

EDUCATION BEGINS AT HOME ACT

What is the “Education Begins at Home Act”?

The Education Begins at Home Act (S. 667) is legislation reintroduced in the 110th Congress on February 16, 2007 by Senator Bond (MO) and Senator Clinton (NY). It is intended to give many more children a quality early childhood experience with the help of home visitation services. The new funds will help states to establish or expand quality home visitation programs already underway in communities, and will target some specific groups of children and families for assistance. The legislation has been referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

What does the “Education Begins at Home Act” do?

The legislation will establish the first, dedicated federal funding stream to support parents with young children through quality home visitation at the state and local level.

Specifically, the bill will:

- Provide \$400 million over 3 years to states to expand access to parent education and family support services through quality early childhood home visitation programs
- Provide \$50 million over 3 years to fund innovative ideas and partnerships at the local level to expand early childhood home visitation services to families with English Language Learners
- Provide \$50 million over 3 years to reach military families with early childhood home visitation services on military bases as well as through Department of Defense and Impact Aid Schools
- Strengthen the early childhood home visitation component of Early Head Start.

Why is early childhood home visitation important?

The home is the first and most important learning environment for children, and parents are their child's most influential teacher. Home visitation delivers parent education and family support services directly to parents with young children, providing guidance on how parents can enhance their children's development from birth through kindergarten entry.

Home visitation is an effective, research-based and cost-efficient way to bring families and resources together to ensure that children grow up healthy and ready to learn. This legislation builds on existing models of quality early childhood home visitation programs, which together can help to meet the special needs of different children and families. This legislation will help states to create a system of early childhood home visitation that will ensure that families are receiving the most appropriate services to meet their needs.

What kinds of outcomes could one expect from early childhood home visitation programs?

Quality early childhood home visitation programs lead to positive outcomes for children and families, including:

- **Improved children's readiness for school** – Children whose parents participated in a quality home visitation program showed improved school readiness scores and higher scores on achievement and standardized tests¹.
- **Improved child health and development** – Families who received quality home visitation were more likely to seek prenatal and well-child care and to have their children immunized².

¹ Pfannenstiel, J.C., Seitz, V., & Zigler, E. (2002) Promoting school readiness: the role of the Parents as Teachers Program. *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field*, 6, 71-86; Arkansas Statewide Study of HIPPY, 1999, conducted by Dr. Robert Bradley of the University of Arkansas; Levenstein, P., Levenstein, S. & Oliver, D. (2002), First grade school readiness of former child participants in a South Carolina Replication of the Parent-Child Home Program, *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 23, 331-353.

- **Improved parenting practices** – Parents participating in quality home visitation demonstrated more knowledge about child-rearing, have better communication skills and have less parenting stress.³
- **Reductions in child maltreatment** – Parents participating in quality home visitation had more age-appropriate expectations of their children and used more positive discipline, which are both precursors of abuse, and overall had fewer documented cases of abuse and neglect⁴.

Under this legislation, what families will be eligible for home visitation services?

An eligible family is defined as a woman who is pregnant or a parent or primary caregiver of a child who is from birth until entry into kindergarten. If they wish, states will be able to further define which families they serve with these new funds.

How will the funding be administered?

At the federal level, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in collaboration with the Department of Education, will make grants to states to establish or expand Parents as Teachers programs or other quality programs of early childhood home visitation. The funds can be used to supplement, not replace, existing state and local services for families. In each state, the Governor will identify a state agency to take the lead in delivering early childhood home visitation services under this program.

Grants to promote innovative strategies for serving families with English Language Learners will be made directly from DHHS to local entities. Grants to serve military families will be made by the Department of Defense to local entities.

How will funding be allocated to states?

Funds will be allocated to states based on the number of children from birth through age 5 who reside in that state, compared to the number of children of those ages who reside in all States that receive funds for the fiscal year. However, no state can receive more than \$20 million in one fiscal year.

What will states be required to do to receive the funding?

To receive a state grant, a state will be required to complete an application that includes:

- A **needs assessment** that describes the existing quality and capacity of early childhood home visitation programs and the families being served, and identifies gaps in services.
- A plan for **how the state will implement one or more early childhood home visitation programs** that help fill in its identified service gap.
- A description of **how the state will build on and promote collaboration among existing early childhood home visitation programs** to ensure families are getting the most appropriate services to meet their needs.

² Berkenes, J.P. (2001), HOPES Healthy Families Iowa FY 2001 Services Report; Klagholz & Associates (2000), Healthy Families Montgomery Evaluation Report Year IV; Greene et al. (2001), Evaluation Findings of the Healthy Families New York Home Visiting Program; Katzev, A., Pratt, C. & McGuigan, W. (2001), Oregon Healthy Start 1999-2000, Status Report.

