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Even Start Family Literacy Programs: An Overview

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Abstract. The Even Start program provides education and relate services jointly to parents lacking a high school diploma (or equivalent) and their young children. Even Start services include basic academic instruction and parenting skills training for adults, and early childhood education for their children, along with necessary supplementary services such as child care or transportation.

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Even Start Family Literacy Programs: An Overview

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Summary

The Even Start program provides education and related services jointly to parents lacking a high school diploma (or equivalent) and their young children. Even Start services include basic academic instruction and parenting skills training for the adults, and early childhood education for their children, along with necessary supplementary services such as child care or transportation. Generally, Even Start programs do not directly provide all of these services; rather, they establish networks of service providers, including Head Start programs and grantees under the Adult Education Act (AEA). Even Start is the only federal program specifically dedicated to providing services to both disadvantaged young children and their parents.

The families served by Even Start programs are highly disadvantaged, with very low levels of education and income, and increasing proportions of them have limited English language skills.

The Even Start program was reauthorized in the 106th Congress, in P.L. 106-554, the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY2001. ESEA Title I, Part B was renamed the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs and was reauthorized for five years beginning with an authorization of $250 million for FY2001. The reauthorizing language is largely the same as language contained in the Literacy Involves Families Together Act, H.R. 3222 (Goodling), which was passed by the full House on September 12, 2000. However, language in H.R. 3222 specifying that religious organizations should be treated the same as other nongovernmental organizations in the awarding of subgrants *was not* included in the final reauthorization language.

P.L. 107-110 (the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization legislation, which was signed into law on January 8, 2002, moved the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs from Title I Part B of the ESEA to Subpart 3 of Title I Part B of the No Child Left Behind Act and extended the authorization period through FY2007. The only change to the program was an amendment allowing states to use funds for state-level activities to improve the quality of family literacy services provided (in addition to other previously authorized uses).

The Even Start program's funding was reduced to $99 million for FY2006 (including the FY2006 across-the-board reduction). For FY2007, the Administration has requested no funding for the program, the House Committee on Appropriations has recommended $70 million in funding for the program, and the Senate Committee on Appropriations has recommended no funding for the program.

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Major Provisions of Even Start

The Even Start Family Literacy program, authorized by ESEA Title I, Part B, provides education and related services jointly to disadvantaged parents and their young children. The purpose of the program is to integrate early childhood education, adult basic education, and parenting skills education into a "unified family literacy program" (ESEA Section 1201). An assumption underlying Even Start is that children whose parents have low literacy or basic education levels are more likely to be educationally successful if, in addition to receiving early childhood instruction themselves, their parents receive educational services plus instruction in how to help their children learn. Further, parents may be more motivated to participate in adult basic education programs if one of the purposes of such education is to support their children's educational development. While some other federal education programs — such as ESEA Title I, Part A programs — also provide services to both disadvantaged young children and their parents, Even Start is the only federal program specifically dedicated to this purpose.

Under the Even Start legislation, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) is authorized to make grants to states for assistance to eligible entities — consisting of a local educational agency (LEA) in collaboration with a community based organization, institution of higher education, or other agency or nonprofit organization — for joint programs of education for children aged 0-7 years[1] and their parents. In each participating family, at least one parent must be eligible to be served under the Adult Education Act (AEA) — i.e., not enrolled in school and not a high school graduate (or equivalent) — or, if a LEA provides the basic education component of the program, services may be provided to parents who are within the compulsory school age range for their state.

Even Start program services *must* include adult literacy instruction, early childhood education, instruction to help parents support their child's education, recruitment, screening of parents, staff training, and home-based instruction. In addition, child care and transportation services *may* be provided, *if* these services are necessary and other funding sources are not available. Typically, Even Start programs do not directly provide all of these services, rather they establish networks of service providers, including Head Start programs and grantees under the AEA.

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[1] Title XVI of P.L. 106-554 (the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY2001) permits the program to serve children 8 or older if services are provided in collaboration with ESEA Title I, Part A program.

Even Start programs must be coordinated with other programs with similar purposes, operate year-round, and be independently evaluated.

