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## Opportunities in ESSA for Improving Early Education

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# Opportunities in ESSA for Improving Early Education

By Harriet Dichter

Early childhood education provides a foundation for children that can enhance their learning and development in elementary school and beyond. Particularly for low-income and vulnerable children, early childhood education helps close achievement gaps, improve learning outcomes, and contribute to improved life outcomes. At the same time, gaps in early childhood education carry significant consequences for children's later academic and developmental outcomes. Many children are left without opportunities to participate, or may be participating in programs that are of low quality. As a result, children—particularly low-income children—are entering kindergarten without the skills they need.<sup>1</sup>

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, P.L. 114-95) provides opportunities for state board members to strengthen early childhood education. It highlights young children and explicitly calls out early childhood education in many parts of the new law. The Congressional Research Service, in summarizing the bill, notes that resources may be used to improve early childhood education programs. Early childhood education is mentioned at least six dozen times, and the programs that constitute it—preschool, Head Start, and child care—are called out as well: Preschool is mentioned at least four dozen times, Head Start is mentioned over three dozen times, and child care is mentioned two dozen times. This is a far more proactive inclusion of early childhood education in the nation's most important education law than has been the case in the past. State and local leaders have ample flexibility and opportunity to focus on early childhood education as a foundational element within ESSA.

While a new provision within ESSA that provides for “preschool development grants” has generated considerable discussion, the new law suffuses early childhood education throughout many of its titles. This integrated approach opens the door

for strong supporters of early childhood systems and services to leverage ESSA as a resource in meeting their state vision and goals for early learning. At the same time, state and local education agencies that are charged with planning and implementation of ESSA are encouraged but not required to include early childhood education in their work. The language of ESSA advances early education by making its contributions explicit. This explicit inclusion of early childhood education is intended to signal how critical it is for state policymakers and districts, and their early childhood education partners, to include ESSA resources in their overall plans for early learning.

ESSA couches its deliberate, ongoing references to opportunities for early learning within the context of state and local leadership and decision making. State education agencies, state policymakers, and local education agencies can use ESSA to advance their work in early childhood education as part of larger state and local visions and goals for early learning. The impact of ESSA's new approach is not yet known—it will require a great deal of leadership, initiative, and commitment to early childhood education as central to children's education-

al and life trajectories to realize ESSA's full potential for young children.

In that spirit—and with the understanding that much work lies ahead in interpreting and explaining ESSA—this report provides a basic primer on the inclusion of early childhood education in ESSA and advances initial ideas for turning those opportunities into actions. This primer focuses primarily on those areas within ESSA that explicitly call out early childhood education, concentrating on the opportunity to use Title I, Title II, and Title III funds in particular to address access and quality, support a high-quality early childhood education workforce, and support successful transition into elementary school.

State boards of education are critical to the successful development of a state's early childhood education vision and agenda. Their reach differs based on the law and context particular to each state, and not all state boards have policy authority. Yet all can convene and provide a forum for understanding the importance of early education, the opportunities for incorporating early childhood education into the state's overall education work, and the options to proceed. ESSA serves as a reminder of the powerful opportunity to incorporate early childhood education in states' work to close achievement gaps and promote continuous improvement for all students. State boards can be powerful champions in leading the way toward this goal.

## DEFINITION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ESSA's definition of early childhood education has two main parts. First, it addresses the age span of participating children as covering young children from birth through age six. Second, it specifies the types of programs that constitute early childhood education (see box 1). All of these programs are designed to address children's full learning needs, including their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

As the major statement of federal education policy, ESSA is unsurprisingly lengthy—with a total of nine major titles—and complex. Table 1 summarizes the many ways in which federal education policy now explicitly references early education, with more detail provided by title in the following sections.

### **TITLE I: IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE DISADVANTAGED**

Title I offers many opportunities to expand quality and access, along with quality improvement, for early childhood education. States must engage consultation and coordination with a diverse group of stakeholders. The state board of education is part of this stakeholder group, although its role will vary from state to state based on the authority a state assigns it. In addition to providing its own leadership perspective on early childhood education, the state board can coordinate with the broader early childhood stakeholder community to help ensure that the Title I plan reflects the state's early childhood goals. ESSA specifically calls out the state's child care programs, Head Start, and the state's early learning advisory council (as applicable) as part of this consultation. Establishing proactive, working partnerships with these programs and groups is an important precursor to

leveraging Title I investments as part of a coordinated strategy in meeting state and local school readiness goals. State education policymakers and leaders may not be as familiar with their state child care programs. The opportunities presented by ESSA provide a good reason for working together to maximize state impact.

