

EARLY INTERVENTION AND EARLY LEARNING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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A. Purpose

Through its research program on Early Intervention and Early Learning in Special Education (Early Intervention), the Institute supports:

...research that contributes to the improvement of developmental outcomes and school readiness of infants, toddlers, and young children (from birth through age 5) with disabilities or at risk for disabilities.

...The long-term outcome of this program will be an array of tools and strategies (e.g., assessment tools, curricula, programs, services, interventions) that have been documented to be effective for improving developmental outcomes or school readiness of infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities or at risk for disabilities.

B. Background

More than one million infants, toddlers, and young children (birth through five years old) receive early intervention or early childhood special education services under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Relatively little rigorous research, however, has been conducted to evaluate the impact of early interventions or early childhood special education services for improving child outcomes (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000). Under the Early Intervention research program, the Institute supports research on early intervention practices, curricula, professional development, measurement, and systems-level programs and policies.

The Institute intends for its Early Intervention research program to support research on infants, toddlers, and young children with high- or low-incidence disabilities, or at risk for disabilities. Under the Early Intervention research program, the Institute supports research on interventions that are delivered to the child by early intervention specialists, teachers, related service providers (e.g., speech-language pathologists, physical therapists), or parents. Interventions may include training provided to parents to enable them to deliver interventions to their child. The Institute supports research to develop a new intervention or to test the efficacy of an existing intervention. For example, you may propose a Development and Innovation project to support parents of children with cochlear implants or hearing aids in their efforts to enhance their children's listening and language development.

Also appropriate under this topic is research on professional development programs intended to improve services to infants, toddlers, or young children with or at risk for disabilities, and thereby improve developmental outcomes or school readiness. Professional development programs may be for early intervention specialists, teachers, or related service providers. For example, you might propose an Efficacy and Replication project to evaluate a professional development training program for special educators to improve the early literacy skills of young children with developmental delays.

Under the Early Intervention topic, the Institute also encourages research on systemic interventions intended to directly or indirectly improve developmental outcomes or school readiness of infants, toddlers, or young children with or at risk for disabilities. Examples of systemic interventions include (a) programs to improve the development and implementation of Individualized Family Service Plans or preschoolers' Individualized Education Programs; (b) programs or procedures intended to better coordinate service delivery systems; (c) Response to Intervention approaches; and (d) interventions intended to improve collaboration among families, service providers, and educators and promote smooth transitions as children move from Early Intervention services to preschool settings.

The Institute encourages the development and validation of assessments for purposes such as screening, progress monitoring, or evaluating student outcomes or the effects of early intervention programs. For example you may propose a Measurement project to develop and validate measures that can be used not only for measuring infants' developmental outcomes, but also for determining early intervention program areas that need improvement and for providing data for accountability purposes.

The Institute also encourages you to conduct Exploration studies to explore malleable factors that are associated with better developmental and school readiness outcomes for infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities or at risk for disabilities, as well as mediators or moderators of the relations between these factors and student outcomes, for the purpose of identifying potential targets of intervention. For example, you may propose to study the role of potentially malleable factors (including parenting practices and EI/ECSE services) in the onset of language delays during children's infant, toddler, and preschool years, and the consequences of these delays for school readiness.

C. Application Requirements

Focus on children with or at risk for disabilities

This research program is restricted to early intervention and special education research for infants, toddlers, or young children with disabilities or at risk for disabilities. Please adhere to the requirements described in Part I Section B Requirement to Focus on Children with Disabilities.

Sample requirements

- Your research must focus on infants, toddlers, or young children (preschool or prekindergarten children) with high- or low-incidence disabilities, or at risk for disabilities. Students without disabilities may be included in the sample (e.g., an inclusive classroom) if appropriate for the research questions.

Content requirements

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- Your research must address either developmental outcomes pertaining to cognitive, communicative, linguistic, social, emotional, adaptive, functional or physical development or school readiness outcomes (i.e., reading, pre-reading, pre-writing, early mathematics, early science, or social-emotional skills that prepare young children for school).

- Interventions may be school-based interventions or may occur in other natural settings (e.g., home-based, child care settings) or may be systemic interventions.
- Interventions designed to provide direct services to infants, toddlers, or young children may be delivered by early intervention specialists, teachers, related service providers (e.g., speech-language pathologists, physical therapists), or parents. Professional development interventions may target professionals or paraprofessionals who provide services to infants, toddlers, or young children with disabilities or at risk for disabilities.
- Under the Measurement goal [#5], assessments of the knowledge or performance of early intervention and early childhood special education practitioners, as well as assessments of the quality of early intervention/early childhood special education programs and systems must be related to measures of child outcomes.
- You must include measures of child outcomes (e.g., developmental or school readiness outcomes).