



Funding Sources for Christian Early Education Programs

Recent changes to federal education funding structures such as the Childcare Block Grant, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title I-IV, the CARES Act, and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund — mean that your tax dollars are now available to invest in high quality competency aligned professional development that enhances school culture and enables school leaders, early educators, and families to promote holistic development; promote continuous improvement, and data-informed instruction, and students to achieve early learning outcomes. Christian early childhood professionals, such as early learning/childcare program administrators, early educators, school leaders, K-2nd grade teachers, and consultants, receive federal and state funding to provide a variety of services to children in economically disadvantaged working families. Federal and state funding for early childhood services is available through a network of funding streams and government agencies.

Christian schools face a complex decision when it comes to accepting state and federal funding. Historically Christian schools have traditionally operated as islands of privilege, often relying on private tuition fees for funding and excluding students with exceptional learning needs and families who cannot afford private education. As schools in the developing globalized world thrive, Christian schools in some regions face sustainability challenges. Swaner and Mecham highlight two macro-trends identified by Barna research: the changing faith profile of parents and the proliferation of school options. These trends impact Christian schools' viability.¹ Christian schools must grapple with the tension between maintaining their Christian identity and accessing public funding. Accepting public funds can broaden access to Christian education and funding for professional development. Diversifying funding sources enhances financial stability and program profitability. School leaders must use wisdom and be discerning in order to prevent mission drift as many state mandates have strings attached, while others allow schools to engage a more diverse population without changes to mission or practices. The following are quick facts about the funding streams that support early education services.

¹ Swaner, L., and J. Mecham. 2017. "What is the Future of Christian School Education?" *Christian School Education* 21 (1):6-8.

Funding Source	Purpose	Key Information
Childcare Development Fund (CCDF)	Provides grants to assist economically disadvantaged families in obtaining childcare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$5.3 billion average monthly funding. Administered by the Office of Childcare (OCC), HHS. Targets low-income families, those receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance. Families making up 400% of the federal poverty level qualify in some states.
Preschool Development Grant	Supports states, local education agencies, and local governments in building high-quality preschool systems or expanding proven early learning programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grants help expand access for children from low-to-moderate-income families. - Focuses on ensuring an adequate supply of high-quality preschool slots and qualified teachers.
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership	Allows Early Head Start programs to partner with local childcare centers serving infants and toddlers from low-income families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to expand high-quality early learning opportunities to infants and toddlers through partnerships. - Supports working families with full-day, full-year programs.
Title I	Requires districts to provide eligible private school children with Title I services or benefits equitable to those provided to public school children including early learning. ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports K4-2nd grade early learning programs with funds for additional academic support and learning opportunities. - Eligibility based on residence in a public Title I school attendance area and need for additional academic support.
Title II: Preparing and Retaining High-Quality Educators	Authorizes programs to improve teaching and leadership through professional learning at the state and district levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focuses on job-embedded, evidence-based, and classroom-oriented activities. - Allows funds to be used for professional development related to Title II goals. -- Supports preschool teacher training to promote school readiness. <u>The ready school (ed.gov)</u>
CARES Act	Provides funding relief for K-12 schools through the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF), allowing repurposing of funds for distance learning supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specifically addresses infrastructure and training for online instruction. Includes waivers to repurpose existing funds for technology infrastructure.
Other Federal Sources	Various federal programs fund professional development, including Title III, Title IV-A and B, Title V, Impact Aid, McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, Career and Technical Education, and Individuals with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding supports a range of professional development activities in different areas of education. - Flexibility in use depending on the specific program.

² First Five Fund. (2021) Title I Funding Can Play a Critical Role in Supporting Early Learning. <https://www.ffyf.org/resources/2021/02/title-i-funding-can-play-a-critical-role-in-supporting-early-learning/#:~:text=Title%20I%20of%20the%20Elementary%20and%20Secondary%20Education,educational%20equity%20at%20the%20Elementary%20and%20secondary%20levels.>

Funding Source	Purpose	Key Information
	Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act.	
State Funding	Rethinking K-12 Education Models Grant and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund provide support for innovative education models and ongoing functionality during the COVID-19 pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - States receiving over \$180 million for rethinking K-12 education models - GEER Fund allows governors to provide subgrants to LEAs for various educational activities such as expanding hours or services.

