



Principles of Successful Early Childhood Legislation

As the federal government considers methods for strengthening existing – and exploring new – early childhood programs for families with children under the age of five, The First Five Years Fund urges policymakers to ensure that early childhood programs supported with federal funds adhere to the following core principles:

✓ Invest In the First Five Years

Federal law should ensure that programs are integrated across ages birth to five, with appropriate provision for infants and toddlers. Extensive research shows that investment in children aged birth to five yields significant returns.

✓ Support the First Three Years

Research shows that the greatest returns come from investment in the youngest children. Families with children ages birth to three have the most difficulty finding affordable, safe, and developmentally appropriate care and remain the most underserved by federal and state programs.

✓ Focus on At-Risk Kids

Federal law should continue to focus first on serving those children who are the most at risk. When budgets are limited, it makes sense to target resources to the children whose education, health, and development benefit the most from government investment.

✓ Promote State-Federal Collaboration

Federal law should encourage collaboration among federal and state programs. For many states, the State Advisory Councils required by the Head Start reauthorization will provide an opportunity to improve coordination and make more efficient use of federal and state funding. Federal funding should provide an incentive for states to strengthen their entire birth to five system (including Head Start, early education, and child care), and improve coordination between early learning and K-12.

✓ Ensure Effective Service

Federal law should maintain a commitment to promoting child-centered, parent focused programs that use research- and evidence-based methodologies. Funding should go to programs that embrace principles known to consistently produce positive and lasting impacts on children, including highly skilled teachers, small class sizes with high adult-to-child ratios, age appropriate curricula, stimulating materials, a safe physical setting, and a language-rich environment.

✓ Encourage Additional Investments

Federal law should promote and leverage the use of state and private funds. While a continued and growing federal commitment to at-risk young children is essential, the federal government should use its funding to drive state and private investment.