



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Administration on Children, Youth and Families

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Washington, D.C. 20447

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb

Dear Colleague:

This letter provides you with additional information about *Good Start, Grow Smart*, including the DRAFT revised State Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan Preprint and Guidance that address the three child care-related goals of *Good Start, Grow Smart*:

1. Voluntary State guidelines or content standards on early literacy, language, pre-reading and numeracy skills for children ages 3 to 5 that align with State K-12 standards and describe what children need to know and be able to do to succeed in kindergarten;
2. State plans for the professional development and training of child care teachers, providers and administrators to enable them to support the school readiness of young children; and,
3. State plans for coordination across early childhood programs and funding streams.

As indicated in the President's April 2002 announcement, *Good Start, Grow Smart* is envisioned as a Federal-State partnership that creates linkages between CCDF, including funds set-aside for quality, and State public and private efforts to promote early learning. The announcement specifically indicates that States will address the above *Good Start, Grow Smart* goals in their biennial CCDF Plans.

Statutorily, this initiative is supported by sections 658D(b)(1)(D), 658E(c)(3)(B), and 658G of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 1990, as amended. These sections require States to coordinate the provision of services with other Federal, State, and local child care and early childhood development programs, and to use a portion of the funding they receive to improve the quality of child care services. Read in conjunction with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Pub. L 107-110), *Good Start, Grow Smart* and the CCDBG statute call upon States to support the school readiness of young children through nurturing child care environments that foster early literacy, language, pre-reading, and numeracy skills.

The attached DRAFT Preprint and Guidance are subject to approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This process was announced in the December 18, 2002 Federal Register and provides States and others with the opportunity to comment on the drafts. To ensure that State Lead Agencies have a copy of the draft materials and can plan for the July 1, 2003 State Plan submissions, we are providing copies of the draft documents as an enclosure to this letter. With the exception of a new subsection that deals with *Good Start, Grow Smart*, we have made only minor editorial changes to the preprint and guidance. The new subsection is

intended to provide you with the opportunity to tell us about your State's efforts in support of *Good Start, Grow Smart*.

Since *Good Start, Grow Smart* was announced, the Child Care Bureau has actively sought input from ACF Regional Offices, States and other stakeholders about ways we can work together to further the school readiness of young children served in the range of child care settings. This has included discussions during Regional Child Care Administrator Meetings, with national organizations, and during the Annual State Child Care Administrators' Meeting in July 2002. The Bureau has also consulted with members of its State Issues Work Group (comprised of State agency representatives) and staff in ACF Regional Offices. In addition, the Child Care Bureau has consulted with early childhood researchers associated with the Department of Education, the National Institutes of Health, and other federal and non-federal research organizations.

In September, the Child Care Bureau, in cooperation with the Head Start Bureau and the Department of Education, sponsored a State Early Learning Guidelines Roundtable in Washington, DC. Teams were invited from ten States that have established early learning guidelines. These States provided information about their processes in developing guidelines, including motivating factors, guiding principles, leadership, participants, timelines, dissemination and implementation, resources, and challenges. The participating States also offered advice to the Federal agencies and other States about the development and implementation of voluntary early learning guidelines. The summary of proceedings from this meeting is available on the Child Care Bureau's web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/policy1/current/ACF118/summary.doc>.

In Fall 2002, ACF Regional Offices convened a series of Regional State Roundtable discussions that included State Child Care Administrators and representatives from Head Start, the Department of Education, and other early childhood professionals. The Department of Education is sponsoring Early Childhood Educator Academies that define and describe best practices on voluntary early learning guidelines, professional development, and instructional practices. The Child Care Bureau has worked with the Department of Education on the inclusion of child care content and audiences in the Academies.

