time before we have the option of getting funding for the program.”

That said, the match rate contained in the proposal may cause serious concern at the state level. Following is the match required to access the federal funds.

- ◇ Years 1 & 2—10%
- ◇ Year 3—20%
- ◇ Year 4—30%
- ◇ Year 5—40%
- ◇ Year 6—50%
- ◇ Year 7—75%
- ◇ Year 8—100%

At that point in time, the states will be providing a match equal to the federal contribution.

States would be allowed to utilize up to 10% of funding already allocated to pre-K at the time of the enactment of the Strong Start legislation to provide the match. **The question will be: What federal resources will be available each year and will 10% of the current pre-K state funding level be sufficient to meet that 100% mark in year 8? Will this progressive match standard require more state investment in pre-kindergarten and how will states fund that?**

Source: The Strong Start for America's Children Act: Summary, National Women's Law Center, www.nwlc.org

How to Reduce the State's Match Requirement

The legislation includes another unusual component: it allows a state to reduce the match requirement by meeting certain standards. Those standards include:

- * The state offers enrollment in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs to not less than 1/2 of children in the State who are: 1) age 4 on the eligibility determination date, and 2) from families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- * The state has a plan for continuing to expand access to high-quality programs.

- * The state has a plan to expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs to children from moderate income families whose income exceeds 200% of the federal poverty level.

If those criteria are met, the match can be reduced to:

- ◇ Years 1 & 2—5%
- ◇ Year 3—10%
- ◇ Year 4—20%
- ◇ Year 5—30%
- ◇ Year 6—40%
- ◇ Year 7—50%
- ◇ Year 8—75%

- ◇ Year 9 & above—100%

In this scenario, the match rate is reduced by one-half during years 1-3, increases in years 4-8 but doesn't hit the 100% mark until the 9th year, one year later than the regular match scenario.

To recap, the conditions that must be met to reduce match are:

- 1) **The state serves at least 50% of eligible 4-year-olds in high-quality programs.**
- 2) **The state has a plan to expand access to high-quality programs.**
- 3) **The pre-kindergarten program moves toward universal access.**

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"A Voice for Southern
Children"

How to Use This Newsletter

If you're interested in advocacy, one of the most effective tools that you can have is access to information. This newsletter is provided as a service to locate and share information that we think will be helpful to you in your work at the state level and to keep you updated on what's happening in public policy.

You'll find information that:

- **Compares your state to other SECA states**—how you're doing, what issues you have in common, what the hot topics are in your states.
- **Brings the national scene to your fingertips** and gives you a perspective on how national events might impact you... You'll also receive information about where to find additional information.

We hope you'll find it helpful. Children need you to be their "voice" in your community and state.

This monthly newsletter is produced by Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director.

SECA strives to provide non-partisan and non-biased information

that is of interest to early childhood educators. Sign up at

http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/policy_newsletter_sign.php

to receive notice of its availability each month.

Thoughts from the Executive Director

It's an interesting time to put a new initiative (particularly one that is seen in some circles as the establishment of a new federal entitlement) into the legislative arena, but it appears that the strategy is to get the early education bill inserted as a priority into the current budget negotiations.

The discussion on the phone call was enlightening, particularly since the different national and state organizations began to provide their perspective on the legislation....you've got to have adult/parent engagement, how will this affect Head Start, what about the focus on infants/ toddlers, what happened to the

home visiting component of the President's proposal. One questioner asked to whom they needed to send ideas to change the legislation.

With the removal of the tobacco tax from the legislation, one of the roadblocks that we would see in the South has disappeared; however, the issue of creating a new program with a large funding base has not.

This newsletter provides a significant focus on the match requirement because it will be a major point of contention at the state level. Most pre-kindergarten programs have a significant amount of state funding, at least in the Southern states, that could serve as

match. However, as you begin to expand access, the state funds required to support that expansion long term may be a point of contention. (*Just go back to the state battles over the expansion of Medicaid....exactly the same issue with mixed results in the South.*)

If we have a chance of getting this legislation into consideration, we'll have to be smart and savvy advocates. *Who in your Congressional delegation might be agreeable to consider voting for the legislation? What arguments can you use?* (The organizations listed in this newsletter have tools on-line.)

The problem is that you have to move NOW: January 15th and a budget deal are right around the corner.