It's essential to note that specific details and eligibility criteria may vary based on the funding source and state regulations. Schools should carefully review each program's guidelines and requirements to access the available funding for professional development initiatives.

Subsidies, Tax Credits, Scholarships

Schools receiving federal and state funding such as **vouchers or subsidy certificates** for childcare services are also provided directly to parents via **tax credits**. Some States have established business tax credits to support early learning leaders and early educators directly. There are also tax credits available for businesses that sponsor childcare services for their employees. Learn more at: <https://childcare-stage.acf.hhs.gov>

The **Children's Tuition Fund (CTF)**, a ministry of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), advocates for educational choice and innovation. CTF operates tax-credit scholarship programs that empower parents to choose the best education for their children. These programs provide financial assistance to lower-income families, allowing them to access quality education options. Tax-credit programs vary by state, but they generally allow individuals and businesses to receive tax credits when they contribute to scholarship funds. In some states, businesses participate directly, while others encourage individual contributions. CTF collaborates with schools, contributors, and parents to provide relationship-oriented financial assistance through these programs. As a Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) in several states, CTF processes and approves tax credits with the state, working directly with contributors. The goal is to increase access to kingdom education, open doors of opportunity for families by supporting educational choice and promoting school sustainability and resilience by being a consistent stream of revenue. CTF currently operates tax-credit scholarship programs in the following states: Alabama (AL), Illinois (IL), Missouri (MO), Nebraska (NE), Pennsylvania (PA), Rhode Island (RI), and Virginia (VA). Find out more at: <https://childrenstuitionfund.org/childrens-tuition-fund/>

Child And Adult Care Food Program

Federal funds are also available through the **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)** to provide nutritious meals and snacks to children in early learning programs. Approximately 4 million children receive nutritious meals and snacks through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) which is the early education arm of the National School lunch program each year. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) clarified that religious schools do not need to submit written requests for a Title IX exemption to claim one. Title IX is the federal law that prohibits sex-based discrimination. Religious educational institutions are exempt if there is a conflict between Title IX and their governing religious tenets.³ Apply online at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp>

³ United States Department of Education. Exemptions from Title IX <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/t9-rel-exempt/index.html>

The Federal and the State Departments of Education fund public (schools) and private (schools and childcare programs) entities to provide early learning services to children in low-income families. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) also provides grants to selected Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) fund States to improve early learning and development programs for young children through comprehensive early learning education reform.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provides grants to private nonprofit and for-profit agencies through the Early Head Start programs to provide early learning services to children in low-income families.

The majority of the federal and state funding is used to provide direct services to children and families, but some funds are used to improve the overall quality of the services provided by early care and education programs, including the funding of technical assistance and training:

Childcare Development Fund

CCDF is administered by the Office of Child Care (OCC) within the Development \$5.3 billion average monthly (FY Administration for Children and Families (ACF), HHS and provides grants Fund (CCDF) State Funding \$2.0 billion (FY 2014 allocation) 2012) to States, Territories, and Tribes to assist low-income families, families receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance in obtaining child care so they can work or attend education and training programs.

Grantees must serve children younger than 13 years, however, some grantees may also elect to serve children ages 13 to 19 who are physically or mentally incapacitated or under court supervision (such as foster care). This would typically be your early learning program, extended care (before and after care), tutoring, and summer enrichment programs. Learn more at:

<https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/615>

Preschool Development Grant

At least 46 states allow some form of equitable services funding for EE. Few early learning provisions in ESSA were mandated; nonetheless, many states proactively and voluntarily included ECE in their ESSA plans.⁴ Additionally, in 2018, 46 states and territories were awarded initial PDG B-5 grants. In 2019, 23 applicants received renewal grants, and 6 states and territories were awarded initial planning grants. In 2020, 5 of the states and territories that received an initial grant in 2019 were awarded a renewal grant, bringing the total to 28 renewal grants. These grants will help States, local education agencies, and local Development (FY 2014 governments build the fundamental components of a high-quality Grant Program estimate) preschool system or expand proven early learning programs. To be eligible for funding, prospective grantees must describe how they will expand access to children from low-to moderate-income families, ensure an adequate supply of high-quality preschool slots and qualified teachers, monitor for continuous improvement, partner with local education agencies and other providers, and sustain high-quality services after the grant period.

