



Early Learning: Ensuring Success in School and in Life

“By ensuring excellent early learning and support for every child, as the foundation of a world-class cradle-to-career education system, we'll help to guarantee America's success in the 21st century.”

- Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

From the campaign trail to the White House, President Barack Obama’s commitment to improving the quality and consistency of early learning programs and services has never wavered. He has said, "It will be the goal of this administration to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education from the day they are born to the day they begin a career."

By offering strong services and interventions in those early years, we have a chance to reduce — and ultimately prevent — the achievement gap.

The research is clear: participation in high-quality early learning programs results in short- and long-term positive outcomes for children, including improved high school graduation, and higher college attendance and completion rates.



The U.S. Department of Education held a series of Listening and Learning sessions Spring 2010 around four early learning topics. In these discussions, the Department heard from experts, stakeholders, families and other members of the public on critical issues, from building a seamless preschool through third grade continuum, to promoting family engagement; and from improving the early learning workforce, to developing appropriate early learning standards and comprehensive assessments across a broad range of domains.

The Department’s Early Learning Goal

The Department of Education is committed to early education through its’ Early Learning Initiative. The Department’s goal is to improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through third grade, especially those with high needs, so that children are on track for being college- and career-ready. Through continuous efforts within the early learning community the Department is committed to:

- Increasing access to high-quality early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially for children at risk for school failure;
- Improving the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early learning professionals have the skills and abilities necessary to improve young children’s health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes;
- Improving the capacity of states to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems, whose data are used to improve child outcomes and to ensure programs are monitored for effectiveness.

Department Investments in Early Learning

The Department has made early learning an integral component of its reform efforts and incorporated early learning priorities in a wide range of programs and funding streams. Some of the current investments include:

Title I

Since the enactment of the ESEA in 1965, the use of Title I funds have been allowable to provide services to eligible children birth to school entry. Title I funds can be used to support high-quality school and community-based preschool and K-3rd programs.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA Part C ensures that appropriate early intervention services are made available to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. IDEA Part B provides special education and related services for children with disabilities, ages three through five, as well as for children with disabilities up through age 21.

Investing in Innovation Fund (i3)

Of the 49 highest-rated i3 applicants, 13 (or 27%) addressed the competitive priority on early learning to improve outcomes for high-need children birth through third grade.



Promise Neighborhoods

The Department's Promise Neighborhoods Program will fund efforts that coordinate the health, social services and educational resources of high-need communities, providing pre-natal through college services for children and families.

Ready to Learn Television

This program supports the development of educational programming and materials to increase school readiness for young children.

Race to the Top

The \$4 billion Race to the Top fund includes an invitational priority to support states with early learning programs that improve school readiness and the transition between preschool and kindergarten. Of the 11 winning states and the District of Columbia, nine wrote to the invitational priority.

An Invitation to Join the Early Learning Listserv

The Department's Early Learning Listserv is a free service offered by the Early Learning Initiative to keep members of the early learning community up-to-date on information that is relevant to programs and activities serving children birth through third grade. Please join on our Web page at www.ed.gov/early-learning.