Within the Title I plans, states and local education agencies have many opportunities to describe their early learning vision and directly support early learning initiatives. If a district includes early childhood education, the state must indicate how it will support the district. And regardless of whether districts plan to include early childhood education, the state can build local capacity in this area and use the state plan to say how it will do so. Title I calls out opportunities to fund early childhood education services as well as professional development for early childhood educators at the local level. Hence, Title I can expand access to early childhood education, helping more young children reap its benefits, and it can also support quality improvement within existing programs. As with all other aspects of ESSA, it is important to build on the overall state/community vision, existing policies and programs, and areas of strength as well as gaps.

For example, within the state's child care program, all states draw down resources from the federal Child Care and Development Fund and have a lead agency and lead administrator designated.<sup>2</sup> This fund was reauthorized shortly before ESSA, and a new statement of purpose was incorporated that indicates the importance of quality and coordination. Its stated purposes include the following:

- assist states in delivering high-quality, coordinated early childhood care and education services;
- assist states in improving the overall quality of child care services and programs; and
- increase the number and percentage of low-income children in high-quality child care settings.

States are required to prepare a comprehensive child care state plan, which includes goals and activities to support quality. States may have existing workforce, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS),<sup>3</sup> and other strategies that can be coordinated and supported as part of local and state Title I work. Gaining a clear understanding of these state and local strategies can result in greater coordination and leverage across participating programs and better results for young children and their families.

Likewise, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, which are federal-to-local programs, have assessed need as they developed and designed their programs. As with the state child care program, Head Start is a valuable partner in developing the Title I plan.

Indeed, as part of implementation of any early childhood education work at the local level, ESSA requires LEAs that elect to use their funding for early childhood education to coordinate with the local Head Start program, and they are encouraged to coordinate more broadly across all of the

### [ BOX 1 ]

## What Does ESSA Mean by Early Childhood Education?

- Head Start or an Early Head Start program
- state licensed or regulated child care program
- a program that serves children from birth through age six that addresses the children's cognitive (including language, early literacy, and early mathematics), social, emotional, and physical development and is either a state prekindergarten program, a program authorized under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or a program operated by a local educational agency

**Table 1: Early Childhood Education in ESSA by Title and by Entity Involved with Each Provision**

Title	References to Early Childhood Education	SEA	LEA
<b>Title I. Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged</b>	<b>Planning and Coordination.</b> Inclusion of ECE in state and local planning and coordination.	✓	✓
	<b>State report card.</b> Inclusion of preschool program in state report card.	✓	
	<b>ECE services.</b> Funding of early childhood education services.	✓	✓
	<b>ECE professional development.</b> Funding of ECE professional development.		✓
<b>Title II. Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals and Other School Leaders</b>	<b>ECE professional development.</b> Funding to address transition to elementary school, including school readiness by principals and school leaders, early childhood directors, early childhood education program providers.	✓	
	<b>Professional development.</b> Provide programs that increase the knowledge base of teachers, principals, or other school leaders on instruction in the early grades and on strategies to measure whether children are progressing.		✓
	<b>Joint professional development.</b> Provide programs that increase the knowledge base and ability of principals and other school leaders to support teachers, teacher leaders, early childhood educators, and other professionals to meet the needs of students through age 8, which may include joint professional learning and planning activities for school and preschool educators.		✓
	<b>ECE literacy support.</b> Provide subgrants from states to ECE programs and LEAs and their public and private partners (which may include home-based literacy programs for preschool-aged children) to implement evidence-based programs that ensure high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction.	✓	✓
	<b>Three percent state set-aside.</b> Enhance leader professional development, including joint professional development noted above.	✓	
<b>Title III. Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students</b>	<b>Preschool teacher support.</b> Includes preschool teachers in purpose of Title III, e.g., to assist teachers (including preschool teachers), principals, and other school leaders, SEAs, LEAs, and schools in establishing, implementing, and sustaining effective language instruction educational programs designed to assist in teaching English learners, including immigrant children and youth.	✓	✓
	<b>National professional development competition.</b> Includes support strategies that promote school readiness of English learners and their transition from early childhood education programs, such as Head Start or state-run preschool programs, to elementary school programs.	✓	
<b>Title IV, Part A. Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants</b>	<b>Well-rounded education and improved school conditions and technology to support learning.</b> Includes coordination with community-based services.	✓	✓