Five percent of Even Start funds is reserved for programs serving migrant children plus the outlying areas and Indian tribes;[2] and up to 3% is reserved for a national evaluation, technical assistance, and program improvement. Remaining appropriations provide Even Start grants to the states in proportion to ESEA Title I, Part A grants,[3] with a state minimum of the greater of 0.5% of all grants, or $250,000.

Up to 6% of state grants may be used for state administration and technical assistance.[4] Local grants are made by state educational agencies (SEAs) based on recommendations by a review panel, consisting of an early childhood education specialist, an adult education specialist, and at least one additional member. Programs are to be in areas with high rates of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, limited English proficiency, or disadvantaged children. Even Start grants are to be made for a period of up to four years, and may be renewed for up to four additional years. States receiving Even Start grants are required to develop "indicators of program quality," to be used to monitor and improve Even Start programs in the state, and to determine whether to continue funding local programs. P.L. 106-554, Title XVI, requires states to submit to ED their quality indicators for Even Start programs to be eligible for continued funding under the program. The federal share is generally limited to 90% for the first year, declining to 50% for the fifth, sixth and seventh years, and 35% for subsequent years.[5] The federal share limitation may be waived if an entity would not otherwise be able to participate.

Funding for the Even Start program grew from $14,820,000 in FY1989, the program's initial year, to $225,094,720 for FY2005 (including the FY2005 across-the-board reduction). The program's funding was significantly reduced to $99,000,000 in FY2006.[6] **See Table 1**. for the program's complete funding history. This decrease in funding is likely to continue in FY2007. For FY2007, the Administration has requested no funding, the House Committee on Appropriations

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[2] The reservation is *six percent* if appropriations are more than $200 million.

[3] ESEA Title I, Part A grants are made primarily in proportion to school age (5-17 years) children in poor families multiplied by a state expenditure factor. For more information on the Title I, Part A allocation formulas, see CRS Report RL31487, *Education for the Disadvantaged: Overview of Title I-A Amendments Under the No Child Left Behind Act*, by Wayne Riddle.

[4] Increased from 5% to 6% by P.L. 106-554, Title XVI (Grants for administration may not exceed half of the total).

[5] Even Start Amendments contained in the Omnibus Appropriations Act for FY2000 (P.L. 106-113), removed the eight-year limitation on the duration of awards, and reduced the federal share of Even Start grants to 35% for the ninth and subsequent years. P.L. 106-113 also amended Even Start to require SEAs to start progress reviews after the *first* year of receipt of subgrant funds.

[6] CRS Report RL33071, *Even Start: Funding Controversy*, by Gail McCallion.

has recommended $70 million in funding, and the Senate Committee on Appropriations has recommended no funding.

Table 1. Even Start Funding: 1989-2006

1989	$14,820,000
1990	$24,201,000
1991	$49,770,000
1992	$70,000,000
1993	$89,123,000
1994	$91,373,000
1995	$102,024,000
1996	$101,997,000
1997	$101,992,000
1998	$124,000,000
1999	$135,000,000
2000	$150,000,000
2001	$250,000,000
2002	$250,000,000
2003	$248,375,000
2004	$246,910,000
2005	$225,095,000
2006	$99,000,000

Source: U.S. Department of Education Justifications of Appropriations Estimates to the Congress.

Note: These amounts are not adjusted for price level changes.

Program Participants, Services, and Outcomes

Participants. Even Start has grown from 76 local programs serving approximately 2,500 families in 1989-1990 to 855 programs serving approximately 32,000 families in 2000-2001.[7] The most recent available data (2000-2001) are based on program data for a period prior to changes required in the 2000

[7] Data included here are from the *Third National Even Start Evaluation*, 2003, prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service.

reauthorization of Even Start. These data indicate that Even Start programs tend to target families with children under age 5; 40% of participating children were 0-2 years old and 28% were 3-4 years old. The parents in the families served generally have low levels of education; for example in 2000-2001, 44% of parents had a 9th grade or less level of education upon entering the program. Further, the income of participating families is typically quite low — 84% of families had income below the federal poverty level. Only 23% of participating parents in 2000-2001 were employed.[8] The share of participants who are Hispanic was 46% in 2000-2001, while 30% were white, 19% were African American, and the remaining 7% were Asian, Native American, Hawaiian, or Multi-Racial. The percentage of participants from non-English-language backgrounds is high — 45% of new Even Start enrollees speak English as a second language. The top four reasons given by parents for enrolling in Even Start were a desire to improve their educational status (get a GED), their parenting skills, their ability to be a better teacher of their child, and their children's chance of future school success.

