

The Ready to Learn Act

Senator Patty Murray

The Importance of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

- Research shows that benefits from pre-kindergarten education carry over into the first years of school and even into adulthood. These benefits include increased academic success and improvements in emotional development and behavior.
- Studies show that children who learn the names and sounds of letters before entering kindergarten are 20 times more likely to read simple words by the end of kindergarten than children who enter kindergarten not knowing the letters of the alphabet. Children who do not know their letters prior to kindergarten too often fail to catch up with their peers who do.
- Eighty-eight percent of children who are poor readers in first grade remain poor readers by the fourth grade. Children who are not at least modestly skilled readers by the end of third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school.
- Nearly 50 percent of all kindergarten teachers report that at least half of their students come to school with problems that hinder their success. These problems include difficulty following directions, struggles with academic skills, and an inability to work independently.

The Ready to Learn Act

- The *Ready to Learn Act* creates a competitive grant program that would fund early childhood programs to promote school readiness. The bill would create a new title within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Children who are four years of age are addressed through this proposal.
- Governors may apply for their states to receive funding and must outline, through an application process, the planning and implementation process of the activities they intend to create if their state receives a grant. States would have to match each dollar in order to receive the funding.
- Fifteen percent of grant funds will be put towards quality investments.
- The Secretary of Education will coordinate with the Secretary of Health and Human Service regarding the review of state plans and implementation of programs.
- State plans will require qualified teachers, a developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning curriculum that is aligned with the State early learning standards and valid and reliable, multiple assessments for the purpose of improving instruction, low teacher to child ratios, and support for professional development.
- Once these requirements are met, funds can also be used to serve younger children, increase teacher salaries, construct new facilities or include additional comprehensive services.
- The program will prioritize serving children from low-income working families (earning up to 200% of the federal poverty limit) and children from limited English households.
- Schools, child care entities, Head Start programs, or other community providers of pre-kindergarten programs are all eligible for subgrants. Twenty-five percent of subgrants must go to community-based organizations.
- Grants should be used to supplement and not supplant other Federal, State and local public funds expended to promote voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in the state.
- States receiving a grant will submit annual reports to the Secretary detailing the effectiveness of the pre-kindergarten programs in their state.