



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Expanding DC's Early Intervention Services Can Pay Off in the Long Run

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The Council Committee on Education is currently considering a set of bills that are focused on strengthening the infrastructure, streamlining access, and improving the quality of DC's special education services. DCFPI sees the proposals as important steps in the right direction for the District to better serve students with special needs. We [testified](#) in support of two provisions that are especially important:

- **Expanding services to more young children with developmental delays.** The District recently expanded eligibility for early intervention services under IDEA Part C so infants and toddlers up to age three can get services if they have a 50 percent developmental delay in one area or 25 percent in two areas. The Enhanced Special Education Services Act of 2014 proposes a further expansion of these eligibility criteria to include children demonstrating a developmental delay of 25 percent in at least one area.

Research and logic tell us that early identification of disabilities in children can lead to better academic and behavioral outcomes and also lessen future costs to the city and society. The earlier that a child is evaluated and a disability or developmental delay is identified, the sooner they are able to receive the services they require. Low-income children may have the most to gain from early identification. Children living at or below the poverty line are [more than twice as likely](#) to be at high risk for developmental delays (19 percent) as their peers living at more than twice the poverty line (seven percent).

- **Getting students the help they need faster.** Right now, DC Public Schools and DC public charter schools must assess or evaluate a student for special education eligibility within 120 days. The legislation proposes to change this timeline to 60 days from the student's referral date. Keeping a child and their family waiting for half a school year for this process is a waste of learning time for the student and an unwise use of public education resources. While children wait to be evaluated, they go without the services they need, often falling farther behind their peers.

These policy changes will incur additional costs in the DC education budget, but it's important to note the long-term economic gains to be seen from investing resources into early identification and

intervention services, and these gains outweigh the short-term costs. According to a [RAND study](#) on the benefits of early childhood interventions, the returns to society for each dollar invested are estimated anywhere from \$1.80 to \$17.07, with savings coming from grade retention, special education placement, high school graduation rates, and labor market outcomes.

DCFPI looks forward to watching the progress of these bills through the Council. You can read our full testimony [here](#).