

THE FEDERAL BUDGET: THE RIGHT INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age — a time when it may be too late to intervene. Learning is a dynamic process and is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood.

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Background

The federal budget is an indication of the nation's priorities for the investment of public dollars. Our national priorities should be preventing the achievement gap starting with very young children, sustaining their success through school, and helping them and their families thrive. Our nation's economic revitalization requires these additional investments.

For several years, the core federal early childhood education programs received small if any increases in funds, making it difficult for families to access affordable programs for their children and making it difficult for providers to meet the costs of quality early learning experiences. During the recent economic decline, more families have become eligible for child care assistance, Early Head Start and Head Start.

At current funding levels,

- One in six eligible children receives child care assistance;
- Less than half of eligible preschoolers are enrolled in Head Start; and
- Only four percent of eligible babies and toddlers are enrolled in Early Head Start.

For the remainder of Fiscal Year 2011:

- Pass a Continuing Resolution that does not reduce current investments in the Child Care & Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Head Start. *If the cuts in H.R. 1 were to be adopted in a final bill, 368,000 children would lose child care, Head Start and Early Head Start services.*

Recommendations for fiscal year 2012:

- Adopt the President's request for an increase of \$1.3 billion for the Child Care & Development Block Grant, a \$866 million increase for Head Start and Early Head Start, and a \$50 million increase for IDEA Part C (infants/toddlers early intervention), and \$350 million for the Early Learning Challenge Fund.
- Increase Title I funding so that school districts have the flexibility to expand the use of these funds for younger children in high quality settings and schools, for joint professional development, and comprehensive services.
- Expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and index the credit to inflation and make it refundable.