



# FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

EARLY CHILDHOOD:

## IMPACT OF THE PRESIDENT'S FY 2012 BUDGET REQUEST ON EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

On February 14, President Obama presented his \$3.7 trillion budget request for fiscal year 2012 (FY12) to Congress, outlining his spending priorities for the coming year. As expected, the budget reflects the serious economic challenges posed by the federal budget deficit, and proposes to trim or terminate more than 200 federal programs. Consistent with this theme, the budget includes a host of freezes and cuts across all non-security, discretionary federal programs.

### A Note on Comparing Spending Levels

Because funding for fiscal year 2011 (FY11) has not yet been agreed to – the federal government is currently operating under a continuing resolution (CR) that is set to expire on March 4, 2011 – it is difficult to compare the President's budget proposals to current year spending levels. For the most part, the President's budget compares its FY12 funding request to FY10 spending – however, it also compares some of its FY12 budget requests to current year funding with an assumption that the current CR will be extended to the end of FY11 (September 30, 2011). On February 18, the House of Representatives passed a funding bill for the remainder of FY11, containing approximately \$61 billion in cuts to current spending levels, a significant and draconian approach to critical services for children and families. The Senate will take up its own version of FY11 spending when it returns from recess on February 28. As a result, we cannot currently make accurate comparisons between the President's FY12 budget and FY11 spending.

### The President's Request

The President's commitment to the importance of early learning and development is reflected in proposed funding for programs for children from birth through age five, children with disabilities, and children who are English learners. The budget request also expands the focus on early learning and development from birth through third grade, supporting the crucial connection between high quality early development and learning, and later academic and social success.

The proposals in the President's FY 2012 budget most significant for early childhood programs are below:

- ***Child Care and Development Fund:*** The President's request increases overall spending on child care by \$1.3 billion, for a total of \$6.3 billion, an increase of 26% over FY10 funding. Child care subsidies allow parents the peace of mind they need to find and afford quality child care for their children while they work and high quality child care programs provide babies and toddlers with the developmentally appropriate care and early learning they need to successfully move on to the next critical stages of learning and development. The Child Care and Development Fund would serve approximately 1.7 million children with this proposal, and the increase will provide an additional 220,000 children and families with child care subsidies.

- **Head Start and Early Head Start:** The President's budget request increase funding for Head Start by a total of \$866 million, bringing total funding for Head Start to \$8.1 billion, a 11.9% increase over FY10 funding. Head Start and Early Head Start provides high quality and comprehensive early learning and development to disadvantaged children through educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to children and families. The funding in the President's request represents services for more than 968,000 children. The budget request maintains increased investments from ARRA so that children who came into the program with the downturn in the economy will not lose services. The budget request supports technical assistance for low performing programs so that such programs can be strengthened and utilize evidence-based best practices.
- **Early Learning Challenge Fund:** The President's budget would create the Early Learning Challenge Fund, an innovative program to assist states in creating unified systems of early learning and development for children from birth to kindergarten entry, including children with disabilities and English learners. The fund would be administered jointly by the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services and initially funded at \$350 million.
- **Home Visiting:** The President's request includes \$350 million for home visitation programs (now mandatory under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act), an increase of \$250 million over the FY10 level. This program will provide evidence-based home visiting programs to low-income families in at-risk communities.
- **Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities:** The budget request provides an additional \$50 million in IDEA Part C formula grants to help states provide services for infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two. This request increases the average state allocation by approximately \$1 million and will help serve an additional 360,000 infants and toddlers. The request will further encourage states to extend early intervention services to children through age 5.
- **Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities:** This program is level funded at \$374 million (IDEA Part B) and helps states provide public education in the least restrictive environment for children ages 3 through 5.

#### Connecting Early Childhood Development and Learning and Successful K-12 Education:

The President's Budget provides a focus on high quality learning from birth through third grade and includes early learning goals and incentives in multiple Department of Education programs. This focus upon and linking together of early childhood learning and development with education in the K-12 years is fundamental to ensuring that children enter kindergarten ready to learn and continue on the path to productive citizenship and a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. The scientific evidence of the importance of early learning and development upon later success cannot be overstated. As Dr. James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, has stated, "Early childhood education fosters cognitive skills along with attentiveness, motivation, self-control and sociability – the character skills that turn knowledge into know-how and people into productive citizens."

- **Promise Neighborhoods:** Based on the Harlem Children's Zone model, Promise Neighborhoods provide a comprehensive birth through adulthood system of care, early learning, parenting, community education and support that has proven highly successful in improving educational achievement and life outcomes for children and families in low-income at-risk communities. The President's proposal provides \$150 million for

Promise Neighborhoods and allows the Secretary of Education to give priority to applicants that proposal to implement a comprehensive system of early learning and development.

- ***College and Career-Ready Students:*** (formerly Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies): The President's proposal includes \$14.8 billion in formula grants to the states with this funding stream, a 2% increase over the FY10 level. The proposal encourages school districts and schools to use the flexibility in these funds for investment in high quality early learning programs, as well as professional development for early learning educators.
- ***Race to the Top:*** The President's proposal includes \$900 million for Race to the Top, which is designed to create innovation and reform in the states and school districts. Improved early learning outcomes is one of the priorities that will be considered in state competitive grant proposals for this funding.
- ***Investing in Innovation:*** Proposed funding for this competitive grant program is \$300 million, which seeks innovative and evidence-based strategies that improve learning, and includes improved early learning outcomes as one of its priorities for funding.
- ***Effective Teaching and Learning for a Complete Education Programs:*** The President has proposed a total of \$835 million in 3 separate programs that focus on improving teaching and learning, including comprehensive literacy, for students from preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

It's important to recognize that the President's budget represents only the Administration's wish list of priorities, providing a blueprint for Congress to consider as it begins the process of allocating federal dollars for spending on programs. Given the new composition of Congress, we expect that the Congress's spending priorities will look very different from the President's.

As the budget season commences, First Focus urges Congress to act swiftly to maintain programs that serve as lifelines to our nation's children, ensuring that their basic needs can be met. Deficit-reduction cannot and should not be undertaken at the expense of our children's well-being; early learning and development, along with comprehensive health care, sets the stage for all future development and success.

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First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization that is committed to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions.

**For more information** about First Focus's Early Childhood Portfolio visit [www.firstfocus.net](http://www.firstfocus.net), or contact Morna Murray, Vice President and Counsel, Children's Policy and Strategy ([mornam@firstfocus.net](mailto:mornam@firstfocus.net))