*Continued next page*

(cont'd) **Table 1: Early Childhood Education in ESSA by Title and by Entity Involved with Each Provision**

Title	References to Early Childhood Education	SEA	LEA
<b>Title IV, 21st Century Schools, Part F. Subpart 2. Community Support for School Success</b>	<b>National community schools/Promise Neighborhoods.</b> Purpose includes improving outcomes of children living in the most distressed US communities, including ensuring school readiness.		✓
<b>Title IX. Education for the Homeless and Other Laws</b>	<b>Homeless.</b> Preschool children specifically included in purpose of programs addressing education of children who are homeless, including access to state and/or local preschool programs.	✓	✓
<b>Title IX. Education for the Homeless and Other Laws, Part B, Preschool Development Grants</b>	<b>Preschool Development Grants.</b> Assist states in serving low-income and disadvantaged children through 1) strategic planning that facilitates collaboration and coordination among existing programs of early childhood education focusing on school readiness; 2) partnerships to support quality and coordination; and 3) parental choice within a mixed delivery system.	✓	✓

community’s early childhood education programs (i.e., inclusive of child care), particularly with regard to the critical transition from early childhood education to the local elementary school.

Some ideas for leveraging Title I to support early childhood education follow (see also box 2). Note that professional development may be funded at the local level through Title I, as well as at the state and local levels through Title II, so while this list touches upon professional development, it is also explored in the Title II section of this report.

- Link Title I and other state and local funding to support early childhood education services. There are many possibilities involving child care, Head Start, and local school districts.<sup>4</sup>
- Invest in early childhood programs that are at the top of their state’s QRIS, or provide additional supports to ensure that these programs can advance to the top rating level. (In most states, these will be child care programs, but in some states, the QRIS is

applicable to Head Start and district-based services.)

- Invest directly in the state and/or local pre-kindergarten program.<sup>5</sup>
- Invest in the state and/or local Early Head Start/child care partnership program.<sup>6</sup>
- Invest in equitable compensation for early childhood educators regardless of setting.<sup>7</sup>
- Develop and implement a process for transferring children’s records from early childhood education to elementary school.
- Develop and implement a communications process between schools and early childhood education programs.
- Conduct meetings with parents, teachers, and early childhood educators to discuss the needs of individual children as they transition from early childhood education to school.
- Provide joint transition-related training and ongoing processes for implementation

for school and early childhood education program staff.

- Support acquisition and implementation of quality early childhood education curriculum as well as developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant assessments that allow early childhood educators to focus on improving their supports to young children.
- Use the well-regarded Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework to inform how early childhood education fits in local family engagement plans.<sup>8</sup>
- Promote the appropriate use of developmental screening of young children participating in early childhood education programs (including in coordination with how these issues are addressed in Head Start and in the state’s child care programs as well as the health care system).
- Address the linkage or alignment between early childhood education and elementary school across typical alignment areas, including administrator/teacher effectiveness,

instructional tools, learning environment, data-driven improvement, family engagement, community pathways, and cross-sector work.<sup>9</sup>

At the state level, Title I requires state report cards to include the number and percentage of preschool children participating in early childhood education programs. Some analysts believe that this will provide a broad opportunity to report out on the overall quality, availability, and accessibility of early childhood education services.<sup>10</sup>

### TITLE II: PREPARING, TRAINING, AND RECRUITING HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOL LEADERS

Title II addresses opportunities at both the state and local level to focus on the early childhood education workforce. As with Title I, consultation and coordination to develop these plans is expected and will

help produce stronger workforce supports. Title II explicitly includes early childhood education as a dimension for state and local approaches. State leaders need a good understanding of the existing workforce as well as the overall vision for early childhood education to determine how best to maximize Title II funds. The early childhood education workforce crosses districts, child care, and Head Start. It will be necessary to capture the necessary information across the entire workforce to make well-informed decisions that build on strengths, address gaps, and most effectively leverage public investment. As is recommended for Title I, working in partnership with the state child care program and with Head Start is vital.

