

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

June 13, 2016

The Honorable Sylvia Matthews Burwell
Secretary of Health and Human Services
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Dr. John King
Secretary of Education
US Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Burwell and Secretary King:

As you know, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) marks the first time that our nation's primary education law includes dedicated funding to improve access to preschool for children from low-income and disadvantaged families. We want to thank you for working with us and our staff to make this a reality.

As enacted under ESSA, the Preschool Development Grants (PDG) is intended to improve coordination, quality, and access in early childhood education. The program builds upon your administration's great work through the Early Learning Challenge (ELC) and the PDG program (as initially authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act "ARRA"), which helped states develop and sustain strong early learning systems with the goal of universal access to high-quality preschool. The PDG program authorized under ESSA (ESSA PDG) represents another much needed opportunity for our nation's youngest learners.

Fulfilling the promise of the ESSA PDG program will take ambitious actions and comprehensive coordination between the two agencies. We intend for the agencies to work together, and jointly with us, in order to faithfully implement the law. In particular, we urge the agencies to:

Support states with ambitious plans to improve quality and access – The ESSA PDG program provides the Secretaries with the authority to approve ambitious State plans to improve coordination, access, and quality in early childhood education. We intend for the Secretaries to carefully review applications with regard to quality plans with the overall goal of universal access to high-quality preschool.

Work jointly and collaboratively – Like the PDG program, the ESSA PDG is intended to be jointly administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). While the funding will be allocated to HHS, we intend for the program to operate similarly with regard to the current partnership between the two agencies, and we have appreciated the collaborative approach the agencies took to implement the ELC and PDG programs thus far. The partnership has been and continues to be beneficial to grantees as they work to improve outcomes for children.

Ensure an orderly and fair transition – ESSA's transition language (Section 9212(j)(2)) clearly indicates that States that have received funding under the ARRA PDG before the date of enactment

should continue to receive funds under the terms of the existing award for the duration for which the award was granted. The intent of this language is to ease grantee burden. Our expectation is for these states to continue to work with staff from both ED and HHS to ensure that the more than 50,000 children served in more than 230 communities will have continuity in service to the high-quality programs in which they are being served in the fourth year of their grant cycle. The new terms of the ESSA PDG program, therefore, should take effect when the agencies hold a competition under the ESSA PDG program.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that the PDG programs are effective and create real, positive change for children and families across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Patty Murray
United States Senator
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions (HELP)

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bobby Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
U.S. Congressman
Ranking Member
House Committee on
Education & the Workforce