



Early Ed Watch

A Blog from New America's Early Education Initiative

About i3 Validation and Development 'Early Learning' Grantees, Part 2

Author(s): [Laura Bornfreund](#)

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Issues: [Early Education](#) [Pre-K](#) [PreK-3rd](#)



Last week we talked about the projects that [we thought should and should not have earned the i3 early learning competitive priority point](#). The U.S. Department of Education recognized 13 of the 49 winners as having a focus on early learning; we here at *Early Ed Watch* think it is more like seven based on the department's definition. (Or maybe six—see below.) We discussed the validation and development proposals that, from our perspective, didn't make the cut and we explained our rationale.

Today we're back to highlight the development and validation projects that, as we said last week, did "bridge the birth-to-five sphere and the K – 3rd sphere or include a robust school-readiness component." Two of these projects focus on school readiness and two focus on preK-3rd:

School Readiness

- [The Apple Tree Institute for Education Innovation](#) aims to use i3 funds to further develop and expand its *Every Child Ready* program, a data-driven, evidence-based model for preschools that integrates special education into the general education classroom. In addition to Apple Tree Schools, *Every Child Ready* will be implemented at two other DC charter school partners, reaching 800 more children: DC Prep Academy (a preK-8th grade school) and Early Childhood Academy (a preK-3rd school). Apple Tree's program consists of universal screening, regular progress monitoring, and timely data analysis to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to track student progress. Teachers will receive ongoing professional development and coaching to assist them to differentiate their instruction to meet their students' needs.
- [The Parents as Teachers National Center's](#) validation project BabyFACE focuses on bringing early childhood education to American Indian families by employing a home visitation strategy and increasing literacy resources in the home. The project predominantly focuses only on children birth to 5 and their families but does state that the parent educators hired as part of the initiative would be employees of local public schools in order to help facilitate a successful transition to kindergarten.

PreK-3rd

- [The Erikson Institute](#) plans to deliver a mathematics professional development program targeted for pre-kindergarten to third grade teachers of high-needs children. Participating teachers will learn about early mathematics learning and how it relates to the Illinois Learning Standards for Mathematics. Additionally, Erikson will convene teachers across grades to talk about how students' learning builds from one grade to the next, creating an integrated approach to children's first five years of school-based math. The program includes four components: interactive learning labs on math content and processes covered in the Illinois standards; on-site coaching in teachers' classrooms—this will include videotaping of and reflection on teachers' lessons; semi-monthly school-based learning groups for teachers within- and across-grades to study the standards and plan to integrate them into lessons; and support for teachers as they apply their new knowledge and skills in a real classroom context. Erikson will work with 80 educators teaching 3,680 students from eight Chicago Public Schools.
- [Miami-Dade County Public Schools](#) plans to improve teacher instruction to high-need students in pre-k through the third grade. An integral piece of this project is to develop an early childhood education specialization within an existing master's program through the University of Florida. The program will consist of courses such as Guided Teacher Inquiry and Transitions in Early Childhood. As teachers earn the specialization, they will lead learning communities and training opportunities within their schools that will focus on transitions from early childhood programs into school. They will be building on work that has identified "feeder" centers (those preschools and childcare centers that children have attended before enrolling) and has already begun building relationships between center directors, principals, teachers and families.

We also took a more in-depth look at Montgomery County Public School's development proposal for its [North Star](#) project to determine if it met the definition of early learning in the i3 application. *North Star* is a college-prep elementary curriculum with aligned assessments that blend core content and the arts. MCPS plans to use it to develop elementary students' critical and creative thinking skills and to build the academic skills needed for life-long learning. Sounds like a worthwhile project to us. But, [just like many of the projects we wrote about last week, the application narrative mentions primary grades \(K- 5\) only](#). This surprised us because MCPS has [expanded pre-kindergarten throughout the district and implemented efforts to align its early literacy instruction for students in pre-k to third grade](#). In Montgomery County, pre-k teachers are considered part of the elementary school— so it's puzzling that pre-k was not mentioned. Without it, the district's proposal doesn't completely meet the department's early learning criteria.

This appraisal brings the number of winning proposals that *we think* should have earned the “early learning” competitive priority point down to six, including [TFA's](#) scale-up proposal and [LAUSD's](#) development proposal that we wrote about last week. We want to reiterate that we are not saying that the winners did not deserve an i3 grant. It is important, however, to call attention to what the applicants' plans include – and do not include – for early learning, and how those plans compare with the Department's early learning competitive priority focus areas.

The [Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Competition \(i3\)](#) has generated a number of promising strategies and ideas. We'll be watching to see how the “early learning” projects take shape. The Department had said it would promote some the other promising “early learning” applicants that didn't win this time. ([The President requested \\$500 million for fiscal year 2011 for i3.](#)) *Early Ed Watch* will keep you posted.

SUGGESTED READING

[About i3 Validation and Development 'Early Learning' Grantees, Part 1](#)
[Inconsistencies in Scores for i3's Early Learning Winners](#)
[Parsing the i3 Projects with a Focus on Early Learning](#)
[Department of Education Announces the Investing In Innovation Grant Winners](#)

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The New America Foundation
1899 L Street, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036
921 11th Street, Suite 901, Sacramento, CA 95814
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