



FFYF Mini-Update 04.02.09

Hello, early childhood friends:

The information floodgates have officially opened! This week brought bucketfuls of guidance from the Department of Education and even some droplets from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Department of Education

On the Department of Education (ED) [recovery website](#), you can find hundreds of pages of guidance detailing how the Department plans to quickly disburse nearly \$44 billion. Documents released yesterday include guidance on the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF), Title I, and IDEA.

And there's still more to come. Absent from this deluge was the promised additional guidance on using Title I for early childhood, which is still expected to be released in the coming weeks. Also missing were details on the "Race to the Top" funds of the SFSF, the big pot of competitive incentive and innovation grants, totaling almost \$5 billion.

So what do all those pages say about early childhood? Well, it's a bit of a mixed bag.

The good news is flexibility. It appears to us— but, no promises here —that the guidance makes it clear that districts can use SFSF dollars for a wide range of purposes. That means anything that's in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (a.k.a. No Child Left Behind), including early learning, and may even include construction as well. Districts and states do need to ensure that expenditures are used to advance the four areas of assurance (teacher effectiveness, data, standards and assessments, and school improvement), but early learning clearly does that. So the legalese is on our side; now it's just an issue of competing priorities and how the decisions get made at the local level.

The bad news is imprecision. The Department missed some great opportunities to explicitly name "early learning" across all guidance documents. For example, the Title I guidance makes very little reference to early education, other than a small prompt in A-2 (p. 9) that early learning is an encouraged use of funds.

Still, what we see in the SFSF guidance looks promising:

- In I-1 (p. 9), the guidance indicates that states are expected to commit to "pre-k-to-college-and-career data systems," with no link to the Head Start comprehensive data system requirement. This phrasing is repeated in a table on p. 12.
- In I-3 (p. 9) is a reminder that stabilization funds may be used to restore early childhood funding. This is buttressed by III-B-3 (p. 19), which emphasizes the flexibility states have in determining the use of stabilization funds within education. Nonetheless, neither the statute nor the guidance is sufficiently precise on exactly what happens in states where early childhood is not funded through the primary K-12 funding stream. Clearly the money can be used for early childhood regardless; however, the question is at what level the decision gets made. We'll take a deeper look at that and come back to you once we have additional information.
- In III-D-8 (p. 21), early childhood is specifically listed as a strategy for improving the lowest-performing schools.
- In III-D-9 (p. 23), the guidance notes that LEAs have significant flexibility in using stabilization funds for early childhood, and encourages the use of stabilization funds for research-based early childhood. While the example given is pre-k, the overarching frame is early childhood education.

In sum, there's a lot of promise, but there's a lot of legwork still to do.

Department of Health and Human Services

HHS has been busy as well and today released information on Head Start and Early Head Start expansion grants. Their [press release](#) lays out how the buckets of money will flow through the Head Start funding formula, with \$326 million going to Cost of Living Adjustments, \$354 million going to quality improvements, \$220 going to Head Start expansion, \$1.1 billion for Early Head Start expansion, and \$100 million for state advisory councils. Some of the funds for COLAs and training and technical assistance are being made available to grantees immediately. We're still awaiting guidance on the expansion funds and the advisory councils. Some hints about how the granting process might work can be discerned from the synopses on the grants.gov website, which has skeleton entries for both [Early Head Start](#) and [Head Start](#).

In other news, despite alleged tax woes, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius had a pretty easy time of it at her [confirmation hearing](#) before the Senate Finance Committee today and could be confirmed as HHS Secretary before the weekend. Health care was definitely the hot topic of the hearing, but any hearing that gets us one step closer to having someone with her track record in the Department is a big win for early childhood.

Stay tuned for more updates to come!