Learn more at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html>

Military Childcare Assistance

The U.S. Department of Defense spends more than \$530 million annually to provide childcare services to military personnel, making it the largest employer-sponsored childcare program in the United States. These services are provided to military families through child development centers. For more than a decade, the military departments – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Space Force – have provided fee assistance to eligible military families to offset the cost of childcare in community programs through Military Childcare in Your Neighborhood, or MCCYN, when on

⁴ First Five Years Fund. **Early Learning in State ESSA Plans: How States Are Using the Law**

<https://www.ffyf.org/resources/2018/03/early-learning-in-state-essa-plans-how-states-are-using-the-law/>

installation childcare is unavailable. MCCYN supports families in locations with extensive waiting lists and those geographically dispersed – including Reserve Component families. MCCYN provides fee assistance to eligible military families using nationally accredited or quality rated childcare providers. Childcare Aware® of America serves as the third-party administrator for the MCCYN program. <http://www.defense.gov/news/QRMCreport.pdf> Race to the Top – Early Learning <http://www2.ed.gov> Apply at: <https://childcare.gov/consumer-education/military-child-care-financial-assistance>

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership

These grants allow new or existing Early Head Start programs to partner with local childcare centers serving infants and toddlers from low-income families. These grants support communities as they expand high-quality early learning opportunities to infants and toddlers through EHS-CC Partnerships. The partnerships will support working families by providing a full-day, full-year program so that children in low-income families have the healthy and enriching early experiences they need to realize their full potential. Learn more or apply at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning/ehs-cc-partnerships>

Title I

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) (20 U.S.C. § 6301) requires districts to provide eligible children attending private elementary and secondary schools, as well as their teachers and families, with Title I services or other benefits—such as professional development, family engagement, or materials and supplies (on loan from the public schools)—that are equitable to those provided to eligible public school children and their teachers and families. To be eligible for Title I services, a private school child must reside in a public Title I school attendance area and be determined to be in need of additional academic support. Many school districts support early learning programs with their Title I (Education for the Disadvantaged) funds. Private schools across the country use Title I funds to provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects. Allowable Professional Development aligned with Title I uses are:

- Stipends and/or substitutes for staff
- PD aligned to a Schoolwide Program plan or directly related to the needs of participating Title I students
- Educational consultants
- Reasonable supplies and materials for PD
- Travel costs are allowable if they relate to the grant program activities. NOTE: The district should have a travel cost policy that is applied consistently across federal and nonfederal programs. The policy should cover mileage, air fare, lodging, meals and/or per diem rates. Hotel rates for conferences or trainings must be reasonable. (see professional development definition under Title II.) <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

Title II: Preparing and Retaining High-Quality Educators

Title II authorizes programs to improve teaching and leadership through professional learning at the state and district levels. Allowable use of Title II funds focuses on job-embedded, evidence based, and classroom-oriented activities. Recent updates have also expanded the scope of allowable use of funds to all teachers, staff, school leadership, and paraprofessionals such as teaching assistants, instructional support personnel, interventionists, and any educator who works directly with Title I children. To the extent that a teacher's, principal's or other school leader's attendance at a conference sponsored or conducted by a faith-based organization is part of a sustained and comprehensive secular professional development plan, Title II, Part A funds may be expended to pay for the portion of the costs of the conference that, as determined by the LEA, represent the secular professional development in which the teacher, principal or other school leader participated. By law, use of federal funds to support religion is prohibited, pursuant to 34 CFR section 76.532, sections 8505 and 8501(a)(2). Note: If the conference contains both secular and non-secular events, the

attending teacher, principal or other school leader must provide the LEA with information clearly delineating secular and non-secular activities prior to attending the conference. The LEA will determine the percentage of the conference representing secular professional development in which the teacher participated. The LEA should consider all expenses related to attending the conference (e.g., airfare, hotel registration) to determine the amount to reimburse the teacher for attending the conference.