³ Pfannenstiel J. & Seltzer, D. (1989) New Parents as Teachers: Evaluation of an Early Parent Education Program, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 4, 1-18; Wagner, M., Iida, E. & Spiker, D. (2001) The Multisite Evaluation of the Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program: Three-Year Findings from One Community; Administration for Children and Families (2003) *Research to Practice: Early Head Start Home-Based Services*, Washington D.C.: DHHS.; Galano J. & Huntington, L. (1997) Year V Evaluation of the Hampton, Virginia Healthy Families Partnership; LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc. (2001) Healthy Families Arizona Evaluation Report; McLaren, L. (1988) Fostering mother-child relationships, *Child Welfare*, 67, 35-365.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2003) First reports evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for preventing violence: early childhood home visitation and firearms laws. Findings from Task Force on Community Prevention Services MMWR 52 (No. RR-14); Wagner, M., Iida, E. & Spiker, D. (2001) *The Multisite Evaluation of the Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program: Three-Year Findings from One Community*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

- A description of **how the state will promote channels of communication between staff of early childhood home visitation programs and staff of other early childhood programs** such as Head Start, preschool programs, child care programs, etc.
- A plan for providing **training and technical assistance** to staff of programs.
- An **evaluation plan** that demonstrates how outcomes will be tracked and measured in the areas of parent knowledge and practices and children's cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical development.

For what will states be able to use the funding?

States will be able to use the funding to:

- Provide eligible families with **voluntary early childhood home visitation** on at least a monthly basis, with a greater frequency for those families identified with additional needs;
- Offer **annual health, vision, hearing and developmental screening** for eligible children;
- Provide **referrals** for eligible families, as needed, **to additional resources**;
- Offer **group meetings** to further enhance the information and skill-building addressed during home visits;
- Provide **training and technical assistance** to early childhood home visitation staff (required set-aside of 10%); and
- **Coordinate various models of early childhood home visitation** to ensure families are receiving the most appropriate and effective services to meet their needs.

Are states required to use these funds for a particular home visitation model?

The legislation refers to establishing or expanding Parents as Teachers programs or other quality programs of early childhood home visitation. It is not limited to one particular model of service; instead the legislation details some of the characteristics of quality home visitation programs. A state will determine which model or models to utilize that meet those characteristics and best meet the needs of their families.

How will the implementation of quality home visitation programs be assured?

The legislation ensures implementation of quality home visitation programs through the application process, requirements regarding uses of the funds, and required evaluations and reporting. In particular:

- **Applications will be reviewed by a peer review panel** that includes representatives with backgrounds in the fields of home visitation and early childhood development
- States will be required to **reserve 10 percent of the grant funds to provide training and technical assistance** on topics such as effective methods of parenting education, home visiting and promoting early childhood development
- Grantees (state or local entity) will be **required to provide a minimum of monthly visits**, with a greater frequency of services provided to families identified with additional needs
- Grantees (state or local entity) will be **required to implement home visitation models that provide certain services** as part of any home visit, such as providing parents with the knowledge about age-appropriate child development and the skills to interact with their child to enhance age-appropriate development.
- Grantees (state or local entity) will be **required to conduct an evaluation that includes tracking outcomes** in the areas of parent knowledge, positive parenting practices, and child development
- **DHHS will be required to conduct an independent evaluation** that, among other things, will track outcomes in the areas of parent knowledge, positive parenting practices, and child development

What will be the reporting requirements for states?

States will be required to submit an annual report to the Secretary of DHHS. The reports will include a description of:

- the types of activities funded under the grant;

- the children and families served;
- the effectiveness of the training and technical assistance; and
- after the second year of the grant, the results of the outcome evaluations.

State must also provide assurance that they will, if requested, participate in an independent evaluation conducted by DHHS.

Why include a section on strengthening Early Head Start?

Early Head Start is currently the largest federally-funded program that provides home visitation services to parents with young children. Evaluation outcomes have shown the program to be very effective with high needs families. The proposed enhancements to the Early Head Start program are intended to incorporate best practices from the field of home visitation into the existing program.

Why is special attention given to families with English Language Learners and to military families?

Military families and families with English Language Learners each face unique challenges when raising young children. Military families are frequently relocated and are often stationed far away from their natural support system of family and friends. Parents who serve in the military may also be separated from their spouses and children for long periods of time due to deployment. Parents who are English language learners must acclimate to a new country and culture, and learn how to navigate our education, health or social service systems. This legislation will target funding to help promote innovative home visitation approaches that will effectively reach and serve these families with unique needs.

For further information, please contact Jane Callahan, Public Policy Director, at Parents as Teachers National Center, 314-432-4330 ext. 297 or jane.callahan@parentsasteachers.org.