

Respond to the Needs of At-Risk Infants and Toddlers:

Increase the Birth-to-3 Set-Aside in the Early Childhood Block Grant

Support SB1412

Colvin-Currie-Coulson-Eddy-Chapa La Via

REQUEST: Increase the Infant-Toddler Set-Aside to at least 20 percent of the Early Childhood Block Grant by Fiscal Year 2015.

THE NEED: 85 percent of the core structure of a child's brain is developed in the first three years of life. For some children, waiting for high quality preschool can be too little, too late.

Evidence of the achievement gap between children can be seen as early as 18 months of age. While quality preschool is a critical piece of helping all children enter school ready to succeed, more is needed to avoid early school difficulties. This is especially true for children and families experiencing economic, social and psychological stresses.

Communities want to respond to the overwhelming need, and yet our current investments only allow us to serve a tiny portion of eligible at-risk children.

- At least 20 percent of the children born in Illinois – about 36,000 children – have risk factors such as poverty, family language barriers, or mothers who are teen parents or who suffer from maternal depression. As a result, within any given year, 108,000 children between birth and age 3 are at-risk for poor development and school failure. In FY2008, Prevention Initiative programs served fewer than 18,000 children, or only 16 percent of the children who could benefit.
- For the past three years, the Illinois State Board of Education has received far more applications for Prevention Initiative funding than it has been able to grant. In FY2009, ISBE was able to fund less than 11% of the applications received for new resources; in FY2008 only 4% were funded and in FY2007 only 8%.

BACKGROUND:

Illinois is the only state in the nation to wisely, systematically grow programs for at-risk infants and toddlers as we grow preschool. The Early Childhood Block Grant – which funds our landmark “Preschool for All” efforts – not only supports preschool services for 3- and 4-year olds, but programs serving many children from birth to age 3. Since 2005, all new investments in infants and toddlers have been directed to the Prevention Initiative, which funds research-based, intensive services for at-risk infants, toddlers and their families through both center-based and home-based programs.

Illinois' Infant-Toddler Set-Aside was modeled on the federal Head Start program, in which 10 percent of funding was directed to Early Head Start programs serving the youngest, at-risk children. The Illinois set-aside is set by statute at 11 percent of the Early Childhood Block Grant. In recently-passed Head Start reauthorization legislation, Congress recognized the critical need to help more at-risk infants and toddlers and is dramatically increasing the percentage of expansion funds dedicated to Early Head Start. Half of expansion funds will now be directed to these programs.

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