



**Agenda Item No. 2
May 2, 2012 Meeting**

DATE: April 17, 2012
TO: Children and Families Commission of Orange County
FROM: Michael M. Ruane, Executive Director 
SUBJECT: Receive Update on Early Learning Portfolio Strategy: Investing in Innovation Fund Grant Program Application

SUMMARY:

Studies on early childhood learning find that the level of math literacy prior to entry into kindergarten is the greatest predictor of children's academic success in elementary school. Early childhood programs however do not always challenge and extend children's mathematical knowledge. The Commission previously funded MIND Research Institute; an Orange County based nonprofit organization, to develop an interactive math instructional software programs to engage preschool students at varying levels of academic and language proficiency. In addition, the Commission funds Learning Link centers at school districts campuses to engage parents and young children. This report provides an update on a proposed strategy being developed to join the strengths of the Learning Link centers with the MIND Research Institute's math curriculum.

Investing in Innovation Development Federal Grant

As part of the Early Learning Portfolio, Bridgespan recommended that the "Commission adopt a goal to measurably reduce the achievement gap that exists by age five between low-income children and their more advantaged peers in Orange County". The Bridgespan assessment identified a strategy for restructuring the Commission's portfolio of early learning investments to provide a greater focus on evidence and outcomes, achieve a significant impact with limited resources, and demonstrate the power of a catalytic approach for other areas of the portfolio. Understanding that intensive efforts are required in high-need communities to address the multiple and significant challenges that disadvantaged children face that may inhibit their health and school success, Bridgespan also recommended that investments focus on the City of Santa Ana and that the Commission provide technical assistance for strategic planning and coordination.

To meet this recommendation, the Commission has been working closely with a number of agencies, including the Santa Ana Unified School District, the MIND Research Institute, University of California, Irvine School of Education, and the Samueli Foundation in developing an Investing in Innovation (i3) funding pre-application (Attachment 1). If funded, the i3 Development Grant would expand the MIND Research Institute's Pre-K ST Math curriculum to additional preschool classrooms in the Santa Ana Unified School District as well as expand and refine the ST Math software for implementation at Commission-funded Learning Link sites.

Learning Link - Learning Link is an interactive, drop-in center based at school district locations, that provides parents and their children ages 0-5 an accessible and creative learning environment facilitated by early learning specialists trained to engage parents and young children. The goal of Learning Link is to help young children to be prepared for kindergarten by supporting parents in their role as their children's first teacher.

Pre-K ST Math - The MIND Research Institute has developed interactive math instructional software programs to engage and train students at varying levels of academic and language proficiency. The Commission funded MIND to develop the pre-kindergarten focused math curriculum (Pre-K ST Math) for a preschool population.

In addition to expanding the MIND ST Math curriculum, the i3 Development Grant would focus on increasing parent engagement as well as enhancing the professional development of teachers and Learning Link staff in the field of math literacy. A strong evaluation component is crucial for this development grant. As such, the School of Education at UCI would be engaged to develop an evaluation that assesses the strengths of implementing the Pre-K ST Math curriculum within Learning Link sites, gauging child and parent outcomes within the participating Learning Link sites, participating preschool classrooms, and children not receiving an ST Math intervention. The evaluation will also address the impact of professional development on teachers' outcomes. The community interest in the project is to identify an early STEM education model that can be replicated into a countywide portfolio.

If the pre-application is selected, staff proposes working through the existing Commission contract with The Olin Group to develop the full project application.

STRATEGIC PLAN & FISCAL SUMMARY:

The recommended action presented in this staff report has been reviewed in relation to the Commission's Strategic Plan and is consistent with the Early Learning goal. This agenda item does not include a funding request.

PRIOR COMMISSION ACTIONS:

- April 2011— Receive Update on the Early Learning Portfolio Implementation Strategies and Proposed Funding Allocations
- June 2010 – Receive presentation on The Bridgespan Groups' Early Learning Portfolio Recommendations

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Receive update on the Investing in Innovation Fund Grant Program application and authorize participation in developing a full application, if selected by the US Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Investing in Innovation Fund Grant Program Summary

Contact: Alyce Mastrianni

Investing in Innovation Fund Grant Program Summary

Grant Opportunity	Investing in Innovation Fund Development Grants - i3 US Department of Education
Eligibility	Must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submit a pre-application and selected to submit full application - Be a LEA, a non-profit in partnership with an LEA, a non-profit in partnership with a consortium of schools
Critical Dates:	March 15, 2012 - Submit notice of intent April 9 – Submit pre-application (intergovernmental review = 60 calendar days) TBD – Submit full application, if invited
Range of Award	Up to \$3 million with 10 – 20 awards
Cost Sharing or Matching	Must demonstrate one or more partnerships with an entity or organization in the private sector which may include philanthropic Must obtain matching funds or in-kind donations equal to at least 15% of grant award.
Purpose	Provide competitive grants to applicants with a record of improving student achievement and attainment in order to expand the implementation of innovative practices that are demonstrated to have an impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving student achievement of growth - Closing the achievement gap - Decreasing the dropout rate - Increasing high school graduation rates - Increasing college enrollment and completion rates
3 Types of Grants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scale up 2. Validation 3. Development – i3 funds development for high potential, untested practices, strategies, programs (that has a rationale) that should be systematically studied
Competitive Preference Priorities	Focus on technology and productivity
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider applicability for IDEA students - Must participate in a “Community of Practice” - Must conduct an independent evaluation and comply with Department evaluation requirements.
Priorities	Includes 5 absolute and 5 competitive preference priorities. Absolute priority 2 = Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education. Need to select two competitive preference priorities e.g. early learning, support college access, students with disabilities and ELL, improving productivity, technology.
Pre-Application	Narrative of no more than 7 pages that addresses selection criteria including the quality of project design and significance