

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Congress Gets Into the Act

With the historic precedent set through the President's State of the Union speech and his proposal to create universal Pre-K programs throughout the country, a group of Senators have filed bills that closely resemble the proposal and could implement parts of the President's proposal.

Senator Robert Casey (D-PA) unveiled his early education plan on March 6, 2013. The proposal is similar to one he proposed in 2007 and proposes new federal funding for states that "want to establish, enhance or expand their pre-K programs." The federal money would match new state spending. The plan would limit pre-K class size to 20 children and require teachers to have BA degrees.

"This is how we out-compete the Chinese.... This isn't just a nice thing to do for children, it's imperative."

Source: www.casey.senate.gov/newsroom

Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), along with

Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI), **Al Franken** (D-MN) and **Mark Begich** (D-AK), has proposed

The Ready to Learn Act that creates a competitive grant to fund early childhood programs and promote school readiness. The bill would create a new title within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Fifteen (15) percent of the funds would be used for investment in quality improvement. Twenty-five percent of grants provided to subgrantees would go to community based organizations.

Children from families up to 200% of the federal poverty level would be eligible to participate.



Casey



Murray

Begich

Hirono

Franken

"As a former preschool teacher, I've seen first-hand the impact that high-quality early childhood education has on the success of our children." Senator Murray Source: <http://www.murray.senate.gov>

Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) has also introduced a series of three bills that impact early childhood educators. **The Tax Relief for Early Educators Act** provides a tax credit. **The Preparing and Reinvesting in Early Education Act** creates new student loan forgiveness programs. **The Child Care Public-Private Partnership Act** seeks to create child care programs through business partnerships.

Source: <http://begich.senate.gov/education>

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Background Checks

Senators **Mikulski** (D-MD), **Burr** (R-NC), **Hatch** (R-UT), **Rubio** (R-FL), **Bennet** (D-CO), & **Boxer** (D-CA) filed the **Child Care Protection Act of 2013** in March.

For information go to www.mikulski.senate.gov

Congratulations Mississippi! The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013 is a Reality



Senator
Wiggins

This spring, Mississippi joined the other SECA states with the creation of a state prekindergarten program that is designed to be phased in over a period of years. (MS was previously the only SECA state without a state funded Pre-K program.)

Senate Bill 2395's author, Senator Brice Wiggins of Pascagoula, Mississippi, is an advocate of Pre-K education and has championed other aspects of education reform during his time in the Mississippi legislature. In regard to Pre-K legislation, Senator Wiggins said, *"They don't just need to be babysat, they need to be learning. If it is not going to happen at home or if they are not at home, then where they are, we need to get them to be ready for kindergarten."* Source: <http://bit.ly/ZHXQIB>, retrieved May 13, 2013.

A companion House bill was filed and contained some significant differences. The bill ended up in a conference committee to resolve those differences, and a final version of the bill was approved.

Although the Legislature had reached agreement and the main sponsor was a Republican, there was some concern that Mississippi Governor, Republican Phil Bryant, would veto the bill. *"I think April 25*

is the deadline he has to sign it, so we are optimistic he is going to do that and not do a veto." Senator Wiggins

On April 18, 2013, the bill was approved by Governor Bryant and the new Mississippi pre-K program became a reality.

The **Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013** includes provisions for:

- ◆ A phase-in of the voluntary program.
- ◆ Funding levels for the initial phases.
- ◆ Designation of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council, and Mississippi Department of Education, as the responsible agencies.
- ◆ Eligibility criteria for participating programs.
- ◆ Qualifications for staff.
- ◆ Tax credit opportunities for donors to the program.

Who's Eligible?

Children: The program applies to all children who have not entered kindergarten but will have attained four years of age on or before September 1 of a school year.

Programs: An Early Learning Collaborative must be formed to submit an application. The Collaborative must be composed at a minimum of a public school district and/or a local Head Start affiliate, private or parochial schools, or one of more licensed child care centers. (Child care

centers must score at least a "3" on the state's Quality Rating and Improvement Scale.)

How Will it Work?

- ⇒ The MS Department of Education will be responsible for the grant making process, must certify comprehensive early learning standards, and monitor the programs. The State Early Childhood Advisory Council will assist the Department with implementation.
- ⇒ The "lead partner" in the Collaborative must be a public school district or other nonprofit entity with the instructional expertise and operational capacity to manage the collaborative's program. This entity will serve as the fiscal agent to administer any state and local funds.
- ⇒ The curriculum must be "research-based", the teachers must meet certain requirements and 15 hours of annual professional development are required.
- ⇒ The funds will be distributed at a cost per child of \$2,150 in a full-day program and \$1,075 per child in a half-day program. A local match of 1:1 is required and can include in-kind donations.
- ⇒ For collaboratives that can generate contributions to the program, a state tax credit is available to the donors.

