

**ILLINOIS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL
RECOMMENDATIONS TO ISBE FOR GUIDANCE REGARDING THE USE OF AMERICAN RECOVERY
AND REINVESTMENT ACT FUNDS**

Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the Illinois State Board of Education and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will have opportunities to invest funds in ways that will benefit the young children and families served by preschool programs as well as programs for infants and toddlers.

The Illinois Early Learning Council offers recommendations to ISBE as it considers allocating ARRA funding, and for their guidance to LEAs. While the recommendations offered below focus on Title I and IDEA Part B ARRA funding, the Council recommends that ISBE also consider these suggestions as initiatives it could implement on the state level if it is able to access State Fiscal Stabilization funds. The recommendations offered could be implemented by individual school districts or by ISBE itself.

For your convenience, we have attempted to draft this language in such a way that, if it meets with your approval, you could simply remove this introductory text and distribute it to LEAs as-is. If you have any comments or changes, we are happy to follow up. We also stand ready to provide whatever assistance we can in following through on these recommendations.

Congress and the U.S. Department of Education have made clear that funds provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) should be used for early childhood education. As the Department explained in its ARRA guidance:

Congress in its ARRA conference report indicated its intent that grantees use some of their Title I funds for early childhood programs and activities. The Administration is committed over the long term to expanding early childhood educational opportunities and creating a more seamless web of high-quality early childhood services for parents and children. In coming weeks, the Department will provide additional guidance on opportunities to use ARRA funds to expand high-quality early childhood educational services.

It is also clear that the "supplement, not supplant" requirement of Title I, Part A may not be waived for the use of ARRA funds.

The Department's guidance emphasizes that ARRA funds should be treated as one-time funds, and spent in a manner that recognizes the potential for a "funding cliff." Nonetheless, states and districts are urged to consider how ARRA funds can be used in a manner that provides a long-term impact. Early childhood education provides numerous opportunities for short-term spending with long-term impact, and this guidance is intended to assist LEAs in considering those opportunities.

There are many ways that Title I funds (or State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, if available) can be used to support early childhood education and services to children birth to five. Below is a list compiled by the Illinois Early Learning Council; each of these suggestions can be used

individually, or in combination. The Council has also provided suggestions for the use of IDEA Part B funds.

Title I

Program and Family support:

- Provide funding to hire family resource coordinators to provide parent education and outreach. Hire consultants or temporary staff to provide parent education and support to connect families with existing early childhood resources in the community, including school- and community-based programs for children birth to five and Head Start.
- Support programs in their efforts to serve hard-to-reach children by providing funds to hire qualified summer hourly staff who would visit families in order to build relationships and encourage families to enroll in center-based or school-based preschool programs in the fall. In addition to staff salaries, funding could be used for home-based curriculum and staff travel reimbursements.
- Especially in areas where programs have difficulty engaging parents in early learning programs, or in immigrant communities, hire consultants to build a program's capacity to respond to parents who may need assistance negotiating the transition between infant toddler programs and programs for three- and four-year-olds.
- Purchase computers and provide internet connectivity for staff use in early childhood programs so that they can access web-based assessments and maintain accurate program and child outcome data.
- Use funds to translate early childhood enrollment and program materials into the various languages represented in individual school districts.
- Provide funding for early childhood programs to purchase hand-held devices so that staff could use them to complete classroom observations and participate in the Illinois' Tool for Early Childhood Excellence (I TEACHe) observation and documentation system.
- Implement parent engagement programs, such as the Strengthening Families program, which supports parents and prevents child abuse.
- Fund incentives to increase programs' participation and alignment in the Quality Rating System.
- Develop local community collaborations to align IL Early Learning Standards with K-12 standards.
- Use funds to support collaboration activities such as professional development, child screening, and parental support programming among early childhood providers in the community (including school programs, Head Start, community-based providers, and services for infants and toddlers). This could include hiring consultants that focus on building these collaborative systems within a community.

Professional development:

- Provide funding for grants or scholarships, or supplement the contributions of staff receiving Gateways to Opportunity scholarships, so that early childhood staff can take the classes necessary to obtain a baccalaureate degree, Type 04 certification, bilingual or ESL endorsements, or obtain specialized credentials, including the Infant Toddler Credential, Early Childhood Credential and Illinois Director Credential. (Gateways scholarships partially pay for tuition and fees).

