



Strengthening Professional Development for Principals: Investing in Early Childhood Development to Improve School Readiness

Background

An abundance of research has proven that success in K-12 education starts before students enter the classroom. Children from low-income families who attend year round, full-day pre-kindergarten programs are half as likely to need special education services in later grades. They are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, and the odds of juvenile crime, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy are greatly reduced.

Now more than ever, elementary school principals are actively engaged in early childhood learning, leading programs in their schools and communities that are showing improvements in academic success. The process includes partnering with early childhood programs to lay the foundation for later learning, and critical steps to help transition low-income children into school-based settings to achieve greater levels of social, emotional and intellectual success, and ultimately greater academic proficiency.

Many principal preparation programs and school systems lack sufficient training and professional learning opportunities to help principals design and lead quality early childhood programs. In communities where pre-kindergarten programs are not typically part of the school system, principals must have access to and continue their learning about best practices for early childhood issues, developmentally-appropriate learning activities, teaching practices, and assessments, and forging new relationships within the community. They must learn how to best align systems to create a seamless continuum of learning.

Request

New policies in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must strengthen professional development for principals, and include standards for program strategies to create comprehensive early childhood programs. The standards provide guidance to principals on effective pre-kindergarten through grade three alignment, which entails working with families directly to bridge the transition to the primary grades, creating coalitions with community organizations to support children in their home environments, providing facilities and settings for early learning experiences that are developmentally-appropriate and informed by cultural differences, including those that promote health and safety, leading instructional activities, and providing professional learning opportunities for teachers.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATION
TITLE II, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT
(PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPALS)

Create new Subpart 6, Part A of title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6601 et seq.) and reorder, *Increasing School Readiness through School Leadership*

PRINCIPALS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

(a) PURPOSE- The purpose of this subsection is to provide professional development for principals to design Pre-kindergarten through grade three alignment systems, and implement high-quality early learning programs that are school-based, linked to the community; and provide the standards upon which programs should be developed.

(a) FINDINGS

Now more than ever, elementary school principals are actively engaged in early childhood learning, leading programs in their schools and communities that are showing improvements in student academic achievement.

However, many elementary principals need additional training to be better prepared leaders for effective early childhood programs including how to best align systems and provide a seamless continuum of learning. In communities where pre-kindergarten programs are not typically part of the school system, principals must learn more about basic early childhood issues, developmentally appropriate learning activities, teaching practices, assessments, and forging new relationships with the early childhood community.

Research proves that success in education starts before students enter kindergarten. Children from low-income families who attend year round, full-day pre-kindergarten programs are half as likely to need special education services in later grades. These children are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, and the odds of juvenile crime, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy are greatly reduced.

Early learning programs are an essential investment to ensure that children at risk of beginning formal education behind their peers, particularly low-income children, have a chance to begin school on equal footing.

Elementary school principals must play a critical role in the implementation of pre-kindergarten programs to ensure high quality, school-connectedness, and a seamless learning continuum. Programs must be available to all three-, four- and five-year old children in order to build the foundation for learning.

Elementary school principals have a unique understanding of the consequences that occur when children are not fully prepared to enter the primary grades, and positioned to assume responsibility for developing a shared vision in school communities that embrace early childhood programs. Collaboration with quality early learning programs are critical to help transition low-income children into

school-based settings and achieve higher levels of social, emotional, and intellectual success..

Instituting partnerships between quality early learning programs, particularly in high-need communities, and elementary school principals provides the opportunity to help transition children to have a successful elementary and secondary education experience.

(a) GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED

(1) GRANTS TO PARTNERSHIPS- The Secretary is authorized to carry out the purpose of this subsection by awarding grants, on a competitive basis, to partnerships consisting of-

(A) A public or private entity that provides professional development for principals in designing aligned pre-kindergarten through grade three systems and implementing school-based early childhood programs; and

(B) One or more public agencies (including local educational agencies, State educational agencies, State human services agencies, and State and local agencies administering programs under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 9858 et seq.), and Head Start agencies.

(2) DURATION - The Secretary shall award grants under this subsection for periods of no less than 5 years.

