

**OFFICE OF CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER**  
**Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items**  
**Consent Agenda**  
**September 25, 2025**

**OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

I. Approval to revise methodology to award grants to local school districts to support high-quality early childhood programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Background and Purpose: The Office of Early Childhood seeks to improve access to high-quality early childhood programs for children in Mississippi school districts, with an emphasis on providing inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. The Department expects early childhood programs to accomplish and demonstrate the following outcomes:

- More children will enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school.
- More families will have access to quality early childhood programs.
- Pre-kindergarten programs will receive resources and support to increase quality.
- High-quality pre-kindergarten programs will utilize collaboration with other early childhood education programs and related services.
- Pre-kindergarten programs will use curricula that are evidence- or research-based and aligned with the *MDE's Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Three- and Four-Year-Old Children*.
- Pre-kindergarten programs will implement an integrated, effective system of early childhood curriculum, instruction, assessment, and program evaluation.
- Pre-kindergarten programs will implement consistent and appropriate learning targets for children and demonstrate progress towards achieving these targets.

Pre-kindergarten students with disabilities have the right to be included with their non-disabled peers to the extent appropriate to meet their individual needs, as provided for in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Inclusion is not a service delivery option, but rather a belief system that guides all the practices in any specific school. Inclusion philosophy adheres to the principle that all staff members believe it is their job to provide the best education for all children, respecting their students' diversity and maximizing their potential. Full participation with peers is the strong preference with the goal of membership in the same learning community to the maximum extent possible, with the first consideration being the needs of the individual child. An inclusive environment meets the needs of every child, not just a child with a disability, but any child, regardless of learning difference.

Eligibility: At any school district in the State of Mississippi that does or does not currently operate an inclusive pre-K program (for 3 and 4 year olds) or pre-K programs (for 4 year olds) is eligible to apply for these grants funds. Inclusive programs are those that include students with disabilities in their program. Programs that serve students who receive language/speech services ONLY are not considered inclusive programs. Districts may apply for grant funding for more than one classroom, with each classroom adhering to the guidelines set forth on this proposal.

Funding Source: Federal funds

Basis for Awarding the Grants: Competitive

Funding will be awarded based on the following methodology:

The grant award will be \$50,000 for the first year for program set-up with \$10,000 in funds to be awarded each year for year 2 and 3 for support for supplementation to the program.

The programs/s with the highest number of points demonstrating the capacity to facilitate the implementation of pre-K programs will be awarded the funding.

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material: None