These consultations have taught us a great deal about the important work that is being done in States and communities throughout the country to improve the school readiness of young children, as well as some of the challenges we all face. What we have heard has helped us better understand how the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative can build on the work you are doing to help child care providers support the development of early literacy, language, pre-reading, and numeracy skills. More specifically, we have come to understand that:

- ?? There is a solid and growing research basis for this work. Brain research demonstrates that learning, including early language acquisition, begins during infancy through nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers (*Neurons to Neighborhoods*; <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309069882/html/>). The strides children make in language, cognitive, and social development during their first five years of life are related to their later school success (*Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*; <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309068363/html/>). Preschool children who enter school

understanding the relationship between letters and sounds (alphabetic principle), consciously aware that speech is composed of identifiable units (phonemic awareness), and with basic print concepts, are better prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. And, "the single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be *reading aloud to children*"--especially when children feel emotionally secure and are active participants in the reading (*What Research Reveals*; <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/policy1/current/ACF118/wrr.pdf>). Finally, studies indicate that provider training and education are related to good quality child care and, in particular, positive interactions between providers and children. Numerous studies demonstrate that good quality child care is related to children's enhanced language, cognitive, and social development (*Child Care Quality: Does it Matter and Does it Need to Be Improved?* <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality00/ccqual.htm>).

- ?? States are at a variety of stages in the development of early learning guidelines. Some States are just beginning to think about guidelines, while others have guidelines for State pre-kindergarten programs that were developed without the involvement of the child care community. Other States have guidelines that were developed and implemented with the involvement of the entire early childhood community, including parents. Similarly, States are at varying places in their plans for professional development and coordination across early childhood programs. This has important implications for the work each State has left to do--and for the Child Care Bureau's work in providing technical assistance.
- ?? Clear definitions of terms such as "early learning guidelines" are necessary to convey the intent of *Good Start, Grow Smart*. For purposes of the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative, the term "early learning guidelines" refers to what children should know, understand, and be able to do when they enter kindergarten. These guidelines, while voluntary in their implementation, should be relevant without regard to the child care setting or whether or not a child has spent his or her preschool years in the care of a parent. Sometimes referred to as content standards, these guidelines should be research-based, developmentally-appropriate, and measurable. While early learning guidelines are not the same as instructional guidelines or curriculum, they provide the necessary foundation for professional development and inform instructional practice and assessment approaches. Other key terms such as knowledge domain, benchmarks or indicators, and guiding principles are defined in the guidance for the preprint.
- ?? Early learning partnerships are critical to the development and implementation of *Good Start, Grow Smart*, and ultimately to improving the school readiness of young children. States that have successfully developed and implemented early learning guidelines found that it took time to develop trust and good communication among partners, e.g., State departments of education, Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs, resource and referral agencies, child care providers, parents, etc. In addition, several States found that starting with guiding principles and an outside facilitator was helpful.
- ?? While *Good Start, Grow Smart* specifically addresses the development of early literacy, language, pre-reading, and numeracy skills in three to five year-olds, some States have developed early learning guidelines that address the range of developmental domains

including social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and physical. Similarly, to ensure that efforts to improve the school readiness of three to five year-olds do not have unintended consequences for younger children, some States have chosen to address children birth through five in their guidelines.

?? States are recognizing and beginning to address the challenges inherent in improving the school readiness of children in a variety of settings, including centers, family child care homes, and in-home and relative care. The need for research-based, cost-effective training approaches is critical in the child care field--especially as it relates to less formal types of care. As part of the Child Care Bureau's research agenda, we are exploring research options that will allow us to address this need. In addition, we have funded several studies that are focused on alternative approaches to child care financing and are encouraging additional research designed to assist States in determining the most effective ways to spend CCDF quality funds.

We have benefited greatly from our consultations with you and other stakeholders; your input has directly influenced the enclosed DRAFT State Plan Preprint and Guidance. We encourage you to provide comments and suggestions about these documents to me at the address provided in the December 18, 2002 Federal Register Announcement. The Announcement is available at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fedreg/a021218c.html. As indicated in the Administration's announcement of *Good Start, Grow Smart*, we view our work together on the next CCDF Plans as part of a long-term partnership to improve the development and school readiness of young children in child care.

Sincerely,

Shannon Christian
Associate Commissioner
Child Care Bureau

Enclosures