Christian early learning programs can utilize Title II funds to enhance the professional growth of their staff. These funds can support:

- Training workshops for teachers and administrators.
- Courses related to early childhood education.
- Job-embedded activities that directly impact classroom practices.

By investing in professional development, Christian childcare centers can improve teaching quality and better prepare educators to meet the needs of young learners.⁵ Title II funds can contribute to school readiness efforts by:

- Supporting teachers in implementing evidence-based practices that promote early literacy and numeracy skills.
- Providing resources for language development, cognitive growth, and social-emotional learning.
- Enhancing the overall quality of early childhood education programs.

Title II, Part A: Highly Qualified Teachers and Leaders

Definition of Professional Development as defined in the Every Student Succeeds Act Page 296, ESSA, Section 8002“(42) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. —The term ‘professional development’ means activities that— “(xviii) where practicable, provide jointly for school staff and other early childhood education program providers, to address the transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness.”

The process of consultation spans two years and begins annually in October, at which time notifications are sent to all private schools that serve the County Public Schools students inviting them to participate in the Equitable Services Program. If the private school chooses to participate in the program for the following year, the Director of Federal Programs provides ongoing consultation throughout the year.

CARES Act: Training, Scholarships, Salary Supplementation

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act includes an Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) that provides \$13.5 billion in funding relief for K-12 schools. While the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) had previously limited districts’ ability to use federal funds for technology infrastructure, Congress introduced specific waivers to repurpose these existing funds for distance learning supports, teacher scholarships, incentives, and salary supplementation.^{6 7} If you have any questions on eligibility or how to apply for any grant opportunities, there are a few options you can reach out to, including your state or local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency.⁸
<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/state-policies-to-improve-early-childhood-educator-jobs/early-childhood-educator-workforce-policies/compensation-financial-relief/>

Other Federal Sources

⁵ <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/essa-legislation-table-contents/title-ii-part-a/>

⁶ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/policy-guidance/summary-child-care-provisions-coronavirus-aid-relief-and-economic-security-act>

⁷ [GAO-24-106258, CHILD CARE: Selected States Are Taking Steps To Sustain Program Changes Implemented With Covid-19 Funding](https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-24-106258)

⁸ Find Local CRRS [Child Care Resource and Referral - Child Care Aware® of America](#)

Many federal programs currently fund professional development in all states. Most funding for professional development comes from the following programs:

Title I, Part A — Education for the Disadvantaged

Provides for professional development “necessary to assist teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, other staff, and parents in identifying and meeting the comprehensive needs of eligible children” to “local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families.”⁹

Title I, Part C — Education of Migratory Children

Provides for “professional development programs, including mentoring, for teachers and other program personnel” specifically in support of migratory children.

Title I, Part D — Neglected and Delinquent Youth

Provides for “appropriate training for teachers and other instructional and administrative personnel” in meeting the educational needs of neglected, delinquent, and at-risk children and youth.

Title III — English Language Acquisition

Provides for professional development specifically designed to increase the English language proficiency (ELP) of English learners (ELs) and immigrant students by providing language instruction educational programs and meeting academic content standards. For early childhood education, Title III emphasizes the development and implementation of language instruction educational programs that cater to the needs of English learners from a young age.^{10, 11}

Title IV, Part A — Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

Provides for professional development for effective use of data and technology, academic assessments, career and technical education, and family and community engagement.¹²

Title IV, Part B — 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Primarily supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children; also requires grantees to set aside 5% of the award amount for professional development.

Title V, Part B — Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) Small Rural Schools (SRSA)

Provides rural, low-enrollment LEAs with additional funds for activities covered by Title I-A, Title II-A, Title III, and Title IV-A and -B. Title VII, Impact Aid

A highly flexible funding stream for eligible school districts serving federally connected children on military bases, Indian lands, and subsidized housing. Districts may use Title VII funds at their discretion, including professional learning.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Act

Provides for professional learning to “facilitate and enhance the identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school for homeless children and youth.” May not be used for activities impacting non-homeless children.

