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EARLY LEARNING NEWS

ECONOMIC RECOVERY FUNDS

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IMPACT OF STIMULUS FUNDS IN FLORIDA

Of the \$2 billion in federal Child Care and Development Block Grant economic stimulus dollars, Florida will receive \$105.3 million. Of that amount \$80 million will be directed to early learning coalitions to ***maintain or create*** child care subsidy slots for eligible children and their families. These federal funds were designed to assist states in dealing with the troubling economic climate. Florida, like many states, has been faced with budget deficits, and critical services such as early learning have seen funding reductions and shifts from recurring to nonrecurring funds in recent years. The federal stimulus dollars will enable Florida to maintain current funding levels for now with some limited temporary increases. ***Without these funds, there would most likely be many more children on waiting lists for subsidized child care in Florida.***

Additional funds will be used to build the capacity for statewide early learning system infrastructure. Infrastructure needs include development of an Early Learning Information System to improve efficiency and coordination of services; allow better access to information for families, providers, and coalitions; and expand opportunities for evaluation and continuous quality improvement of state efforts. Of the remaining \$25.3 million, \$8.7 million is targeted for quality initiatives and \$5 million is targeted for infant toddler quality initiatives. The Agency for Workforce Innovation, the state administrator for child care funding, is currently researching the costs associated with statewide system projects to support providers through child assessment, program assessment, and professional development.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Federal economic stimulus dollars provide important short-term supports for the early learning system. In order to build greater capacity to meet the needs of children, families, and early learning providers, sustainable funding is required. Please join your local early learning coalition in advocating for increased state and federal funds for early learning.

Business leaders and economists agree that the long-term return on investment in high quality early education is great. *"High quality early childhood services... put children on the right trajectory for success in school and life and reduce the need for costly educational and social interventions later"* (The First Five Years Fund, 2009).