

# The Ready to Learn Act

## U.S. Senator Patty Murray

### The Importance of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

- Research shows 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 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.
- Economists estimate that every \$1 invested in high-quality pre-k saves taxpayers between \$2 and \$17.
- 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 to 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 would benefit 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 grant activities. States would be required to provide dollar-for-dollar state match for the federal award.
- Fifteen percent of grant funds will be put towards investments in quality improvement.
- The Secretary of Education will coordinate with the Secretary of Health and Human Services to review the state plans and implement the program.
- State plans require: (a) qualified teachers; (b) developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning curriculum aligned with the State early learning standards; (c) valid and reliable assessments to help improve instruction; (d) low teacher to child ratios; and (e) support for professional development.
- Once these state requirements are met, funds may also be used to serve younger children, increase teacher salaries, construct new facilities or provide additional comprehensive services.
- The program will prioritize serving children from low-income working families (i.e., earning up to 200% of the federal poverty limit) and children from English learning 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.

Should you have questions, contact Sarah Bolton or Ariel Evans of Senate Murray's staff at (202) 224-2621.