(3) DEFINITIONS-

(A) NATIONAL LEADING EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITIES STANDARDS -

(i) Principals support an expanded continuum of learning that includes children from age three through entry into the elementary grades.

(ii) Principals must be engaged in the school community and partner with early learning programs, and work with families to set a shared vision for understanding early childhood development and strengthening learning throughout the school;

- (iii) Principals must support high-quality curriculum and developmentally-appropriate instructional practices;
- (iv) Principals must provide safe and supportive early learning environments that focus on the needs of the whole child, including the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical and nutritional well-being of children;
- (v) Principals must provide multiple measures of developmentally-appropriate assessment that will inform and strengthen early learning experiences before entering school and once enrolled in school.

(B) SYSTEM ALIGNMENT-For purposes of this section, 'system alignment' means activities targeted to pre-kindergarten through third grade including-

- (i) Establishing partnerships with local public and private pre-kindergarten programs to form transition planning teams involving elementary level principals and teachers, early childhood program personnel and staff, families, agency workers and community leaders;
- (ii) Streamlining the core elements of early childhood teaching and learning experiences to school-based learning;
- (iii) Integrating early learning and K-3 curriculum and standards;
- (iv) Collaborating with community-based organizations to provide information to families about school-based early learning opportunities for children; and
- (v) Providing transition services to children and their families.

(5) USE OF FUNDS

(A) IN GENERAL- Each partnership receiving a grant under this subsection shall use the grant funds to carry out professional

development and mentoring programs to build capacity of principals in meeting national standards for leading early learning communities defined in section (3)(A) and integrating pre-kindergarten education programs in elementary schools through third grade, focusing on high-need communities.

(B) ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES

Such activities may include:

- (i) principal participation in professional development programs that specialize in training and mentoring principals in the early childhood program standards;
- (ii) providing professional development for principals to create aligned systems to transition children from early childhood learning programs to school-based learning;
- (iii) professional development and support which may include mentoring programs for principals to work with parents, early childhood educators, and teachers to provide developmentally-appropriate early learning and school-readiness services;
- (iv) professional development for principals to learn about working with teachers and early childhood educators in order to work with children who have limited English proficiency, and children with special needs;
- (v) professional development for principals to learn about the use of multiple measures in early childhood learning, including portfolio collections, formative assessment and related developmental data, and the selection and use of the latest screening and diagnostic assessments to identify school-readiness issues and improve teaching and learning; and
- (vi) participation in induction and mentoring for principals during their first five years in the field, including standards-based mentoring programs offered by qualified providers.

(6) APPLICATIONS

(A) APPLICATIONS REQUIRED- Any partnership that desires to receive a grant under this subsection shall submit an application to the Secretary at

such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(B) CONTENTS REQUIRED-Each application submitted to Secretary shall include-

(i) a description of the professional development or mentoring programs to inform principals about how to design pre-kindergarten through grade three alignment and programs that are based on the standards described in section (4)(A);

(ii) a description of the professional learning for principals that will encourage them to-

(a) provide safe and supportive and engaging learning environments in school-based facilities that are adequately staffed;

(b) acknowledge and support families through outreach and awareness of the benefits of early learning programs;

(c) address the needs of the whole child as described in (4)(A)(iv);

(d) align and collaborate with community-based organizations to implement programs;

(e) implement collaborative planning that includes principal and teacher visits to pre-kindergarten classrooms and other means to support interactions between teachers and children;

(g) use data and early screening processes according to (5)(B)(v);

(h) focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness;

(i) design a system alignment that captures the core elements of teaching and learning for successful school

transitions;

(j) use the latest materials, practices, and implement curricula that-

(i) ties literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, and other skills to experiences that are developmentally appropriate in early learning settings;

(ii) is aligned with State academic content standards and the standards and goals of the school year curriculum of the local educational agency serving students;

(iii) includes developmentally-appropriate assessments to understand the child's physical, social, emotional, intellectual and general disposition for learning;

(iv) disaggregates data by subgroup populations; and

(v) fosters young children's eagerness to learn.