President Obama’s Historic Early Education Proposal

In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Obama called for universal preschool. The president's fiscal year 2014 budget proposes a historic federal investment of $75 billion over 10 years to provide all 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families with access to high-quality preschool programs. The proposal also includes an expansion of Early Head Start and home visiting to serve infants and toddlers. Massachusetts relies on federal funding sources for 80% of its early education spending. With an ever-growing waiting list of children who need a state subsidy to access preschool, and a significant achievement gap that research shows takes root before kindergarten, the commonwealth would benefit greatly from this early learning initiative.

Main Components

Preschool for All ($75 billion over 10 years): The president’s goal is to reach all 4-year-olds whose families are at or below 200% of the poverty level. Federal funding would flow from the U.S. Department of Education to states based on their share of 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. Funds would be distributed to local school districts and other providers in the mixed delivery system for implementation. To qualify, states would need to meet quality assurances such as state-level early learning standards, the ability to link pre-k and k-12 data, and program quality standards including qualified teachers with salaries comparable to k-12 teachers, professional development, evidence-based curricula, low child-staff ratios, small class sizes, and ongoing program evaluation.

- All 50 states would be able to participate should they meet quality assurances.
- 12-18 awards are estimated for year one, based on $1.3 billion in FY14 funding.
- State match would increase over time from 10% in year one to 100% in year eight and 300% in year 10.

Voluntary Home Visiting ($15 billion over 10 years): Building off of existing voluntary home visiting initiatives funded under the Affordable Care Act, this proposal expands access to programs to support vulnerable families with young children. Home visiting programs offer parent education and connect parents with resources that help them promote their children’s health, well-being, learning, and development.

Preschool and home visiting initiatives would be funded by raising the federal tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products by 94 cents per pack.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships ($1.4 billion in FY14): This proposal would expand high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers through new competitive grants for Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships. This initiative would serve 110,000 infants and toddlers, thereby nearly doubling enrollment in Early Head Start.

State Impact

During the first year of participation, Massachusetts is estimated to receive $27.2 million in federal preschool funding (serving about 3,317 children) and $7.4 million in home visiting funding. The Department of Early Education and Care has made steady progress in building a statewide system of high-quality early education, despite state budget cuts of $82 million since fiscal year 2009. A new federal preschool initiative requiring matching state funds would generate momentum for continued early education support by Massachusetts policymakers.

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2 Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. (2013). Declines in Spending in Early Education & Care in Massachusetts.
3 FY14 ED/HHS Early Learning Budget Briefing. April 19, 2013. Webinar available at: http://edstream.ed.gov/webcast/Viewer/?peid=e6821e0702fe4350b2b71ca33d703b41d
4 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. (June 4, 2013). Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education in Massachusetts.