

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4597

To direct the Secretary of Education, in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to award competitive grants to eligible partnerships to establish, expand, or support career and technical education programs of study in early childhood education.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 20, 2026

Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. LUJÁN, Mr. SCHIFF, and Mr. WYDEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Education, in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to award competitive grants to eligible partnerships to establish, expand, or support career and technical education programs of study in early childhood education.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Early Childhood Work-
5 force Advancement Act of 2026”.

1 **SEC. 2. GRANT PROGRAM FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL**
2 **EDUCATION PROGRAMS OF STUDY IN EARLY**
3 **CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.**

4 (a) GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary,
5 in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human
6 Services, shall award grants, on a competitive basis, to eli-
7 gible partnerships for the purpose of establishing, sup-
8 porting, or expanding career and technical education pro-
9 grams of study in early childhood education.

10 (b) APPLICATION.—To be considered for a grant
11 under this section, an eligible partnership shall submit an
12 application to the Secretary at such time, in such manner,
13 and containing such information as the Secretary may re-
14 quire, including—

15 (1) a description of how the eligible partnership
16 will use such grant to establish, support, or expand
17 a career and technical education program of study
18 in early childhood education;

19 (2) a description of the roles and responsibil-
20 ities of each partner of the eligible partnership;

21 (3) a description of how such funds will be allo-
22 cated for necessary expenses for the career and tech-
23 nical education program of study described in para-
24 graph (1), including the use of additional funding
25 provided by State, local, or private entities, and
26 plans to maintain and sustain the program;

1 (4) a description of how the grant will directly
2 benefit students, including special populations,
3 served by the eligible partnership;

4 (5) a description of how such career and tech-
5 nical education program of study will be coordinated
6 with the activities carried out under section 124 or
7 135 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical
8 Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2344; 2355);

9 (6) a description of how the program reflects
10 the needs of regional, State, or local employers, as
11 demonstrated by the comprehensive local needs as-
12 sessment under section 134(c) of the Carl D. Per-
13 kins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006
14 (20 U.S.C. 2354(c));

15 (7) a description of how the program will ben-
16 efit the child care system and early childhood edu-
17 cation workforce;

18 (8) an assurance that the eligible partnership
19 will—

20 (A) provide information to the Secretary,
21 as requested, for evaluations that the Secretary
22 may carry out; and

23 (B) make data available to third parties
24 for validation, in accordance with applicable
25 data privacy laws, including section 444 of the

1 General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C.
2 1232g, commonly known as the “Family Edu-
3 cational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974”);

4 (9) a description of how the program will in-
5 clude education and training opportunities focused
6 on infant and toddler development, including the de-
7 velopmental needs of infants or toddlers with a dis-
8 ability (as defined in section 632 of the Individuals
9 with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1432));
10 and

11 (10) a description, if applicable, about how the
12 program will respond to the needs or goals identified
13 by the applicable State in the statewide needs as-
14 sessment or statewide strategic plan developed, up-
15 dated, or implemented for purposes of a preschool
16 development grant under section 9212 of the Every
17 Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. 9831 note).

18 (c) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this sec-
19 tion, the Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of
20 Health and Human Services, shall—

21 (1) ensure an equitable national geographic dis-
22 tribution of the grants;

23 (2) award grants to applicants that propose to
24 serve communities in rural areas and to applicants
25 that propose to serve communities in urban areas;

1 (3) give priority to applicants located in areas
2 with a documented shortage of childcare providers;

3 (4) give priority to applicants that provide child
4 care services for infants and toddlers, child care
5 services during nontraditional or extended hours,
6 and inclusive child care services for children with
7 disabilities;

8 (5) give priority to applicants that include an
9 institution of higher education with a program of
10 study in early childhood education or a consortium
11 of such institutions; and

12 (6) give priority, if applicable, to applicants
13 that demonstrate, in the application submitted under
14 subsection (b) for a grant under this section, that
15 the program to be funded with such grant will re-
16 spond to the needs or goals identified by the applica-
17 ble State in the statewide needs assessment or state-
18 wide strategic plan developed, updated, or imple-
19 mented for purposes of a preschool development
20 grant under section 9212 of the Every Student Suc-
21 ceeds Act (42 U.S.C. 9831 note).

22 (d) USE OF FUNDS.—Each eligible partnership re-
23 ceiving a grant under this section shall use such grant to
24 establish, support, or expand career and technical edu-

1 cation programs of study in early childhood education,
2 which shall include one or more of the following:

3 (1) Educational materials and resources, includ-
4 ing classroom instruction, work-based learning, sup-
5 port attainment of dual or concurrent enrollment
6 credits, industry credentials such as a Child Devel-
7 opment Associate, a preapprenticeship, and an ap-
8 prenticeship through career and technical student
9 organizations.

10 (2) Supporting the recruiting, hiring, and train-
11 ing of effective educators in early childhood edu-
12 cation, including educators who became certified
13 through State and local alternative routes to certifi-
14 cation.

15 (3) Improving career and technical education
16 outcomes of students served by the eligible partner-
17 ship through activities such as—

18 (A) supporting the development and en-
19 hancement of innovative delivery models for ca-
20 reer and technical education-related work-based
21 learning (including school-based simulated work
22 sites, mentoring, apprenticeship programs, work
23 site visits, job shadowing, project-based learn-
24 ing, and skills-based and paid internships); and

1 (B) providing academic and nonacademic
2 wrap-around supports and services, including
3 advising, tutoring, test preparation, child care
4 assistance, dependent care assistance, transpor-
5 tation, and financial assistance (which may in-
6 clude scholarships or stipends), during the pe-
7 riod in which such students—

8 (i) complete a Child Development As-
9 sociate credential, early childhood edu-
10 cation associate degree program, or bacca-
11 laurate degree program, as applicable;

12 (ii) access and complete State licen-
13 sure or certification examinations; or

14 (iii) receive opportunities to develop
15 the necessary content knowledge and
16 teaching skills in early childhood edu-
17 cation.