At the state level, ESSA specifically discusses the opportunity to support early childhood educators along with

principals, other school leaders, teachers, and early childhood directors in addressing the transition from early childhood education to elementary school as well as school readiness more generally. States can set aside an additional 3 percent of their Title II resources to address leadership development and in doing so, can include, or focus on, early childhood education (e.g., box 3). States might explore some of these ideas:

- incorporation of early learning knowledge, competencies, and skills in teacher/leader preparation programs, as well as ongoing professional development, about the components of transition from early childhood education into elementary school;
- incorporation of early learning knowledge, competencies, and skills, in collaboration and coordination with the state's child care program, in the state's child care director credentialing (or similar) program about the components of transition from early childhood education into elementary school;
- creation of joint credentialing programs, as well as continuing professional development, for elementary and early childhood education (Head Start, child care) leaders that include knowledge, competencies, and skills around school readiness, transition, and early elementary education. These approaches would require coordination between the state's K-12 educational requirements and those embedded within the state's child care system.

Local districts develop their own Title II plans. ESSA's inclusive approach to early childhood education is noted in two areas. First, districts may provide programs to increase the knowledge base of teachers, principals, or other school leaders on instruction in the early grades and on strategies to measure whether young children are progressing. Second, districts may provide programs to increase the ability of principals and other school leaders to support teachers, teacher leaders, early child-

#### [ BOX 2 ]

## Leveraging Title I: State Examples

Myriad strategies are available to support early childhood education through Title I. A few examples illustrate how these can work in practice.

New Jersey's existing state preschool program provides a comprehensive approach to preschool, including developmental screening. See New Jersey Department of Education, *Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines*, 2015, <http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/guide/impguidelines.pdf>.

The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills is a transition process that helps to ensure a successful start to the K-12 experience and connect the key adults in a child's life (see <http://www.k12.wa.us/wakids/>). The inventory has three components:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/wakids/>). The inventory has three components:

- family connection, which welcomes families into the Washington K-12 system as partners in their children's education;
- whole-child assessment, which helps kindergarten teachers learn about the skills and strengths of the children in their classrooms so they can meet the needs of each; and
- early learning collaboration, which aligns practices of early learning professionals and kindergarten teachers to support smooth transitions for children.

## State Examples: Joint Leader Preparation

As state policymakers explore this area, there is much to be learned from existing programs, some of which are highlighted here:

- **The Maryland Leadership Academy for Early Childhood is designed for teams of six people**—three people from schools, including the principal, and three people from the early childhood community—to learn about best practices in early childhood. Thirty schools were involved in the first year and 100 in the second year, reaching approximately 600 educators.
- **Massachusetts’s Early Educators Fellowship Institute: Birth-to-Eight Leadership Series** is a community-based professional learning approach for principals and program directors in both public and private programs. With Early Learning Challenge funding for the institutes in 2012, approximately 300 local leaders from birth-to-grade-three programs have benefitted from the approach.
- **Pennsylvania’s P-3 Governor’s Institutes** are open to local teams of K-3 and EC leaders and focus on sharing P-3 resources and best

practices. The P-3 Governor’s Institutes take place over four-day sessions. Pennsylvania plans to reach 3,000 educators between 2014 and 2017.

- **Washington’s Starting Strong Institutes** focus on improving leadership by engaging principals, early learning directors, and other early care and education professionals in professional development tied to understanding the birth-through-age-8 developmental continuum and strategies for supporting teachers in high-quality classroom practice. Begun in 2005, the institutes have been funded in part by Early Learning Challenge since 2012. In 2014, attendance exceeded 500 participants.

Excerpted from Kate Tarrant, “P-3 Reform in Vision and in Practice,” in Harriet Dichter, ed., *Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for Young Children and Families*, a BUILD E-Book (Boston: Build Initiative, 2015), <http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/E-BookChapter5P-3ReforminVisionandinPractice.pdf>.

hood educators, and other professionals to meet the needs of students through age 8. ESSA specifically notes joint professional learning and planning activities for school staff and educators in preschool programs that address the transition to elementary school as part of this work.

