



Inclusionary Practice and Systems

BRAIDED FUNDING TO PROMOTE PRESCHOOL INCLUSION

Early learning programs (e.g., child care, preschool, state funded Pre-K) share the challenge of increasing affordability for families while paying salaries to retain a quality workforce. Although multiple funding streams support services for young children with and without disabilities, these local, state, and federal funding sources come with strict guidelines about their use. Some funding streams are based on the economic needs of families, others are based on the developmental needs of children, and still others are based on where the child and family lives. Most programs use multiple funding streams to support their programs. When school districts or community programs use funds from different programs to support an inclusive and comprehensive early learning program, they are using a braided funding model.

WHAT IS BRAIDED FUNDING?

- Braided funding is the use of funds from two or more sources that are used together to fund an early learning program while still maintaining the identity and integrity of each funding source
- The use of funds must match the purpose of the funding source as defined by the donor, or the federal, state and/or local level program

WHO ARE THE IMPORTANT PLAYERS IN A BRAIDED FUNDING MODEL?

- Program administrators, accounting staff, business managers, philanthropists
- Those knowledgeable about funding requirements or who are responsible for financial decisions should be included in the planning.

WHY IS BRAIDED FUNDING IMPORTANT?

- Recognizes the needs of children and families cross artificial administrative and organizational boundaries
- May reduce the burden to program administrators over time; can reduce effort when reporting, keeps track of records on eligibility, and allows for the option to continually fill gaps with more flexible funds
- Coordinates financial assistance from individual funding streams to states, local governments, and others
- Eliminates duplication of costs with each strand maintaining identity
- Provides an audit trail of expenditure of all funds

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF BRAIDED FUNDING?

- Braiding funding supports the cost of high quality inclusive early learning systems with different funding streams, each source paying a portion of the total cost.
- Braided funding allows for fiscal mapping that can help to identify and take advantage of local, state, and federal funding opportunities.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Identify funding streams and eligible populations then compare requirements
- Align requirements of funding streams
- Good recording keeping is essential
- Develop shared goals and a plan for collaboration with fiscal managers, and program leads as well as messaging and prioritization of this shift with the program leadership.
- Utilize current data to drive conversation and support decision making process, as well as the longer term need of utilizing a shared/integrated data system for programs regardless of agency lead (OSPI, DCYF ECEAP, Head Start, Child Care Aware, etc.).
- **Although all elements of a braided funding model must be clear to the program administrators, it should be invisible in the classroom to the teachers, children, and to the families.**

BRAIDED FUNDING CASE STUDY WITH ROBERT LINCE EARLY LEARNING CENTER

Robert Lince Early Learning Center in Selah, Washington provides inclusive early learning programs that braids funding from ECEAP, special education, and private tuition. Robert Lince, as a center, chose braided funding to streamline the process of preschool enrollment for families. All students and families are members of the classroom community and receive the specially designed instruction and support they require to be successful in their classroom. ECEAP requirements are the base in each classroom with specially designed instruction (SDI) offered as push in. For instance, all students are required to have a specific time for centers and SDI is embedded into this time by manipulating what is available in each center, meeting the needs of all students in a play based inclusive setting.

- Principal and Early Learning Director positions are funded out of Title I Part A and Basic education funding support (no ECEAP funds)
- Office staff, nurse, and kitchen staff are paid with Basic education funds
- ECEAP family support Staff has 6 hours each that are fully funded by ECEAP and utilized exclusively for ECEAP students
- Twenty five percent of ECEAP Coach/Manager are solely dedicated to support ECEAP support and compliance standards
- FTE for teaching staff (teachers and paraprofessionals) is driven based on actual program costs for salary and benefits according to a percentage allocation model and charged to the appropriate funding source
- Classroom staff serve students across all programs/funding sources and staff support students in multiple classrooms; staffing allocations are represented according to total student program slots across all classrooms as a whole or the combined total number of slots across all classes
- The percentage allocation is calculated with the total number of student slots across all classrooms rather than classroom by classroom
- Professional development, teaching supplies and supplemental materials, and ECEAP required items were paid for using the same percentage allocation based on student enrollment

Teaching staff support ECEAP students, special education students, and tuition based students in an inclusive setting. Funding does not exceed the percentage of slots dedicated to each program. The cost represents actual costs to the programs including salary and benefits. The projected enrollment percentage allocation was based on the previous year to develop projections in June and finalized in the fall. Enrollment will fluctuate so the model is revisited in February of each year to adjust future projections. Braided funding, although an ever changing model due to fluctuation in enrollment and student needs, supports inclusion and inclusive structures in early learning at Robert Lince Early Learning Center.

RESOURCES

1. **Advance Grow Accelerate AGA** (2014). *Intergovernmental Partnership Collaboration Series: Blended and Braided Funding: A Guide for Policy Makers and Practitioners*. Retrieved from <https://www.agacgfm.org/Resources/intergov/BlendedBraidedFunding.aspx>
2. **Cate, D. & Peters, M. L.**, (2018). *Preschool Inclusion Finance Toolkit 2018*. Retrieved from http://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/inclusion/preschool_inclusion_finance_toolkit_2018.pdf
3. **Gonzalez, K. & Caronongan, P.** (2021). *Braiding Federal Funding to Expand Access to Quality Early Care and Education and Early Childhood Support and Services: A Tool for States and Local Communities*. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/early-childhood-braiding>
4. **Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.** (2020). *Unlocking Federal and State Program Funds to Support Student Success*. Retrieved from https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/esea/pubdocs/Unlocking_State_Federal_Program_Funds.pdf

**Robert Lince is coding staff across all classrooms/programs rather than FTE representing each individual class. The total cost of all staff is broken down by program according to the percentage of students that each program serves.*