18 (4) Creating or expanding recruitment, reten-
19 tion, or professional development activities for career
20 and technical education teachers, faculty, school
21 leaders, administrators, specialized instructional sup-
22 port personnel, career guidance and academic coun-
23 selors, and paraprofessionals, which may include—

24 (A) high-quality teacher mentoring by ex-
25 perienced teachers in early childhood education;

1 (B) providing resources and training to im-
2 prove instruction for, and provide appropriate
3 accommodations to, special populations, includ-
4 ing the unique needs of teaching in rural or
5 urban communities;

6 (C) the integration of coherent and rig-
7 orous academic content standards and career
8 and technical education curricula, including
9 through opportunities for appropriate academic
10 and career and technical education teachers to
11 jointly develop and implement curricula and
12 pedagogical strategies;

13 (D) providing resources or assistance with
14 meeting State teacher licensure and credential
15 requirements;

16 (E) implementing initiatives that increase
17 compensation for early childhood educators who
18 attain a Child Development Associate creden-
19 tial, or an associate or baccalaureate degree in
20 early childhood education; or

21 (F) training for career guidance and aca-
22 demic counselors at the secondary level to im-
23 prove awareness of postsecondary education and
24 postsecondary career options in early childhood
25 education, and improve the ability of such coun-

1 selors to communicate to students career oppor-
2 tunities and employment trends in early child-
3 hood education.

4 (e) EVALUATION AND ANNUAL REPORT.—Each eligi-
5 ble partnership receiving a grant under this section shall
6 provide for an independent evaluation of the activities car-
7 ried out using such grant and submit to the Secretary an
8 annual report that includes—

9 (1) a description of how funds received under
10 this section were used;

11 (2) the performance of the career and technical
12 education program of study funded with such grant
13 with respect to, at a minimum, the performance in-
14 dicators described under section 113 of the Carl D.
15 Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of
16 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2323), as applicable, and
17 disaggregated—

18 (A) by subgroups of students described in
19 section 1111(c)(2)(B) of the Elementary and
20 Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
21 6311(c)(2)(B)); and

22 (B) by each special population; and

23 (3) a quantitative analysis of the effectiveness
24 of such program.

25 (f) GRANT DURATION.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (2), a
2 grant awarded under this section may not exceed a
3 5-year grant period.

4 (2) EXTENSION.—The Secretary may extend
5 the grant period for an eligible partnership for not
6 more than 1 additional 2-year period if the eligible
7 partnership demonstrates to the Secretary that the
8 eligible partnership—

9 (A) is achieving the program objectives for
10 which the eligible partnership is receiving the
11 grant; and

12 (B) has improved education outcomes for
13 students participating in the programs funded
14 by such grant, including special populations.

15 (g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

16 (1) PERKINS TERMS.—Except as otherwise pro-
17 vided, any term used in this Act that is defined in
18 section 3 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Tech-
19 nical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2302) has
20 the meaning given that term in such section.

21 (2) EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRO-
22 GRAM.—The term “early childhood education pro-
23 gram” has the meaning given the term in section
24 103 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
25 U.S.C. 1003).

1 (3) ELIGIBLE CHILD CARE PROVIDER.—The
2 term “eligible child care provider” has the meaning
3 given such term in section 658P(6)(A) of the Child
4 Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 (42
5 U.S.C. 9858n(6)(A)).

6 (4) ELIGIBLE RECIPIENT.—The term “eligible
7 recipient” has the meaning given the term in section
8 3(21)(A) of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Tech-
9 nical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C.
10 2302(21)(A)).

11 (5) ELIGIBLE PARTNERSHIP.—The term “eligi-
12 ble partnership” means a partnership between or
13 among—

14 (A) an eligible recipient; and

15 (B) one or more of the following:

16 (i) An institution of higher education
17 with a program of study in early childhood
18 education or a consortium of such institu-
19 tions.

20 (ii) An eligible child care provider.

21 (iii) A community stakeholder relevant
22 to a career and technical education pro-
23 grams of study in early childhood edu-
24 cation to be funded under this section, in-
25 cluding a labor organization, a local or re-

1 regional business or industry, or a local
2 workforce development board.

3 (iv) A Child Care Resource and Refer-
4 ral Organization (as described in section
5 658E(c)(3)(B)(iii) of the Child Care and
6 Development Block Grant Act of 1990 (42
7 U.S.C. 9858c(c)(3)(B)(iii))).

8 (v) A staffed family child care net-
9 work.

10 (vi) A Head Start program (including
11 an Early Head Start program) carried out
12 under the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9831
13 et seq.).

14 (vii) An early intervention service pro-
15 vider.

16 (6) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The
17 term “institution of higher education” has the
18 meaning given the term in section 101(a) of the
19 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a)).

20 (7) STAFFED FAMILY CHILD CARE NETWORK.—
21 The term “staffed family child care network” means
22 a nonprofit organization—

23 (A) that may be a component of a State or
24 local child care resource and referral organiza-
25 tion;

1 (B) that has at least 1 paid staff member;

2 and

3 (C) that offers evidence-based professional

4 development, quality improvement support,

5 business support, and technical assistance, in-

6 cluding on achieving licensure as an eligible

7 child care provider, to family child care pro-

8 viders.

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