

The Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act *A Landmark Investment in America's Economic Future*

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION FOR A LIFETIME OF SUCCESS

A key piece of President's Obama's education agenda is supporting comprehensive and effective early learning programs for children from birth to age 5. The first five years of a child's life has a lasting impact on their learning, health, and behavior. Economists, business leaders, and child development experts agree that smart investments in early education are vital if we want to close the achievement gap and ensure our children are well prepared to thrive in school and in life.

Nearly 12 million children under age 5 regularly spend time in child care arrangements and children with working mothers spend on average 36 hours per week in such settings. But currently there are no federal quality standards for child care and families are left with a patchwork system of child care with mediocre quality. Our children deserve and need better. By 4 years old, children from low-income families are already 18 months behind most other 4 year-olds. From the start, education reform should include early learning, or we miss out on 5 critical years. A comprehensive range of high quality early learning opportunities from birth through age 5 is necessary to give children what they will need to grow and succeed.

To ensure more kids reach kindergarten ready to succeed, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act includes an Early Learning Challenge Fund to increase the number of low-income children in high quality early learning settings. Specifically, the legislation will:

Invest \$1 billion each year in competitive grants to challenge states to build a comprehensive, high quality early learning system for children birth to age 5 that includes:

- ✓ **Early learning standards reform.**
- ✓ **Evidence-based program quality standards.**
- ✓ **Enhanced program review and monitoring of program quality.**
- ✓ **Comprehensive professional development.**
- ✓ **Coordinated system for facilitating screenings for disability, health, and mental health needs.**
- ✓ **Improved support to parents.**
- ✓ **Process for assessing children's school readiness.**
- ✓ **Use data to improve child outcomes.**

Transform early learning programs by insisting upon real change in state standards and practices:

- ✓ **Build an effective, qualified, and well-compensated early childhood workforce** by supporting more effective providers with degrees in early education and providing sustained, intensive, classroom-focused professional development to improve the knowledge and skills of early childhood providers
- ✓ **Best practices in the classroom** by implementing research-based early learning standards aligned with academic content standards for grades K-3.
- ✓ **Promote parent and family involvement** by developing outreach strategies to parents to improve their understanding of their children's development.
- ✓ **Fund quality initiatives** that improve instructional practices, programmatic practices, and classroom environment that promote school readiness.
- ✓ **Quality standards reform** that moves toward pre-service training requirements for early learning providers, and adopting best practices for teacher-child ratios and group size.