



STATE OF INDIANA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
State House, Second Floor  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

Michael R. Pence  
*Governor*

June 2, 2016

The Honorable Secretary Sylvia Burwell  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Preschool Development Grants Program

Dear Secretary Burwell,

As Governor of Indiana, I support access to quality prekindergarten education, and I am committed to opening the doors of opportunity to the most vulnerable children in our state. As you may know, in 2014, I signed legislation that created “On My Way Pre-K”, the first state-funded prekindergarten pilot program in Indiana history.

The “On My Way Pre-K” program awards grants to low-income families with 4-year-old children so that they may attend an approved high-quality preschool program the year before they enter kindergarten. What makes this program unique is that it targets those who need it the most, fosters parental engagement, and requires local support and funding. I have always believed that the strongest foundation for children is built at home. However, we sadly know that this is not always the case, and some children are in need of additional services to ensure that they remain on track with their peers as they enter the education system.

I am very proud of the fact that my administration championed not only the program, but funding for it as well in the amount of \$10 million each year. I am also pleased to inform you that the pilot program is going extremely well, and we are encouraged by the support and interest it has received at the local level. In fact, 2,300 low-income children have been served in the five pilot project counties, which are geographically diverse and represent both urban and rural areas across the state.


By not expanding the pilot program prematurely, I kept a promise I made to key legislative leaders in order to gain their support for my prekindergarten program. I promised we would not expand the program until we saw evidence that it was working. Keeping our word will be critical as we again look to the legislature next year for additional support to help us expand prekindergarten opportunities for those children in need.

Since the program launched in 2015, many significant milestones have been met, including the completion of infrastructure design and implementation, successful family and community outreach efforts, and eligible prekindergarten provider capacity building. Efforts have been highly collaborative between state agencies, local leadership, prekindergarten programs and families. This is why we are now considering ways to expand as we prepare for the state's next budget session, which will begin in January 2017.

Therefore, we are interested in learning more about the Department of Health and Human Services intentions for the Preschool Development Grants program authorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Preschool Development Grants program, as updated in the ESSA, provides states with options to focus on conducting a statewide needs assessment, developing a strategic prekindergarten plan, maximizing parental choice, sharing best practices and improving program quality. We are encouraged that the program could be a good fit for Indiana now that "On My Way Pre-K" has had the opportunity to build the necessary foundation to support future program expansion.

So that we can plan for the next budget session, I would sincerely appreciate it if you would let us know when the application will be available for the Preschool Development Grants program. I look forward to learning more about the grant process, and I am grateful for the opportunity to expand a program that has produced great results for young Hoosiers, and a program that we are proud to have built right here in the state of Indiana.

Sincerely,

  
Michael R. Pence  
Governor of Indiana