- Provide funding for staff interested in pursuing teacher certification to access the bilingual Basic Skills Test preparation course offered by the Chicago Metropolitan Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Fund the Program for Infant and Toddler Care (PITC) trainings conducted by WestEd to establish a cadre of trainers for Illinois that could bring PITC training to infant and toddler programs throughout the state, as well as PITC training for higher education faculty so that staff at 2- and 4-year institutions could increase course content focused on infants and toddlers. PITC is a comprehensive training system that helps center-based staff and home providers specialized knowledge in the care and development of infants and toddlers.
- Provide funding for substitute teachers for community-based organizations so that staff can take advantage of professional development opportunities.
- Fund and support cohort models of teacher preparation leading to a baccalaureate degree, the Infant Toddler Credential/ Illinois Director Credential/ Early Childhood Education Credential, or a Bilingual/ ESL Endorsement. When funding teacher preparation cohorts, considerations must include:
 - The outreach required to recruit students for participation in cohorts;
 - The students' need for mentors/advisors to guide them through the program;
 - Compensation for participants for time off work needed to complete the program; and
 - A pool of qualified substitute teachers to cover participants' classrooms while they complete the program.
- Provide funding to support the development and delivery of on-line professional development modules for:
 - Early childhood program administrators to provide them with the knowledge and skills to effectively lead high quality programs, promote teacher effectiveness, and successfully participate in Preschool for All. These modules can be used by existing early childhood professional development delivery systems or incorporated into degree/credential programs.
 - Early childhood program staff to provide them with knowledge and skills development in effective instructional strategies for working with young children who are English language learners. Modules can be used by existing early childhood professional development delivery systems such as Illinois Resource Center or incorporated into degree/credential programs.
- Use resources to support the further development and implementation of the online training registry developed by DHS. The use of the registry has been endorsed by the Good Start, Grow Smart team, a team comprised of administrators from Head Start Region V, ISBE Division of Early Childhood, Department of Human Services Child Care Bureau and the Head Start Collaboration office.

Early Childhood Facilities and Space Capacity

- Fund renovations to retrofit an existing space to accommodate additional program slots. This may include, but is not limited to, minor building restorations or other facility improvements.
- Fund complete renovations to meet the following codes and/or regulations: Building and Accessibility (ADA) codes, Illinois Department of Children and Family Service licensing requirements, Fire and Health Department codes and regulations. These renovations may

include, but are not limited to, the installation of handrails, appropriate bathroom and kitchen fixtures, or required lighting fixtures or windows. Other code-specific renovations would include projects such as the widening of doorways to accommodate wheelchairs.

- Provide funds for rental or lease agreement costs for facilities. This may or may not include a third party.
- Support the lease or purchasing costs of a temporary mobile building. The most commonly used mobile buildings have space for two classrooms.
- Fund cosmetic improvements, which may include, but are not limited to, painting or carpet modifications.
- Contract with an architect, engineer and other specialized service professionals to complete a building assessment to evaluate the feasibility of space improvement/expansion projects.

IDEA PART B

- Hire specialized consultants to complete developmental assessments, especially in districts that have had difficulty completing assessments or have a backlog of children needing assessments because of staff shortfalls. This will enable the district or community-based program to complete more IEPs and provide more timely services for young children with disabilities or delays.
- Increase capacity to serve young children with disabilities by providing professional development for staff at community-based organizations to enable them to better serve young children with IEPs.
- Increase the capacity of school districts to respond to the needs of families of children with disabilities or delays so that they can better transition the children from birth to three services to preschool programs. Consultants or temporary staff could assist school districts with transition planning so that when ARRA funds are expended the program will have implemented good policies and activities to ensure smooth transitions for children.
- Provide funding to hire specialized consultants (e.g. speech therapist, physical therapist) to provide services to children in their child care or preschool setting throughout the community.
- Provide funding for substitute teachers for community-based organizations so that staff can take advantage of professional development opportunities that would increase their skills in working with young children with disabilities.
- Make modifications to early childhood facilities so that programs can serve young children with disabilities (ramps, etc.).
- Provide funding to hire specialists to conduct developmental screenings in non-traditional settings (e.g. child's home, family child care centers). This would identify families with children who may have developmental delays but are not connected with early childhood services and result in the appropriate referral for intervention.
- Use funds to contract with mental health consultants to support teachers in preschool and child care centers in their work with children with behavior problems. This will target children who may be at-risk, but are not yet at the level of needing an IEP and will provide preventative services in order to avoid the future need for an IEP.