

As a result of increased national attention on the numerous benefits of early education, a number of plans have been proposed to increase access to high-quality pre-Kindergarten (pre-K). Most recently, on November 13<sup>th</sup> the Strong Start for America's Children Act was introduced in the House by Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and Richard Hanna (R-NY), and in the Senate by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and a number of other Senate Democrats. Below is a chart with a brief overview of pending proposals, with additional details below the chart.

	Strong Start for America's Children S.1697/H.R.3461 (Sen. Harkin/Reps. Miller and Hanna)	President Obama's Pre-K Plan	Prepare All Kids Act S.502/H.R.1368 (Sen. Casey/Rep. Maloney)	Pre-K Act S.519/H.R.1041 (Sen. Hirono/Rep. McCarthy)	Ready to Learn Act S.322 (Sen. Murray)
Are the grants formula or competitive?	Formula	Formula	Formula	Formula, in two tiers based on quality.	Competitive
What Department administers the grants?	The Department of Education in consultation with Health and Human Services (HHS).	The Department of Education in consultation with HHS.	The Department of Education in consultation with HHS.	The Department of Education in consultation with HHS.	The Department of Education in consultation with HHS.
State or federal funding?	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
What are the funding set-asides?	Optional 20 percent for quality in first 4 years, and optional 15 percent for infants and toddlers from birth to age 3.	None specified.	15 percent for infants and toddlers from birth to age 3, and 10 percent to extend pre-K to full day and full year.	10 percent to serve infants and toddlers from birth to age 3.	15 percent to improve quality.
What are the class size requirements?	Must be evidence-based.	Small class sizes.	Maximum class size of 20 children.	Meet nationally established best practices.	Maximum class size of 20 children.
What are child to staff ratio requirements?	Must be evidence-based.	Low staff to child ratio.	10 students for every teacher.	Meet nationally established best practices.	10 students for every teacher.
What are the teacher requirements?	Bachelor's degree (BA) in early childhood education or related field, or meet a number of other requirements (see below).	Bachelor's Degree.	BA with specialization in early childhood education or early childhood development within 6 years of bill becoming law.	Associate's degree or higher in early childhood education and states must have a plan for all teachers to have a BA within 5 years.	Must have a BA or advanced degree in early childhood education or a BA and specialized training in early childhood development within two years.
Targeted Age	4-year-olds first, then 3-year-olds.	4-year-olds first, then 3-year-olds and children in kindergarten.	Children ages 3-5.	Children ages 3-5.	4-year-olds.
Targeted Income	Under 200 percent FPL first, then any income level.	Under 200 percent FPL first, then any income level.	Priority for children under 200 percent FPL.	Priority for low-income children.	Under 200 percent FPL.

## A Comparison of Pre-K Plans

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What are the curriculum requirements?	Developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, with an appropriate learning environment as well.	Developmentally appropriate and research-based, with an appropriate learning environment as well.	Evidence and research based, meet the developmental needs of children, and support children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.	Research-based and promote children's language, literacy, math, science, creative arts skills, and social, emotional, and physical development.	Developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate with valid and reliable assessments to improve instruction.
Are there wraparound services for children?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Optional
What is the maintenance of effort requirement?	Per-child and aggregate expenditures must be equal to or greater than the previous fiscal year.	None specified	Expenditures on early childhood must be equal to or greater than the previous fiscal year.	Total and per-child expenditures on pre-K and total expenditures on child care at the previous fiscal year level or above.	Per-child expenditures must be equal to or greater than the previous fiscal year.
Are there reporting and monitoring requirements?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Can the children be tested?	Test scores can't be used for rewards or sanctions for individual children, teachers, or providers.	Not specified.	Test scores can't be used for rewards or sanctions for individual children, teachers, or providers.	Test scores can't be used for rewards or sanctions for individual children or teachers.	There is no prohibition against testing for rewards or sanctions for individual children or teachers.
Where does the money come from?	Appropriation levels are authorized through FY2023.	Increase the tobacco tax by 94 cents per pack of cigarettes.	Discretionary appropriations of such funds as necessary.	Discretionary appropriations of such funds as necessary.	Discretionary appropriations of such funds as necessary.

### How is the money distributed?

The Strong Start for America's Children Act authorizes formula grants awarded to states with pre-K that meets certain quality requirements. Qualifying states receive a grant based on the number of 4-year-old children in families living under 200 percent FPL. A total of \$26.87 billion is allotted for the first five years of the formula grants. States then subgrant to local school districts, Head Start programs, and other pre-K providers that meet certain quality requirements. An additional \$750 million of discretionary funding in FY2014 is designated as Preschool Development Grants, which are competitive grants awarded to states for the creation or improvement of state funded pre-K. Preschool Development Grants are available to states that currently don't have high quality state-funded pre-K and do not qualify for the formula grants described above.