Services Provided. In most cases, Even Start programs do not directly provide all of the required services; rather they coordinate and integrate services provided by other agencies, especially early childhood education provided by Head Start or state preschool programs, or adult basic education provided by AEA grantees. The services most often provided directly by Even Start programs are early childhood education and parenting skills education. In addition to the core services that all Even Start programs must provide, the support services most often provided are child care, meals, transportation, and social services.

The average federal budget for Even Start programs surveyed in 2000-2001 was $175,439. The average federal Even Start program expenditures per participating family was $4,708 in 2000-2001. The rates of actual participation in various Even Start activities by the families being served in 2000-2001 were 84% for adult education, 89% for parenting education and parent-child joint activities, and 95% for early childhood education; with 82% of families participating in all core services. Maintaining the intensity of services and rates of participation continue to be an issue — about half of the Even Start families who joined Even Start between 1997-1998 and 2000-2001 left the program within 10 months. In 2000-2001, 17% of families who left Even Start did so because they had completed their education goals under the program. The majority of participants who left did so because of job conflicts, relocation, motivational issues, and other concerns (such as poor health, homelessness, etc.).

Evidence from the research literature has indicated that children who participate in intensive high-quality services score higher on literacy measures.[9] And, evidence from national Even Start evaluations has indicated that families participate more when more intensive services are offered. As a consequence Even Start projects have

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[8] Nevertheless most of their income comes from wages, although not from the non wage-earning parent participating in Even Start.

[9] W. Steven Barnett, "Long-term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes," *Long-term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs* [The Future of Children], vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 25-50.

increased the amount of early childhood education and adult education services offered. However, most Even Start parents do not use all the hours of services available for themselves and their children. For example, in 2000-2001, on average, children birth to two received 30% of the service hours made available. For children aged 3 and 4, 5, and school-aged, the averages were 37%, 44%, and 62%, respectively.

Outcomes. The most recent national Even Start evaluation, for 2000-2001, was based on two data sources — an experimental design study (EDS) that tracked 18 projects that agreed to randomly assign new families to Even start or a control group; and, the Even Start Performance Information Reporting System (ESPIRS) which tracks annual data from the universe of Even Start projects. Although families participating in the EDS were randomly assigned to control and Even Start groups, the 18 projects participating were not randomly selected. The EDS families were more likely than Even Start families as a whole to be Hispanic (75% versus 46%), and to be participating in Even Start projects in urban areas (83% versus 55%).

The national evaluation collected data on 41 different outcome measures for the families participating in the EDS. The results indicated that the Even Start children and their parents did not perform better than the control group children and their parents. Even Start children and their parents made gains in literacy and other measures, but so did control group parents and children:

> The data show that children and parents in the control group made the same kinds of gains on literacy assessments, on parent reports of child literacy, on parent-child reading, on literacy resources at home, on family economic self-sufficiency, and so on, that were seen for Even Start families.[10]

The only area in which Even Start children did significantly better than control group children was in teacher reports of behavior problems for elementary school aged children.

Legislation

P.L. 107-110 (the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization legislation, which was signed into law on January 8, 2002, moved the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs from Title I Part B of the ESEA, to Subpart 3 of Title I Part B of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The only change to the program was an amendment allowing states to use funds for state-level activities to improve the quality of family literacy services provided (in addition to other previously authorized uses).

The Even Start program was reauthorized in the 106th Congress in H.R. 4577, the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY2001, signed into law as P.L. 106-554. ESEA Title I, Part B was renamed the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs, and was reauthorized for five years beginning with an authorization of

[10] *Third National Even Start Evaluation*, p. 165.

