

Expanding Early Childhood Care in your Community

Why Early Childhood Matters

Early care and education works. Every educator knows the value of early intervention and early education, on the long-term success of students. **One of the strongest indicators for success in third grade (the first major testing year for students in Louisiana) is kindergarten readiness.** Skills such as language and literacy, math, motor skills, and social skills are all indicators not only of kindergarten readiness, but life-long academic success. Not only is early childhood education a strong indicator of future success, it is equally important in preventing behaviors or consequences that are detrimental to the success of our children. **Children who participate in high-quality early care and education programs are less likely to:**

- Require special education services, or be retained a grade in school
- Dropout before high school graduation
- Develop a chronic disease in adulthood or be engaged in the criminal justice system

Why Should LEAs Consider Expanding Pre-K or B-3 Seats Now?

Families and young children have experienced significant challenges since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. A recently-published [report on child wellbeing](#) found that millions of children across the country are experiencing heightened levels of food insecurity, families with heightened anxiety around financial security, and the widest gaps of learning loss. Equity and achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged children and their affluent peers is predicted to widen due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the detrimental effects of interrupted learning.

Additionally, due to facility closures or family risk factors, many young children that would have typically been enrolled in high-quality child care, Head Start, or other pre-K programs stayed home this year. While it is difficult to predict all of the impacts of these challenges, school systems should anticipate that children will enter school requiring a greater degree of support than in previous years.

To support young children's cognitive and social-emotional development and to help ensure they are more likely to be ready for kindergarten, school systems should consider expanding their early childhood options for young children. This could include:

- **Expanding pre-K Seats:** Systems may choose to use ESSER I or ESSER II funds to expand pre-K for children who qualify for pre-K under Title I.
- **Expanding B-3 Seats:** Systems may also choose to partner with type III child care providers to offer additional seats for children birth through age three who qualify for early childhood education programs under Title I.

Allowable Use of ESSER Funds:

Creating or expanding early childhood education programs in response to COVID-19 is an allowable use of funds under ESSER I, ESSER II, and ESSER III. School systems can consider using these funds to expand school-based pre-K programs or birth through three seats in child care center partnerships, and fund the costs of the program that are reasonable and necessary for the implementation of these seats.

Direct language from the CARES Act reads as follows:

CARES Act section 18003(d)(1); 2 CFR §§ 200.403-200.405. ESEA section 8101(16) defines “early childhood education program” as:

(A) a Head Start program or an Early Head Start program carried out under the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9831 et seq.), including a migrant or seasonal Head Start program, an Indian Head Start program, or a Head Start program or an Early Head Start program that also receives State funding;

(B) a State licensed or regulated child care program; or

(C) a program that— (i) serves children from birth through age six that addresses the children’s cognitive (including language, early literacy, and early mathematics), social, emotional, and physical development; and (ii) is— (I) a State prekindergarten program; (II) a program authorized under section 619 or part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; or (III) a program operated by [an LEA]. To be an allowable use of funds under section 18003(d)(1) of the CARES Act, an early childhood education program funded under ESSER must meet this definition. CARES Act section 18007(8).

Expanding Pre-K Seats

School systems considering expanding pre-K seats should first take the below steps to understand the community need, and capacity for meeting that need:

- Analyze pre-K and kindergarten enrollment data by year, center, and zip code or neighborhood
- Assess anticipated need based on LA4 seats requests, enrollment and attendance data from previous year(s)
- Identify available classroom spaces
- Evaluate the number of teachers available in workforce to ensure classrooms are meeting ratio requirements
- Use ESSER funds to hire teachers
- Recruit and enroll children through social media, advertising campaigns, and in-person outreach events
- Purchase curriculum and necessary supplies for classrooms
- While costs may vary depending on context, the per-child rate for LA 4 is **\$4,580**, which may be a helpful budgeting starting point for systems who wish to expand four-year-old pre-K

Expanding B-3 Seats

School systems considering expanding birth through three seats should first take the below steps to understand the community need, and capacity for meeting that need:

- Analyze birth cohort data and economically disadvantaged cohort data to understand the community need
- Analyze early childhood access data by year, center, and zip code or neighborhood
- Survey interested centers about capacity for serving more children
- Create partnership agreements with existing or new Type III child care providers to serve additional children
- Use ESSER funds to pay providers, hire additional staff as needed, and equip classrooms with high-quality instructional materials
- Recruit and enroll children through social media, advertising campaigns, and in-person outreach events
- While costs may vary depending on context, the per-child rate for B-3 seats ranges from **\$10,670-\$12,161** per year, varying by age group; this may be a helpful starting point for systems who wish to expand B-3 seats

If your school system or community network plans to expand pre-K or B-3 seats, please direct questions or requests for additional data, resources, or supports to Devon.Camarota@la.gov.