Districts could explore some of these ideas in their Title II plans:

- improving knowledge, competencies and skills of principals and school leaders to meet the needs of children birth through age 8;
- improving knowledge, competencies and skills of principals, school leaders, teacher and early educators (including jointly) to instructional tools (standards, curriculum, assessment) and practices that support effective implementation;

- providing joint professional development and ongoing planning and implementation on transition that brings together school staff and early childhood educators;
- incorporating the use of common child and teacher observational tools starting with early childhood education and continuing into the early elementary grades by building initial and ongoing training and professional learning communities that unify early childhood educators and early elementary grades educators.

Title II also includes grant opportunities for states that, in turn, subgrant literacy resources to early childhood education programs, local districts, and their public and private partners to focus on high-quality and comprehensive literacy instruction. Home-based literacy programs are called out. Funds are set aside—15 percent—to support early

childhood education, and states must consult with the state’s child care program and its early learning advisory council (as applicable) on this initiative. States may set aside a modest amount of the funding for their own use.

Some Title II ideas at the state level:

- supplemental coaching and professional development for local grantees;
- coordination with the state’s child care professional development preparation and continuing education system on literacy instruction. Under the federal Child Care and Development Fund reauthorization (see Title I section above), states must provide a progression of professional development, which would help enable this type of approach;
- collaborating with the state’s home visiting

programs to support parental competency, knowledge, and skill in supporting their children's literacy development.

As early childhood education programs, local districts, and their public and private partners develop local initiatives under the literacy prong of Title II, they may also want to consider some of the ideas noted above. Some additional possibilities:

- high-quality professional development for early childhood educators;
- family and early childhood educator involvement in literacy development of their children.

### TITLE III: LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

In its statement of overall purpose, Title III specifically references preschool in discussing the education of English language learners. Assisting teachers is a central goal of Title III, encompassing preschool teachers, principals, and other school leaders. It also aids state education agencies, local education agencies, and schools in establishing, implementing, and sustaining effective language instruction designed to assist in teaching English learners, including immigrant children and youth. State and local leaders are encouraged to include early childhood education in this work.

Possibilities include the following:

- providing support for the development and placement of bilingual early childhood educators;
- professional development and ongoing support for early childhood educators to develop competencies, knowledge, and skills to effectively support English learners;
- supporting effective screening and assessment for young children who are English learners and are participating in early childhood education programs;

“Well-designed early childhood education programs address all aspects of the young child’s development, including their social-emotional learning as well as physical development.”

- collaborating with the state’s QRIS and child care professional development system to address all of the issues noted above.

Additionally, Title III authorizes a national professional development project that allows for the incorporation of early childhood education. States, including those working in consortia, as well as institutions of higher education, may apply. A state-wide focus on early childhood education would benefit the school readiness of this growing population.<sup>11</sup>

### TITLE IV: 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS

Title IV includes a multitude of programming to support a broad-based vision of 21st century schools. We focus here on two portions: student support and academic enrichment (Part A) and community support for school success (Part F).

ESSA’s Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) program (Title IV, Part A) offers states and school districts flexible formula funding to improve students’ academic achievement by increasing the capacity of states, LEAs, schools, and local communities to provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; improve school conditions for student learning; and support effective technology use. Within this framework, early childhood education could play a

critical role, and its inclusion could benefit states and local schools in reaching their goals for student learning. For example, as districts conduct required SSAEG needs assessments and prepare district plans, they should keep in mind that early childhood education is considered as one aspect of a well-rounded education, so supporting it would appear to be well within this part of ESSA. States may set aside 5 percent of SSAEG funding for state-level activities, 4 percent of which could be used to support district early learning initiatives and 1 percent for administration. The law explicitly calls for collaboration with community-based service providers, which allows for partnership with the early childhood community to address critical issues such as the role of physical and behavioral health in supporting learning. Well-designed early childhood education programs address all aspects of the young child’s development, including their social-emotional learning as well as physical development. Therefore, state and districts SSAEG plans should address these important potential uses of program funds.

In Title IV, Part F, community support for school success incorporates school readiness. ESSA addresses full-service community schools as well as Promise Neighborhoods and includes early childhood education as part of the “pipeline” for making these strategies successful. More specifically, pipeline services include early childhood education, support for a child’s transition to elementary school, family and community engagement, and comprehensive supports in areas such as health, nutrition, and mental health. Districts as well as their partners must demonstrate they are collaborating to gain funding for community schools; higher education, districts, and other community partners may take the lead for Promise Neighborhoods. Ensuring that these efforts address inclusion of early childhood education will be fundamental to their overall success. These initiatives should take into account existing goals, strengths, and gaps in state

and local systems and services to meet the learning and developmental needs of young children so that their early childhood initiatives add coherence and vitality in this area.

