



July 21, 2009

Early Learning Challenge Fund Proposal
U.S. Rep George Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee

Overall Goal: A challenge to the states to compete for results-oriented standards reform, to ensure that more disadvantaged children enter kindergarten ready for success.

- Results-oriented, standards reform of state early learning programs serving children birth to age 5, to promote child development and school readiness
- Establish high standards of quality across settings
- Fund and implement quality initiatives that improve the skills and effectiveness of early learning providers to increase the number of disadvantaged children who participate in comprehensive and high quality early learning programs
- Ensure that a greater number of disadvantaged children enter kindergarten with the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and abilities to succeed in school
- Increase parents' ability to access comprehensive and high quality early learning programs across settings for their children

States seeking to compete for an ELCG must:

- Agree to implement pathways that lead to a greater number of disadvantaged children in high quality programs; specify goals and benchmarks, specify current baseline of the number of disadvantaged children in high quality early learning programs
- Describe how the state will implement a system of early learning programs and services that include the following components:
 - State early learning and development standards, including birth to age 3, that include social and emotional, cognitive, and physical development domains, and approaches to learning that are developmentally appropriate for all children aligned with K-3 standards
 - A program rating system that builds on licensing requirements that is designed to improve the quality and effectiveness across settings; integrates evidence-based program quality standards; integrates the state's early learning and development standards to improve instructional practices; addresses staff qualifications and professional development; provides financial incentives to help programs meet higher levels of quality; and includes a mechanism for public awareness of program levels
 - A system of program review and monitoring that is designed to rate providers and to assess and improve program practices, instructional practices, and the classroom environment
 - A process to support early learning programs integrating instructional and programmatic practices
 - Minimum preservice early childhood development and education training requirements for providers in early learning programs

- A comprehensive plan for professional development that includes training and education that is sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused and leads toward a credential or degree and is tied to improved compensation
- An outreach strategy to promote parent engagement and understanding about quality programs and the state's rating system (including the rating of the program in which their child is enrolled)
- A coordinated system to facilitate screening, referral, and services related to health, mental health, disability, and family support
- A process for evaluating school readiness
- A coordinated data infrastructure to facilitate uniform collection of data about the quality of programs, the children participating in such programs, and the qualifications and compensation of providers; and alignment and interoperability between the data system for early learning programs and data systems for K-12
- A description of how the state's early learning policies, including child care policies, facilitate access to high quality early learning programs for low income children
- An assurance that grants will be used to improve the quality of early learning programs across a range of settings
- An assurance that grants will be used to supplement, not supplant
- A description of how the state will coordinate the purposes of the grant with activities under CCDBG, Section 619 and Part C (preschool and infants/toddlers) IDEA programs, Title 1, state-funded Pre-k, Head Start, and other early learning programs

Two Types of Grants: (\$1 billion per year for 8 years; \$8 billion total)

- (1) Quality Pathways Grants: Grants for states that have demonstrated significant progress. 5 year grants that are renewable. States would establish goals to increase the percentage of children served in the highest quality settings as determined by the state. In the 2nd year, states may apply to the Secretary to reserve up to 25 percent to expand access to programs offering full day services (states must match at 20 percent; a hardship waiver is allowed). Improvement plans required if state encounters barriers to reaching its goals
- (2) Development Grants: Grants for states not as far along on the early learning front. 3 year grants, not renewable

Purpose/uses:

- Targeted to develop quality systems – to improve credentials (tied to compensation), quality standards, classroom observation assessments to improve instruction, promote data driven decisions, integrating early learning standards into program classrooms.
- Building capacity to promote parent engagement and parent understanding
- Building capacity to expand ability for early screening to link children to services
- Establish, expand, and strengthen Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)
- Development and implement school readiness standards that inform the quality improvement process
- Implementation of state data systems

Priority for Grant Receipt: Priority consideration would be given to states using a portion of CCDBG quality funds to increase the number of disadvantaged children in high quality settings, that commit to significantly increasing state expenditures on early learning programs, and demonstrate efforts to build public-private partnerships.

Fund Split: 65 percent of the funds would go to Quality Pathway Grants. 35 percent would go to Development Grants. There is no maximum or minimum on grant amounts. Beginning in 2013, 85 percent for Pathway Grants.

Match: Pathway grants are matched 10 percent first and second year, 15 percent third year, and 20 percent fourth and subsequent years. Development grants are matched 20 percent in the first year, 25 percent in the second year; and 30 percent in the third year. Allows for hardship waiver for both grants.

Maintenance of Effort: State spending on early learning programs and services shall not be less than the level of spending for fiscal year 2006.

Fund Reservations:

- 2 percent jointly to administer this title with the Secretary of Health and Human Services
- 3 percent for research
- .25 percent for competitive grants for Indian tribes to develop and implement school readiness plans

The bill does not define what high quality is and does not define what school readiness is. The end goal is for more disadvantaged children to spend more of their time in high quality care.