

State Early Childhood Advisory Councils

Southern Early Childhood Association



SECA Policy Brief

July 2009

Updated December 2009

Background

In 2007, Congress reauthorized the Head Start program through the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, PL 110-134. The bill included many requirements for Head Start and one component of particular interest to the early childhood community at large.

Sec. 642B, Head Start Collaboration: State Early Education and Care, included a language that authorized the establishment of a State Early Childhood Advisory Council by the Governor of each state. Although the enabling language was included in the reauthorization, the funding to support that requirement was not realized until 2009 with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

On May 11, 2009, the US Department of Health and Human Services sent letters to the Governors of each state stating that funding was available to establish the Councils. The letter included the basic requirements for accessing the funding to create the Councils and provided the allocation of grant funds that would be available to each state. (See **Appendix A** for the allocations to the SECA states.)

The grant applications are not due until August 2010, so there is time for early childhood advocates to impact how these funds will be utilized, who will be selected to serve on the Council and how the plan will be developed. As states develop applications (or make decisions not to apply), this brief will be amended to provide state specific information for the SECA states.

The Purpose of the Early Childhood Advisory Councils

PL 110-134 outlines the responsibilities of the Advisory Councils. The Councils shall:

- “Conduct a **periodic statewide needs assessment** concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry, including an assessment of the availability of high-quality pre-kindergarten services for low-income children in the State.”
- “Identify **opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination** among Federally-funded and State-funded child development, child care, and early childhood

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education programs and services, including collaboration and coordination among State agencies responsible for administering such programs.”

- “Develop recommendations **for increasing the overall participation of children** in existing Federal, State, and local child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.”
- “Develop **recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system** for public early childhood education and development programs and services throughout the State.”
- “Develop recommendations regarding **statewide professional development and career advancement plans** for early childhood educators in the State.”
- “Assess the **capacity and effectiveness of 2-and 4-year public and private institutions of higher education** in the State toward supporting the development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which such institutions have in place articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans, and practice or internships for students to spend time in a Head Start or pre-kindergarten program.”
- “Make recommendations for **improvements in State early learning standards** and undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.”

Additionally the State Advisory Council shall:

1. “**Hold public hearings** and provide an opportunity for public comment on the activities described above. The State Advisory Council shall submit a statewide strategic report addressing the activities described to the State Director of Head Start Collaboration and the Governor of the State.”
2. “After submission of a statewide strategic report, the **State Advisory Council shall meet periodically** to review any implementation of the recommendations in such report and any changes in State and local needs.”

Source: PL 110-134, <http://eclkc.ohs.act.gov/hslc>

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Council Members

The law specifies the composition of the Council. The Governor appoints the members of the Council and the following constituencies must be represented .

- A representative of the state agency that is responsible for child care.
- A representative of the state educational agency.
- A representative of local education agencies (school districts).
- A representative of institutions of higher education in the state.
- A representative of local providers of early childhood education and development services.
- A representative from Head Start agencies located in the State, including migrant and seasonal Head Start programs and Indian Head Start programs.
- The State Director of Head Start Collaboration.
- A representative of the state agency responsible for programs under section 619 or Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- A representative of the state agency responsible for health or mental health care.
- Representatives of other entities determined to be relevant by the Governor of the State.

Source: PL 110-134, <http://eclkc.ohs.act.gov/hslc>

The law does not specify the maximum number of appointments to the Council.

Grant Specifics: What We Know to Date

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The law includes some specific information about what a grant application must include and information about match and reporting requirements.

- The grant is for a period of **3 years**.
- The **application** must include:
 - A **plan** that specifies what activities will be undertaken and how the state will meet the objectives outlined in the law.
 - Information on the **effective use of the funds** for each fiscal year of the grant to create an early childhood education and care system by developing or enhancing programs and activities consistent with the statewide strategic report.
 - A description of the **state’s early learning standards**
 - The State’s **goals** for increasing the number of children entering kindergarten ready to learn.
 - Information identifying the **agency or joint interagency office** and **individual** designated to carry out the activities.
 - A description of how the state plans to **continue activities** beyond the grant period.
- The grant may not be for less than **\$500,000** for the 3 year period.
- States must use this grant to “**facilitate the development or enhancement of high-quality systems of early childhood education and care designed to improve school preparedness ...**”
- The federal share of the total amount committed to the Councils is 30%. **The state must provide a 70% match of non-Federal resources.**

Source: Excerpted from *PL 110-134*, <http://eclkc.ohs.act.gov/hslc>

Eligible Activities

PL 110-134 provides a “laundry list” of eligible activities:

- ❖ **Promoting school preparedness** of children from birth through school entry.
- ❖ Encouraging families and caregivers to engage in **highly interactive, developmentally and age-appropriate activities** to improve children’s early social, emotional and cognitive development.

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- ❖ Supporting the **transition** of young children to school.
- ❖ Fostering **parental and family involvement** in the early education of young children.

Source: *Source: PL 110-134*, <http://eclkc.ohs.act.gov/hslc>

Allowable Match

Experts from Center for Best Practices, National Governor’s Association, have provided information concerning allowable state match to meet the 70% match requirement. According to the Center, the match may be cash or in-kind contributions. Allowable match includes:

- ✓ **Investments** in early childhood education and development programs.
- ✓ **Professional development** of the early childhood workforce.
- ✓ **In-kind contributions** of real property, equipment and supplies.
- ✓ **Services** provided by state employees, consultants and ECAC members with direct and tangible benefits for the ECAC.

