



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

February 26, 2024

Dear Chief State School Officer,

The skills and knowledge that children acquire in their early years are the building blocks for future learning, setting the stage for literacy, numeracy, and social skills that will be used throughout their lives. By expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities and creating a [sturdy bridge through kindergarten and the early grades](#), State and local leaders across the country are working to ensure children have a strong foundation for early and later school success.

To help advance these efforts, earlier today, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) released revised guidance on how funding under Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) can help expand access to high-quality preschool for more three- and four-year olds. I encourage you to draw on this revised guidance and additional resources to expand access to high-quality early learning in your State and communities.

The evidence is clear: high-quality preschool is an effective strategy to support academic achievement for every student and prepare children for success in school and life.<sup>1</sup> When opportunity gaps are not effectively addressed prior to kindergarten and first grade, they are likely to extend into elementary school and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, research shows that when students from low-income backgrounds receive two years of high-quality preschool, followed by high-quality and instructionally aligned full-day kindergarten, achievement gaps narrow and students are better positioned to meet important third grade reading and math benchmarks that are predictive of high school graduation.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the well-documented benefits of high-quality preschool, these programs reach fewer than half of three- and four-year-olds. Limited access to high-quality preschool is a persistent barrier to early school success, particularly for children from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and children with disabilities. When parents seek out preschool for their children, it is often difficult to find high-quality, affordable options.<sup>4</sup>

The Biden-Harris Administration's historic investments in Title I have secured an additional

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<sup>1</sup> Ansari A. THE PERSISTENCE OF PRESCHOOL EFFECTS FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH ADOLESCENCE. *J Educ Psychol.* 2018;110(7):952-973. doi:10.1037/edu0000255; Weiland C, Yoshikawa H. Impacts of a prekindergarten program on children's mathematics, language, literacy, executive function, and emotional skills. *Child Dev.* 2013;84(6):2112-2130. doi:10.1111/cdev.12099; Heckman, J., Early childhood education strengthens families and can break the cycle of poverty. *The Heckman Equation*, www.heckmanequation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/F\_Heckman\_PerryMidlife\_OnePager\_050819.pdf , accessed 2024

<sup>2</sup> Temple JA, Ou SR, Reynolds AJ. Closing Achievement Gaps Through Preschool-To-Third-Grade Programs. *Front Educ (Lausanne).* 2022;7:871973. doi:10.3389/educ.2022.871973

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds AJ, Ou SR, Temple JA. A Multicomponent, Preschool to Third Grade Preventive Intervention and Educational Attainment at 35 Years of Age. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2018;172(3):247-256. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.4673

<sup>4</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2023 Kids Count Data Book. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023.

nearly \$2 billion in annual funding for high-need schools and students, which can help more children benefit from high-quality preschool. To support States, local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools leveraging these resources, the Department is releasing revised [\*Non-Regulatory Guidance, Serving Preschool Children Through Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended\*](#). The last time this guidance was revised was in 2012, prior to the most recent reauthorization of ESEA in 2015. The release of this guidance also follows the release of the President's [Executive Order](#) to Increase Access to High-Quality Care and Supporting Caregivers, which directed the Department to update its guidance on how schools and districts could expand access to high-quality preschool.

The guidance includes information on how States, LEAs, and schools can expand preschool access and improve program quality by strengthening partnerships with Head Start and community-based organizations, including through layering and braiding Federal, State, and local funds. Additionally, it addresses questions on educator professional development, increased instructional hours, equitable compensation for early childhood educators and staff, and partnerships that support preschool delivered in a range of settings. The revised guidance can be used in conjunction with the joint [Dear Colleague Letter supporting mixed delivery preschool](#), also released today by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (HHS), which highlights additional funds that can be used to support these efforts, along with the [Department's 2016 Early Learning Guidance](#) to leverage federal funds to support high-quality preschool programs and facilitate alignment across Pre-K-3.

As required by the ESEA and indicated in the Department's revised guidance, LEAs that use Title I funds to provide preschool to children<sup>5</sup> from low-income backgrounds must ensure that those services comply, at a minimum, with the [Education and Child Development Program Services performance standards](#) in effect under section 641A(a) of the Head Start Act. The Department is collaborating with HHS to support LEAs in meeting this requirement by elevating research-based strategies and best practices to support high-quality instruction for preschool students.

The revised guidance also highlights ways to meet the developmental and linguistic needs of preschool students, especially children with disabilities and English learners, which is essential to achieving educational equity. Young children with disabilities should have access to high-quality inclusive preschool programs that provide individualized and appropriate support in a range of settings to enable them to fully participate alongside their peers without disabilities and achieve their full potential. This guidance complements the recently released Federal [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#), which provides additional information on policies and practices to support more inclusive early childhood programs.

Additionally, this guidance offers a timely reminder that English learners can be identified as early as age three and supported by funding under Title III, Part A of the ESEA. Title III, Part A of the ESEA helps support preschool students who are learning English in addition to their home

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<sup>5</sup> While Title I funds may be used to serve eligible children from birth to the age at which the LEA provides a free public elementary education, the Department understands that, in practice, most of these Title I funds are used for preschool programs to serve children ages three to five, prior to kindergarten eligibility.

language by providing supplemental funds to school districts to support English learners during an important time of brain development and language acquisition. Title III funds can be used by LEAs for supplemental activities related to the development and implementation of effective preschool language instruction educational programs for English learners, including dual language programs, that are coordinated with other relevant programs and services.<sup>6</sup>

We encourage you to leverage this guidance and Title I, Title III, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding, as well as to coordinate with Head Start and other community-based programs to increase access to high-quality learning opportunities for young learners in your State. I look forward to working with you to strengthen these supports for underserved students and expand opportunities to experience early school success.

Sincerely,



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.  
U.S. Secretary of Education

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<sup>6</sup> For additional information, visit the [Home | NCELA - English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs](#) website.