

Strong Start for America's Children Act

All children deserve the chance to learn and build skills from an early age so they can start kindergarten on a level playing field with their peers. Research has shown that children who attend high-quality preschool programs are less likely to be held back in school, require remedial education, engage in criminal activity, or use social safety net programs later in life. They are also more likely to graduate from high school and have higher earnings as adults.

Despite the clear benefits of early childhood education programs, millions of young children from low- and moderate-income families lack access to high-quality, affordable preschool programs. The Strong Start for America's Children Act is a bold, 10-year innovative federal-state partnership to expand and improve early learning opportunities for children across the birth-to-age-five continuum.

The Strong Start for America's Children Act provides:

Access to High-Quality Preschool

- Formula funding is provided to states, with a state match, for high-quality, full-day preschool for four-year old children from families earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
 - States that provide universally available, voluntary, high-quality preschool programs for 4-year old children can use funding to provide access to 3-year olds that meet the same eligibility requirements.
- States in turn provide subgrants to local entities, including school districts and Head Start programs or licensed child care settings, to offer children high-quality prekindergarten programs. Such programs must include:
 - Teachers with high qualifications and that are paid comparably to K-12 teachers;
 - Rigorous health and safety standards;
 - Small class sizes and low child-to-staff ratios;
 - Instruction that is based in evidence and is developmentally appropriate;
 - Evidence-based child-staff comprehensive services for children, including strong parent and family engagement, nutritious meals, and health screening and referrals.

Early Learning Quality Partnerships

- New Early Head Start and child care partnerships are supported to improve the quality of child care for infants and toddlers through age three.
- Local Early Head Start agencies contract with local center-based child care programs and family child care homes serving infants and toddlers to raise child care program quality through training and technical assistance.
- These partnerships will meet the high-quality performance standards of Early Head Start and blend federal funds to provide high-quality, full-day care.

Children with Disabilities

- The bill acknowledges that high-quality prekindergarten programs should be inclusive of services for children with disabilities
- The bill recognizes the need for increased funding to serve children with disabilities in early childhood settings by increasing the authorization level for programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities and preschool grants for children with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Act.

Home Visitation

- The bill expresses a sense of the Senate that federal funding for voluntary, evidence-based home visitation programs under the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program be continued.
 - This cost-effective program improves maternal and child health and increases school readiness for invulnerable populations by delivering voluntary parent education and family support services directly to parents with young children.