Source: <http://birthtofivepolicy.org>

Challenges for States

With many state economies in dire straits, the match requirement may prove to be the most onerous component of the grant application. However, the economies of the SECA states on the whole have fared much better than many other states, and the substantial investments that have been made in the South in early childhood education may prove to be a deciding factor on whether the grants are declined or accepted.

One deciding factor will be how flexible the US Department of Health and Human Services is in defining what is eligible under the match category. Information on application content and format is available at:

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/sac>.

For states with existing coordinating bodies that are funded through state funds, the match contribution may be much easier to define. Additionally, many of the early childhood program activities currently underway in the SECA states may be eligible as match.

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Questions to Ask

- Is your state going to accept or decline the grant?
- If your state is accepting the grant, who is the “point person” that has been appointed by the Governor to oversee the application and implementation process?
- Will the Advisory Council be an existing state body or is a new group being formed? (See **Appendix B** for information on decisions that SECA states have made concerning designating an existing body or creating a new entity.)
- Will the Governor’s Office be reaching out to groups and constituencies to determine who will be appointed to the Council? Do you have an opportunity to submit your name or make nominations?
- Where will the grant be administered (what state agency) and how does this fit with other programs and initiatives within that agency?
- Will the role of the Head Start Collaboration Director be a prominent one and how will the Collaboration Office function with the State Advisory Council?
- Who will staff the Advisory Council? Will this be a full-time staff person or will it be a duty that will be added to someone’s job description?
- How will the public hearings be coordinated and reported? How will input received during those hearings be integrated into the state plan?
- After the plan is developed, will public comments on the plan be solicited? Who will guide the plan development process? Will there be opportunity to modify the plan and application prior to submission to DHHS?
- Will the Advisory Council have a direct connection to state agency heads and Governor’s Office? If not, will the Advisory Council’s input be valuable and how will it be utilized?

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- Are there innovations that can be accomplished through this grant? Have plans been on the back burner because of funding and can those plans now be brought out to have significant impact on the system?

Appendix A

State Early Childhood Advisory Councils Grant Allocations to SECA States

(Grant allocations are for 3 years.)

| State | DHHS Grant Funds | Match Required to Access Total Grant Funds Available | Total Funds/ In-kind Available |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Alabama</i> | \$1,797,985 | \$4,195,298 | \$5,993,283 |
| <i>Arkansas</i> | \$1,174,518 | \$2,740,542 | \$3,915,060 |
| <i>Florida</i> | \$4,818,802 | \$11,243,871 | \$16,062,673 |
| <i>Georgia</i> | \$3,476,312 | \$8,111,395 | \$11,877,707 |
| <i>Kentucky</i> | \$1,565,631 | \$3,653,139 | \$5,218,770 |
| <i>Louisiana</i> | \$2,000,023 | \$4,666,720 | \$6,666,743 |
| <i>Mississippi</i> | \$1,512,067 | \$3,528,156 | \$5,040,223 |
| <i>Oklahoma</i> | \$1,506,605 | \$3,515,412 | \$5,022,017 |
| <i>South Carolina</i> | \$1,628,299 | \$3,799,364 | \$5,427,663 |
| <i>Tennessee</i> | \$2,254,123 | \$5,259,620 | \$7,513,743 |
| <i>Texas</i> | \$11,274,474 | \$26,307,106 | \$37,581,580 |
| <i>Virginia</i> | \$1,645,761 | \$3,840,109 | \$5,485,870 |
| <i>West Virginia</i> | \$642,214 | \$1,498,499 | \$2,140,713 |

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Appendix B

SECA State Actions Early Childhood Advisory Councils

| State | Decline or Accept Grant | Create New Council | Utilize Existing State Entity |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Alabama</i> | Accept | Alabama Early Childhood Advisory Council (likely) | |
| <i>Arkansas</i> | Accept | | Arkansas Early Childhood Commission |
| <i>Florida</i> | Accept | Establish a subcommittee of the Florida Children & Youth Cabinet (likely) | |
| <i>Georgia</i> | Accept | Establish a subcommittee to the Children's Cabinet (likely) | |
| <i>Kentucky</i> | Accept | | Kentucky Early Childhood Task Force /attached to Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (likely) |
| <i>Louisiana</i> | Accept | | Bright Start Steering Committee (likely) |
| <i>Mississippi</i> | Accept | State Early Childhood Advisory Council (announced) | |
| <i>Oklahoma</i> | Accept | Smart Start Oklahoma Board (announced) | |
| <i>S Carolina</i> | Accept | First Steps to School Readiness Board (announced) | |
| <i>Tennessee</i> | Accept | | The Tennessee Pre-K Advisory Committee is being |

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| | | | reorganized as the Tennessee Early Learning Council and will fulfill the duties outlined in PL 110-134. |
| <i>Texas</i> | Accept | Texas State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care (announced) | |
| <i>Virginia</i> | Accept | | Governor's Working group on Early Childhood (likely) |
| <i>West Virginia</i> | Accept | | Partners Implementing an Early Care & Education System (PIECES) |

Source: The Next Step in Systems-Building: Early Childhood Advisory Councils and Federal Efforts to Promote Policy Alignment in Early Childhood, Appendix 1, New American Foundation, November 2009.

Note: Those listed as "announced" includes those that have been formally designated as the ECAC through a letter from the governor to the Department of HHS and those states where the council has been designated as the ECAC by executive order or legislation.

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