Career and Technical Education (Carl D. Perkins Act)

Provides grants to “vocational and technical education program[s] that... provide professional development programs to teachers, counselors, and administrators” (among other activities).

Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act — Special Education

Provides for professional learning and collaborative planning related directly to the provision of special education. Specifically, awardees may use up to 15% of their IDEA Part B funds to support

⁹ First Five Fund. (2021) Title I Funding Can Play a Critical Role in Supporting Early Learning. <https://www.ffyf.org/resources/2021/02/title-i-funding-can-play-a-critical-role-in-supporting-early-learning/#:~:text=Title%20I%20of%20the%20Elementary%20and%20Secondary%20Education,educational%20equity%20at%20the%20Elementary%20and%20secondary%20levels> .

¹⁰United States Department of Early Education. <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/essa-legislation-table-contents/title-iii-part-a/>

¹¹ National Association of Secondary School Principals. <https://www.nassp.org/a/title-iii-language-instruction-for-english-learners-and-immigrant-students/>

¹² U.S. Department of Education Releases New Resource on Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral and Mental Health during COVID-19 Era (2021)

<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-new-resource-supporting-child-and-student-social-emotional-behavioral-and-mental-health-during-covid-19-era>

Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) to provide early intervening services for those students not yet identified as needing special education or related services.

State Funding

Rethinking K-12 Education Models Grant

11 states have received over \$180 million in new grant funding to “rethink education” to better serve students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant supports states’ efforts to create new, innovative ways for students to continue learning in ways that meet their needs. All awarded states, including Texas, Louisiana, New York and more, will use part of their funds for professional development purposes. Learn more at: <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/states-highest-coronavirus-burden/>

Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund

Governors may provide subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) within their jurisdiction that have been “most significantly impacted by coronavirus” to support their ability to continue providing educational services to their students, and to support the “on-going functionality” of these entities. The LEA may use these funds for any activities that are authorized under the ESEA but are encouraged to apply for funding supporting the effective delivery of online instruction. Read your state’s GEER Fund application on the USED website to find out if makes allowances for professional development use. Learn more at: [Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education](#)

The **American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP Act)**, signed on March 11, 2021, has allocated **\$23.97 billion** for **childcare stabilization grants**. These grants are intended to provide financial relief to childcare providers, helping them defray unexpected business costs associated with the pandemic and stabilize their operations so they can continue providing care. These grants may have stipulations that are aligned with your mission. Schools can use these subgrants to cover various expenses, including:

- Personnel costs
- Rent or mortgage payments
- Insurance
- Facility maintenance and improvements
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-related supplies
- Training and professional development related to health and safety practices
- Goods and services needed to resume providing care
- Mental health supports for children and early educators
- [Reimbursement of costs associated with the current public health emergency.](#)

For more detailed information, you can visit the [Child Care Stabilization Grants page](#) on the **Child Care Technical Assistance Network** website. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/child-care-stabilization-grants>

Other Grants

Candid

The first step in seeking grants is to set up a Candid profile. Candid provides essential nonprofit data, tools, and resources. It’s a merger of **Foundation Center** and **GuideStar**, combining their expertise to empower changemakers. If you’re looking for grants, scholarships, endowments, or fellowships, Candid offers an **online tool** with **10,000+ sources of funding**. Additionally, you can explore **requests for proposals (RFPs)** on **Philanthropy News Digest (PND)**. GuideStar, a part of Candid, provides comprehensive data on nonprofits. Use it to look up information (such as board members, affiliations, and types of grants awarded) about specific organizations. The Foundation

Directory allows you to search for grant makers, grants, and recipients. Simply enter relevant keywords related to your project, and it will provide results. Learn more at: <https://candid.org/>

Grants.gov

If you're interested in exploring other grants, you can check out the Grants.gov website, which serves as a single access point for over 900 grant programs offered by federal agencies, including the Children's Bureau. Learn more at: <https://grants.gov/>