### TITLE IX: EDUCATION FOR THE HOMELESS AND OTHER LAWS

As part of state and local plans to support the education of children who are homeless, early childhood education is included as part of the continuum of services. In the development of these state and local plans, and in their subsequent implementation, state and local education leaders should pay particular attention to identification of very young children who are homeless and the adequacy of educational and related services, with a new emphasis on the provision of preschool services to children who are homeless.

Head Start has historically focused some attention on children who are homeless. Thus partnership with Head Start should be included, as with other state and local early childhood programs. The relationship between state and local education coordinators is critical in meeting the early education needs of this vulnerable population. At the same time, connections to the state's broader housing, human services, and health systems and services are also critical to ensure that young children's needs are met and that they are ready for school.

### TITLE IX, PART B: PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

A new feature of ESSA is the inclusion of a preschool development grant program. There are three key stated purposes to this new initiative:

- assist states to develop, update, or implement a strategic plan that facilitates collaboration and coordination among existing programs of early childhood care and education in a mixed delivery system across the state designed to prepare low-income and disadvantaged children to enter kinder-

“State and local education leaders must pay particular attention to identification of very young children who are homeless and the adequacy of educational and related services.”

garten and to improve transitions from such systems into the local education agency or elementary school that enrolls such children;

- encourage partnerships among Head Start providers, state and local governments, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, private entities (including faith- and community-based entities), and local education agencies to improve coordination, program quality, and delivery of services; and
- maximize parental choice among a mixed delivery system of early childhood education program providers.

By approaching these issues systemically, boards increase the likelihood of success for each element of the state reform agenda.

In other words, this approach to preschool development emphasizes what is known as “mixed delivery,” which is integral to the definition of early childhood education in ESSA. This approach brings together child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, and preschool/local districts. Additionally, this approach places a premium on collaboration, coordination, and partnership to best leverage all available resources, respect parental choice, and most efficiently use public resources.

While federal preschool development grants have been made available to 18 states,<sup>12</sup> the provisions in ESSA are a significant departure from the program

under which these 18 states are receiving resources. ESSA addresses the transition to the new program for these states and permits the continuation and conclusion of the original grants.

The US Department of Health and Human Services leads the new program in collaboration with the US Department of Education. As with the current program, states will compete for these funds. ESSA specifies that states may receive four years of funding, including resources for a year of planning followed by up to three years of implementation funds. The new program places responsibility for the development of the strategic plan, vision, and implementation approach squarely with the states.

For example, the state's strategic plan must address how the state will achieve the following:

- more efficiently use existing federal, state, local, and nongovernmental resources to align and strengthen the delivery of existing programs;
- coordinate the delivery models and funding streams existing in the state's mixed delivery system; and
- develop recommendations to better use existing resources in order to improve the overall participation of children in a mixed delivery system of federal, state, and local early childhood education programs, program quality while maintaining availability of services, parental choice among existing programs, and school readiness for children from low-income and disadvantaged families, including during the children's transition into elementary school.

However, the federal government may not specify, define, or prescribe these elements for preschools:

- early learning and development guidelines, standards, or specific assessments, including

the standards or measures that states use to develop, implement, or improve such guidelines, standards, or assessments;

- specific measures or indicators of quality early learning and care;
- early learning or preschool curriculum, programs of instruction, or instructional content;
- teacher and staff qualifications and salaries;
- class sizes and ratios of children to instructional staff;
- the scope of programs, including length of program day and length of program year; or
- any aspect or parameter of a teacher, principal, other school leader, or staff evaluation system within a state, local education agency, or early childhood education program.

More is unknown than known about how the new preschool development grants will work. States can best prepare by ensuring that all the relevant stakeholders in the early childhood education system are working together to develop a sound vision and clear strategic plan so that they are ready for next steps. The grant provisions emphasize the importance of strengthening connections across all types of early education programs and recognizing the value that each contributes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report offers a first look at ESSA's new strategy for early childhood education, which provides state policymakers and local leaders with opportunities to deepen their commitment to the education of young children; acknowledges the importance of working in collaboration with key state and local early childhood systems to build on the state and local vision, strengths, and gaps; and sees early childhood education as part of a continuum that must successfully connect to elementary education.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here is a current listing of organizations that have produced materials addressing early childhood education in ESSA. Please check their websites, as they continue to expand available resources.