$250 million for FY2001. The reauthorizing language is largely the same as language contained in the Literacy Involves Families Together Act, H.R. 3222 (Goodling), which was passed by the full House on September 12, 2000. However, language in H.R. 3222 specifying that religious organizations should be treated the same as other nongovernmental organizations in the awarding of subgrants *was not* included in the final reauthorization language. In addition, the Inexpensive Book Distribution Program was not moved to the Even Start program in H.R. 4577; state grants for state administration and technical assistance were increased from 5% to 6% (grants for administration may not exceed half of the total); and states are required to submit to ED their quality indicators for Even Start programs to be eligible for continued funding under the program.

The Literacy Involves Families Together Act, H.R. 3222 (Goodling), was introduced in the House on November 4, 1999 and referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. H.R. 3222 was reported by the full Committee on February 29, 2000; it was passed by the full House on September 12, 2000. H.R. 3222 proposed authorizing $250 million in funding for Even Start for FY2001, and proposed to:

- Rename Section 1202, Part B: "The William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs";
- Require more stringent qualifications and standards for staff paid out of Even Start funds;
- Permit Even Start programs to serve children aged 8 or older if services are provided in collaboration with ESEA Title I, Part A programs;
- Authorize states to use a share of their grants to improve the quality of services provided by local grantees whose services have been of low quality, and to permit states to provide technical assistance to help local programs of demonstrated effectiveness to "access and leverage additional funds";
- Require grantees to use instructional programs "based on scientifically based reading research" for children (including reading readiness activities for preschool children), and if possible, for adults;
- Would have added to the list of indicators of an area's need for a program: whether an area has a high percentage of parents who have been victims of domestic violence, or who are receiving assistance under a state program funded under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act;
- reserve not more than 3% of funds appropriated for Even Start to provide technical assistance to, and to carry out an independent evaluation of, programs receiving Even Start assistance;
- Increase the amount of funds reserved for migrant programs, outlying areas and Indian tribes from 5% to 6%, if the amount appropriated for the program exceeds $200 million;
- Specify that no state shall award a subgrant for less than $52,500 in the ninth and subsequent years;
- Provide for a one-time coordination grant for each eligible state in the amount of: the lesser of $1 million or the amount the

appropriation for Even Start exceeds the previous year's appropriation;
- Require Even Start programs to employ "continuing use of evaluation data for program improvement," and to provide information on how their plan "provides for rigorous and objective evaluation of progress toward" meeting the program's stated objectives;
- Reserve, in years in which the current year's appropriation for Even Start exceeds that of the previous year: "the lesser of $2 million or 50% of the increase in total Even Start appropriations each year" to be used by the National Institute for Literacy to conduct, through "an entity ... that has expertise in carrying out longitudinal studies of the development of literacy skills in children": scientifically based reading research on adult literacy and helping parents support the literacy development of their children;
- Move the Inexpensive Book Distribution Program from ESEA Title X, Part E, and add it as Title II under this act; with an authorization of $20 million;
- Amend the definition of an eligible entity to include "a religious organization." Specify that religious organizations shall be treated the same as other nongovernmental organizations in the awarding of subgrants, but an Even Start program may not subject a participant to "sectarian worship or instruction or proselytization."
- Provide that no services may be "provided by voucher or certificate" and, that "for purposes of any Federal, State or local law, receipt of financial assistance under this part of Section [1029(b)] shall constitute receipt of Federal financial assistance or aid."

On January 19, 1999, the Educational Opportunities Act, S. 2 (Jeffords), was introduced in the Senate and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. S. 2 was reported by the full Committee on April 12, 2000. This bill would have, among other things, authorized $500 million for Even Start for FY2001 and would have amended Even Start to:

- Permit Even Start programs to serve children aged 8 or older in collaboration with ESEA Title I, Part A programs;
- Authorize states to use a share of their grants to improve the quality of services provided by local grantees;
- Require the use of instructional methods "based on scientifically based reading research" for children and, if possible, for adults;
- Reserve up to 3% of funds for technical assistance and an independent evaluation;
- Increase the funds reserved for migrants outlying areas and Indians from 5% to 6%, if appropriations exceed $250 million; and
- Require Even Start programs to "use methods to ensure that participating families successfully complete the program"; and
- Require each state that wishes to receive an Even Start grant to submit a plan specifying indicators of program quality and the state's plan for ensuring each funded program fully implements Even Start requirements, describe how the state will conduct subgrant

competitions, and describe how it will coordinate resources to improve statewide family literacy services.