President Obama's proposal would award formula grants worth a total of \$75 billion of mandatory funding over 10 years to states that offer state-funded pre-K that meets certain quality requirements. Qualifying states receive a grant based on the relative share of 4-year-olds from families living under 200 percent of the FPL. Like the proposal above, an additional \$750 million of discretionary funding in FY2014 was designated as Preschool Development Grants, competitive grants to states that currently don't have high quality state-funded pre-K to be used for the creation and implementation of state funded pre-K.

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The Prepare All Kids Act awards formula grants to states, which then make subgrants to pre-K providers to establish, expand, or enhance high quality full-day pre-K. Subgrants are made to qualified pre-K programs, which are pre-K providers, Head Start agencies, child care providers, schools, or other entities that provide pre-K. This gives states flexibility to choose what types of providers receive the grants and allows for a mixed delivery system.

The Pre-K Act awards grants in two tiers. States in the first tier, or Qualified States, must have state funded pre-K that meets certain quality requirements, such as teacher-student ratios and staff training requirements. Qualified states receive formula grants. States in the second tier, known as Selected States, receive competitive grants based on their plans to ensure their state funded pre-K will be eligible as a Qualified State within two years. Subgrants for both tiers are made by the state to qualified pre-K providers that are funded in whole or in part by the state.

The Ready to Learn Act, on the other hand, awards competitive grants to states to pay for the federal share of subgrants to pre-K providers, including schools, child care providers, Head Start agencies, and other providers. At least 25 percent of each state grant must go to community-based pre-K.

### **How will the state and federal government share the funding?**

In the Strong Start for America's Children Act, states contribute a 10 percent match of federal funds in the first year, with the share increasing each year. After 8 years, states will contribute an equal share of the federal amount. If a state's pre-K initiative enrolls at least half of the 4-year-olds living below 200 percent FPL and if the state has a plan to expand access to pre-K to children from families whose income is above 200 percent FPL, that state's share begins at 5 percent and increases to an equal share of the federal amount after 9 years.

The President's proposal included a provision that states must contribute a 10 percent match of federal funds in the first year, with the share increasing incrementally each year to 100 percent after 8 years and 300 percent after 10 years. The state share is lower if that state's pre-K initiative enrolls a certain number of children from middle income families.

On the other hand, the Prepare All Kids Act and the Ready to Learn Act both have 50 percent cost sharing between states and the federal government. The Pre-K Act includes a 30 percent match for Qualified States and a 50 percent match for Selected States.

### **How will states and pre-K providers use the grant funds?**

The Strong Start for America's Children Act allows states to use the money to ensure that pre-K is high quality and available to 4-year-olds living below 200 percent FLP, for professional development, to ensure that pre-K teacher salaries are comparable to K-12 teacher salaries, to support teacher acquisition of early learning credentials, to monitor and evaluate pre-K providers, to address the needs of dual language learners, homeless children, children with disabilities, children in foster care, and children who receive free or reduced price lunch, and to encourage coordination and partnership among all early learning initiatives. Pre-K providers use their grant funds to provide affordable high-quality pre-K to 4-year-olds.

Similarly, the President's proposal called on states to use grant funds to ensure that pre-K is high quality and available to 4-year-olds living below 200 FLP, then to increase availability of full-day kindergarten and pre-K for 3-year-olds, for professional development, and to ensure that pre-K teacher salaries are comparable to K-12 teacher salaries. Preschool Development Grants are used to address fundamental needs of creating and implementing high quality state-funded pre-K, such as facility creation and workforce development.

In the Prepare All Kids Act, states and providers use the money to ensure that pre-K supports children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, professional development for teachers, and to extend pre-K to full day and year-round. Similarly, the Pre-K Act calls on providers and both Qualified States and Selected States to put priority on improving quality (such as through professional development, extending pre-K to full day and year-round, and renovating existing facilities), then states can use remaining funds to expand access. The Ready to Learn Act requires that funds first be used to improve quality through implementing the class size and ratio, curriculum, and teacher requirements above. Then grant funds can be used to serve younger children, increase teacher salaries, provide additional services, and construct new facilities.

### **What are the teacher requirements?**

In the Strong Start for America's Children Act, if a teacher does not have a BA in early childhood education or related field, they must instead have a BA in any field and have passed a State-approved assessment in early childhood education, be enrolled in a professional development program while teaching, and complete a teacher training program within 3 years, or a BA and a credential, license, or endorsement that demonstrates competence in early childhood education.

### **Will the pre-K initiatives offer additional services for children?**

Pre-K providers who receive grant funds under the Strong Start for America's Children Act must have at least health, dental and vision screenings with referrals when appropriate, family engagement opportunities, nutrition services, coordination with initiatives under the Individuals with Disability Education Act, physical activity, and additional support services based on state needs assessment.