Alliance for Early Success, <http://earlysuccess.org/>. See in particular Albert Wat, “The Every Student Succeeds Act: A Half-Full or Half-Empty Glass for Early Education?” (January 11, 2016), <http://earlysuccess.org/blog/every-student-succeeds-act-half-full-or-half-empty-glass-early-education>

Build Initiative, <http://www.buildinitiative.org/>. See, for example, “Every Student Succeeds Act: Opportunities for Early Learning,” February 18, 2016, <http://www.buildinitiative.org/OurWork/LearningCommunity/RecentWebinarsEvents.aspx>.

First Five Years Fund, <http://ffyf.org/>. See “Every Student Succeeds Act, May 2016,” retrieved May 2016, <http://ffyf.org/resources/early-learning-essa-can-look-like-states-districts/>.

National Association of Elementary School Principals, <http://www.naesp.org/>. See NAESP’s “Brief Summary,” n.d., <http://www.naesp.org/brief-summary-every-student-succeeds-act>

New America, <http://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/>. See Laura Bornfreund, “Every Student Succeeds Act and Early Learning,” December 9, 2015, <http://www.edcentral.org/every-student-succeeds-act-early-learning/>.

Ounce of Prevention Fund, <http://www.theounce.org/>. See, for example, Elliot Regenstein, Maia Connors, Rio Romero-Jurado, “Valuing the Early Years in State Accountability Systems Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” February 16, 2016, <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/policy/policy-conversations>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Much recent literature exists: e.g., Julia Issacs, *Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children* (Washington, DC: Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, 2012); Jim Minervino, *Lessons from Research and the Classroom: Implementing High-Quality Pre-K that Makes a Difference for Young Children* (Washington, DC: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014); Deborah Roderick Stark and Fortney H. Stark III, *Equity Starts Early: How Chiefs Will Build High-Quality Early Education*, (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016); Save the Children, “Early Steps to School Success,” (Washington, DC, 2015); Marjorie Wechsler et al., *The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016); Hirokazu Yoshikawa et al., *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*, (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> HHS provides a list of lead agencies here: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/resource/ccdf-grantee-state-and-territory-contacts>. For an overview of the Child Care and Development Fund, go to <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/fact-sheet-occ>.

<sup>3</sup> A QRIS provides standards and supports to enable early learning programs to improve their program quality and support children’s school readiness. See US Health and Human Services, “QRIS Resource Guide,” <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?do=home>, and the “QRIS Learning Network,” retrieved May 2016, <http://qrisnetwork.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> ESSA references use of the Head Start performance standards for districts electing to invest in early childhood education through Title I. Further clarification will be needed in this area.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of state preK programs, see National Institute for Early Education Research, “The State of Preschool 2015,” <http://nieer.org/research/state-preschool-2015>.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships, see Office of Early Childhood Development, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning/ehs-cc-partnerships>, and for a list of the participants, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning/ehs-cc-partnerships/grant-awardees>.

<sup>7</sup> On compensation for early childhood educators, particularly those serving the youngest children or working outside of districts, see M. Whitebook, D. Phillips, and C. Howes, *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2014), <http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ReportFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> US Health and Human Services Department, Administration for Children and Families, Head Start, “The Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework,” <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/framework>.

<sup>9</sup> On alignment, see K. Kauerz and J. Coffman, “Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches” (Seattle, WA: College of Education, University of Washington, 2013), [http://depts.washington.edu/pthru3/PreK-3rd\\_Framework\\_Legal%20paper.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/pthru3/PreK-3rd_Framework_Legal%20paper.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> See First Five Years Fund, “Every Student Succeeds Act, May 2016,” retrieved May 2016, <http://ffyf.org/resources/early-learning-essa-can-look-like-states-districts/>.

<sup>11</sup> For information on this population, see Migration Policy Institute, “Top Languages Spoken by English Language Learners Nationally and by State” (Washington, DC), retrieved May 2016, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/top-languages-spoken-english-language-learners-nationally-and-state>.

<sup>12</sup> See US Department of Education for a complete list of participating

states, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html>.





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