



Illinois

Early Childhood Block Grant

The Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) funds a pre-k program for at-risk 3- and 4-year-old children. The state contracts directly with school districts, child care providers, and Head Start programs; and some school districts subcontract with community-based providers.

Eligibility

Income: locally determined within a state framework of multiple risk factors; low family income is a consideration in the screening process to identify at-risk children

Age: children ages 3 to 5 who are not eligible for kindergarten

Priority: locally determined; the state suggests that the most at-risk children with the greatest number of eligibility criteria be enrolled in the program

Length of Program

Hours/day: a minimum of two and a half hours per day, five days per week

Days/year: a minimum of 180 days

Eligible Providers

Public school districts, university laboratory schools approved by the Illinois State Board of Education, charter schools, area vocational centers, non-profit and for-profit child care and Head Start agencies, faith-based organizations, and family child care providers

Number Served

55,984 (2003) ¹

Total Annual Budget

\$198.7 million (2003)

Monitoring

Each program is required to send program and student (demographic and attendance) data to the Illinois State Board of Education on an annual basis. An annual review will be conducted for each new project to ensure program quality, to assist in program improvement, and to provide technical assistance.

¹ For updated figures on the program budget and number served, please see the NIEER State Preschool Yearbook at: <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

Governance

How are state pre-k programs integrated into community-based settings?

The Illinois School Code authorizes contracting directly with community-based providers or subcontracting through public school districts. Fiscal year 2003 was the first year that child care providers, Head Start agencies, churches, and other community-based providers could apply directly to the Illinois State Board of Education for grants.² Local school districts decide whether or not to subcontract with community-based providers, but must include provisions for collaboration in their applications to the state.

Are there requirements to integrate the state pre-k and subsidized child care programs at the state or local level?

There are no requirements for integration between the pre-k and child care programs. However, there is a larger statewide coordination effort for early care and education. The Illinois Early Learning Council coordinates existing programs and services for children from birth to age 5 in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families. The goal of the Council is to fulfill the vision of a statewide, high-quality, accessible, and comprehensive early learning system to benefit all young children whose parents choose it. The Council guides collaborative efforts to improve and expand upon existing early childhood programs and services.

At the local level, community collaboration is one of six required components of the application for funding: “[C]ollaborative partnerships that combine high-quality education and care for pre-kindergarten children will be given extra consideration in the approval process. Collaborative partnerships must include a direct link between and among the initiatives.” The application notes that successful community collaborations include certain critical elements: services and activities provided are coordinated with other programs in operation in the same service area that are concerned with the education, welfare, health and safety needs of young children and their families (e.g., pre-kindergarten at-risk initiative, prevention initiative, other birth-to-age-3 programs, parental training initiative, early childhood special education, Head Start, Even Start, Title I, child care providers); the education program that is established includes a language and literacy development component for each child based on the child’s individual assessment; the program collaborates with all entities in the community serving at-risk children and families; a clear collaboration and implementation plan is available; and the program has written procedures for transitioning children both into and out of the program, including into kindergarten.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

What are the rules/guidelines for notifying and selecting pre-k providers?

² For-profit and nonprofit organizations located in the city limits of Chicago that are submitting new applications for Early Childhood Block Grant funds must apply directly to the Chicago Public Schools’ (CPS) Community Partnership Programs Office using the CPS application form. For-profit and nonprofit organizations located in the city limits of Chicago that already operate Early Childhood Block Grant funded-programs through ISBE should continue to submit their applications directly to ISBE.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) posts the application on the website and mails to an extensive list of providers. There is outreach (Bidders Conferences) to educate providers about application procedures and requirements, including the rules that allow community-based programs to apply directly for funds.

All providers who wish to participate in the pre-k portion of the ECBG must participate in the competitive application process. Staff at the Illinois State Board of Education oversee the review process and make recommendations for funding the best applications. There is no requirement for onsite review of programs prior to approval, but programs applying to participate in the program must demonstrate how they meet the criteria, including staff requirements and educational components, in their grant proposal.

What resources are available to help providers become eligible to deliver pre-k services?

Through the ECBG, the state funds The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning (<http://www.thecenterweb.org/>) to provide a statewide comprehensive staff development program designed for personnel associated with the ECBG; a clearinghouse for identifying peer support, consultative services and other educational resources; and an early childhood resource library which houses a large collection of children's literature, classroom materials, and professional resources. In addition, individual ECBG program budgets include funds to support professional growth and development. Illinois has a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project and a Child Care WAGES® Project, although these programs are not specifically targeted to pre-k providers.

Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credential as teachers in school-based settings? Pre-kindergarten programs funded with ECBG funds must adhere to the same standards, regardless of where the program is located. Because there is a requirement for certified teachers, there must be parity with local school district wage and benefits scales.

Supports for Working Families

Is there any explicit discussion in the legislation or regulations of extending the day, coordinating with the child care subsidy program, or helping working families?

The application process gives extra consideration to collaborative partnerships that meet the needs of children requiring full-day, full-year care. Applications will not be funded (will “not meet the standard”) if the plans are insufficient to meet the needs of children requiring full-day, year-round placement.

Illinois has also created the child care collaboration program for eligible child care providers who collaborate with ECBG pre-kindergarten programs. If providers participate in the collaboration program, they can take advantage for the following child care rule exceptions *for families approved in the collaboration*: annual re-determination of family eligibility; a 90-day job loss grace period; and, indefinite eligibility for families whose current TANF Responsibility and Service Plan specifies the child or family’s participation in the collaboration.

What policies help working families access pre-k and other supports?

The application process gives extra consideration to programs that collaborate to meet the needs of working families, and child care collaboration grants are available to support programs that provide wraparound services.

Funding

What is the per-child payment for the pre-k program?

The per-child payment ranges from \$2,650 to \$3,000.

How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider?

There is nothing to prevent Head Start, child care, and state pre-k dollars from paying for the same child during the same hours. The provider budgets must show what the different funding streams pay for, and ensure that they are not paying for the same thing. For example, Head Start funds may pay for the facility and the comprehensive services, while pre-k funds pay for a certified teacher. To receive a full-day child care subsidy, children must receive more than six and a half hours of care.

Sources

- Website: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/html/block_grant.htm
- Program Guidelines and Requirements:
http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/block_grant_prek_settings.pdf

For information about national trends, read CLASP's *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-kindergarten* at http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf.