



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## Keep Up the Momentum for Early Learning and Development of our Youngest Residents

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This year, the District developed a blueprint for improving our city's investment in the early learning and healthy development of our youngest residents. That blueprint was laid out in DC's application for a federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Education announced this week that DC is not one of the [six states](#) that won a grant this round. But that should not stop the District from moving ahead on the most important strategies laid out in that application, including several that can be considered as the mayor starts putting together the FY 2015 budget.

DC's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge [application](#) outlines several strategies to strengthen services that support learning for children from birth to age five, including child care, pre-kindergarten, and maternal and child health home visiting programs. The following were particularly strong aspects of the application.

- **Improved data on access to child care and Pre-K in Wards 5, 7, and 8.** The application emphasized the need to better track access to child care and Pre-K in the parts of the city with the highest need. DCFPI agrees. There currently is not enough data on the supply and demand for quality child care/Pre-K slots in the city, which is critical to knowing how and where to expand these services.
- **Increase reimbursement rates for high-quality early learning programs serving children with the greatest needs.** This past year, the Council invested \$11 million to increase child care reimbursement rates and improve access to infant and toddler programs. While this was a positive step, there is still a need to support child care providers who primarily serve school-age children or infants and toddlers. The application mentions offering higher reimbursement rates to quality child care programs that serve children in the child welfare system or those who are homeless. A combination of financial supports and coaching/mentoring can build up the capacity of the city's child care providers.

- **Conduct a feasibility study for evidence-based home visiting programs through Medicaid financing.** The application suggests exploring the ability to finance home visiting programs with Medicaid dollars. This option, also recommended by the DC Home Visiting Council, would allow certain home visiting services to be eligible for reimbursement through Medicaid targeted case management. Getting access to federal funds would allow successful home visiting programs to increase the number of families they serve and to improve the quality of services. Because it may take more than a year to complete the study and get the necessary approvals from the Medicaid program, the study should be expedited, and the District should consider a commitment of local funds in FY 2015 until the Medicaid funding mechanism is approved.

DCFPI looks forward to working with the Gray administration on these important initiatives in 2014!