



March 24, 2009

Dr. Sherri Killins, Commissioner
Department of Early Education and Care
51 Sleeper Street, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Allocation of the ARRA Child Care and Development Block Grant Funds

Dear Commissioner Killins,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership and Boston After School & Beyond, we want to thank you for your leadership and support of children, youth and families.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations regarding the allocation of the approximately \$24.9 million in Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Together our organizations are working to support increased opportunities for learning and enrichment for school age children and youth, particularly low-income children and youth, in Boston and in communities across the state. The ARRA funds provide a unique opportunity to improve how we educate and care for our children and youth now and in the years to come.

Our global economy demands that students learn a broad range of “21st century skills,” including problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and teamwork. At the same time, we have a persistent achievement gap in our state between lower-income children and youth and their more affluent peers. Research has demonstrated that this achievement gap is largely caused by the “summer learning loss” that occurs when low-income children are not exposed to learning and enrichment activities over the summer months.

To meet our children’s current and future needs, we recommend that the distribution of ARRA funds support (1) infrastructure development necessary to create new ways of learning and to avoid the “funding cliff” of a quick infusion of funding; and (2) direct service opportunities that are research-based and will increase equal opportunity to education for all children. In specific, we recommend the following proposals:

1. Develop and implement afterschool and out-of-school time program assessment standards.
Rationale: The implementation of high-quality assessments valid for all students are prioritized in the ARRA guidelines. For in and out-of-school time learning, we need to design coordinated assessment standards to ensure continuous program improvement. Such an investment will create more innovative learning and enrichment opportunities now and for future generations.
2. Provide summer-only vouchers for school-age children and youth to prevent summer learning loss.
Rationale: The summer time provides a unique opportunity to not only change the course of the achievement gap, but to ensure that funds are quickly spent and positively impact student learning. Existing data shows that there are many more families on the waitlist for care and as a result, filling this gap is a “shovel-ready” proposal.

3. Expand professional development opportunities for the school-age workforce, including “mini-scholarships” for school-age providers to attend professional development trainings.
Rationale: In order to be better prepared to work with schools and teach 21st century skills, afterschool educators need increased high-quality professional development opportunities. Currently, we do not have a coordinated workforce development system across the state agencies serving school age youth and their families.
4. Expand the STEM pipeline fund afterschool pilot.
Rationale: Careers in the 21st century are increasingly reliant on STEM subject areas, yet many students find these the most troublesome. Expanding the existing STEM afterschool pilot at EEC will ensure that more students are exposed to STEM subjects early on and in a project-based learning environment.
5. Take steps to build a robust data system.
Rationale: Since the ARRA requires states to implement longitudinal data systems, ARRA funds provide the opportunity to strengthen our ability to measure the achievement of all students in a way that will help schools, community-based organizations and educators improve teaching and learning. For school-age, our state lacks a coordinated statewide database of program information, and child and youth outcome measures across the various education and youth-serving agencies.

The above recommendations will position our state to better educate our children and youth, and to leverage our field’s expertise in support of our state’s economic recovery. These recommendations meet EEC’s stated goals for ARRA funding and will add value to the lives of children and families, contribute to a comprehensive, integrated education system, address issues of diversity and equity, and are consistent with EEC’s strategic plan.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you and your office to support the development of new and better ways for all school age children and youth to learn and achieve life success.

Sincerely,



Gwynn Hughes
Executive Director
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership



Chris Smith
Executive Director
Boston After School & Beyond