The Prepare All Kids Act requires providers to have a parent engagement plan, provide referrals to other supports, and provide a smooth transition to kindergarten. Similarly, the Pre-K Act requires providers in Qualified States to provide at least one of the following services: health screenings, parent involvement, or nutrition assistance, and the Ready to Learn Act gives states the option to use the 15 percent quality set-aside to provide comprehensive wraparound services for children.

### **What are the reporting and monitoring requirements?**

In the Strong Start for America's Children Act, states that receive a grant must be able to or have a plan to link preschool data to K-12 data systems through a state-assigned student ID number. States are also required to set and make publicly available performance measures and targets to increase school readiness, narrow school readiness gaps, and reduce special education placements and grade retention. An annual report to the Department of Education must include progress toward these targets, the number and percentage of children served by race, income, age, disability status, English language learner, homelessness, and cost to families.

The Prepare All Kids Act requires an annual report from the Secretary of Education to Congress that reviews the effectiveness of each pre-K provider that receives a subgrant, including the number and ages of children enrolled (including family income, race, gender, disability status, and native language of each child), a description of the curriculum, and an explanation of all funding sources. Similarly, the Pre-K Act requires an annual report that includes how states are improving or enhancing state-funded pre-K, the progress of Selected States toward becoming a Qualified State, and the number of children served by subgroup (children with disabilities, English language learners, low-income children and children in rural areas).

The Ready to Learn Act requires an annual report from the Secretary of Education to Congress that includes how each state that receives a grant is providing high quality pre-K to all four-year-olds, a timetable of implementation, state efforts to integrate pre-K with K-12, and state efforts at parental education.

### **Can children be tested?**

An important provision in the Strong Start for America's Children Act is that states must track student progress by connecting early education and K-12 data systems to ensure that pre-K programs are effectively increasing schools readiness and closing school readiness gaps, among other goals. As such, the bill calls for tests that are valid and reliable for its purpose and conform to the recommendations of the National Research Council reports on early childhood, and include child screening and formative assessments. As with all of the other proposals above, test scores can't be used for rewards or sanctions for individual children, teachers, or providers, and can only be used to improve classroom instruction, professional development, program effectiveness, and parent and family engagement.

### **Where does the money come from?**

The Strong Start for America's Children Act authorizes appropriations of: \$1.3 billion for FY2014, \$3.25 billion for FY2-15, \$5.78 billion for FY2016, \$7.58 billion for FY2017, \$8.96 billion for FY2018, and such sums as necessary for FY2019-2023, and \$750 million for pre-K Development Grants in FY2014, and such sums as necessary for FY2015-2023. The other pieces of legislation do not include dollar amounts for appropriations.

## **Birth to Age 3 Provisions**

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The Strong Start for America's Children Act contains a number of provisions for children from birth to age 3 that are similar to the president's plan, including:

- **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships:** The bill includes competitive grants for existing and new Early Head Start programs that partner with child care providers that meet Early Head Start quality requirements and serve a high number of children from birth to age 3 with child care subsidies. This investment would enroll approximately 110,000 children, nearly doubling current enrollment in Early Head Start. By increasing the number of slots for infants and toddlers in high quality full-day and full-year child care, offering comprehensive services, and preparing children for the transition to pre-K, this initiative helps ensure children's healthy development while meeting the needs of working families.
- **Head Start Coordination:** The legislation tasks HHS to develop a process to support coordination among Head Start providers and the new pre-K initiative. This will include planning for these providers to utilize existing federal investments for serving 3-year-olds, infants, and toddlers as state funded pre-K is more widely available for four-year-old children.
- **Child Care and Development Block Grant:** The bill amends the Child Care and Development Block Grant to ensure that children who receive child care subsidies remain eligible for at least one year before undergoing eligibility redetermination, and encourage coordination with other block grant application periods.
- **Research-Based Voluntary Nurse Home Visiting:** The bill includes a sense of Congress that the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program is important and beneficial for children, their parents, and the country, and that Congress should continue to fund MIECHV past FY2014, when funding is currently set to expire.

### Proposals in Congress Would Greatly Increase Access to High-Quality Early Education Experiences

Extensive research on brain development in early childhood and the positive effects of early education on school readiness and long-term positive effects means that early childhood education, and pre-K in particular, have received increasing national attention. Despite these major positive impacts, many families in low- and middle-class families can't afford to send their children to high-quality preschool, and publicly funded preschool is not widely enough available for all the families who want their children to attend. As a result, children in high-income families attend high-quality preschool and begin kindergarten ready to learn while children in low- and middle-income families are left out and begin kindergarten already behind their wealthier peers.

There is clearly no shortage of ideas on how to increase access to high-quality preschool for every child; though there are some significant differences among the bills above, all of the proposals would result in more children reaping the benefits of high-quality early childhood education. These proposals translate the extensive research on early education into policy, and it is now up to Congress to begin consideration of how to ensure that every child can attend high-quality preschool.