To read a copy of the bill, go to <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2013/pdf/SB/2300-2399/SB2395SG.pdf>

Funding for Pre-K: Two Reports, Two Different Conclusions

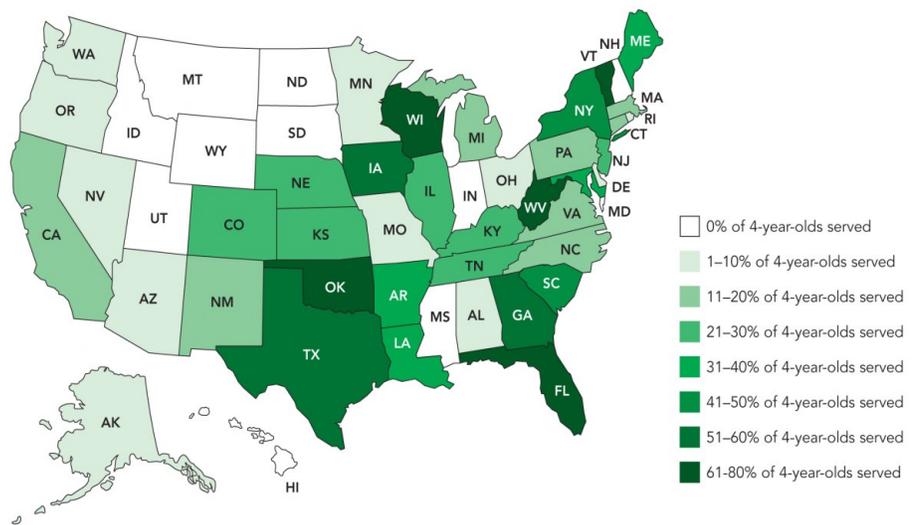
The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) released its latest state preschool yearbook, *The State of Preschool 2012*, and it reflected an alarming trend nationally in the amount of funding available to support pre-K programs. **State funding for pre-K decreased by \$548 million in 2011-2012, the largest one year drop in the history of this research.**

According to the report, this reflected to some extent the pressure on state budgets and cuts made over the period of the recession, but it noted that these reductions reflected a long term trend that started before the recession. The loss of \$127 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funds (ARRA) also contributed to the decline. (These funds were used in previous years to blunt those cuts.)

State Pre-K funding per child decreased by \$442, for the first time falling below \$4,000 per child, declining in 27 of 40 states. Only 12 states increased funding per child in 2011-2012.

Only 15 states plus D.C. could be verified as providing enough per-

FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED IN STATE PRE-K



Source: *State of Preschool 2012*, National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012, <http://www.nieer.org>, Retrieved 5/13/13

child funding to meet all 10 benchmarks for quality standards. More than half a million children or 42% of nationwide enrollment, were served in programs that met fewer than half of the quality benchmarks.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) released a report in April entitled *State Pre-K Funding: 2012-13 School Year*. This report painted a more optimistic picture about funding for Pre-K and the support for the program that continues throughout the nation.

This report found that most states have protected Pre-K from budget cuts that have impact-

ed K-12 education. **ECS found that funding for Pre-K programs serving 4-year-olds increased by \$181 million (3.6%) to a total of \$5.3 billion in 2012-13.** For the 2012-2013 year, 24 states increased funding, 8 maintained flat funding, 8 decreased funding and 11 had no program. Here is the SECA state breakdown:

Increased funding: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia

Decreased funding: Georgia, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia

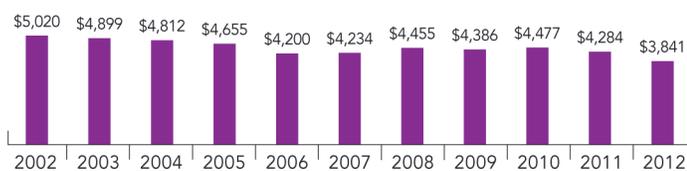
Flat Funding: Arkansas, Kentucky

Sources:

State of Preschool 2012, National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012, <http://www.nieer.org>, Retrieved 5/13/13

State Pre-K Funding: 2012-2013 School Year, www.ecs.org, Retrieved 5/13/13

AVERAGE STATE SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED (2012 DOLLARS)



Source: *State of Preschool 2012*, National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012, <http://www.nieer.org>, Retrieved 5/13/13

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"A Voice for Southern
Children"

We're on the Web!
www.southernearlychildhood.org

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.

What's Happening in the SECA States

Florida

The Florida Senate tied on a vote to allow a "parent trigger" option in the state after the legislation passed the Florida House. This was the second year for defeat of the proposal.

A "parent trigger" allows a majority of parents in a struggling school district to petition to implement significant changes in the way the school operates. Proponents argued that the option would allow parents to have a stronger voice in the education of their children. Opponents, including the Florida PTA, argued that such petitions might enable for-profit companies to take control of the schools.

Louisiana

State schools superintendent John White has cancelled an arrangement with inBloom, an organization that has been storing student data on the state's behalf. Superintendent White has decided to review the system and the confidentiality of student data that included age, sex and grade level. Data on individual students is provided to technology and content providers in order to improve classroom instruction, according to inBloom. **Georgia** and **Kentucky** are slated to conduct pilot programs with inBloom this year.

South Carolina

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that the U.S. De-

partment of Education should not have reduced the state's special education funding before the state filed an appeal and that the state should get its money back. Funding was removed from South Carolina because it had not maintained state funding levels from the past year, a requirement to draw down the funds.

Texas

The El Paso School District will have a state-appointed board of managers. The elected board was removed by the state after a cheating scandal that sent the district superintendent to prison. The change had to be approved under the Voting Rights Act of 1965.