



U.S. Department of Education PDG Annual Performance Report Executive Summary

Based on ED 524B OMB No. 1894-0003 Exp. 06/30/2017

Grantee State: TN

PR/Award #: S419B150026

You are required to submit an Executive Summary of up to 3000 words with your Annual Performance Report. This summary should relate to your approved application and summarize the goals and objectives that have been achieved under your grant, what you learned, and any evaluation results. Describe any unanticipated outcomes or benefits from your project and any barriers that you may have encountered. If there have been any changes to the project from the approved application, those should be explained as well.

Overview of Progress

Through the preschool development-expansion application process, the State of Tennessee submitted an ambitious and achievable goal to partner with a Consortium of Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in Shelby County, including the districts responsible for all schools in the City of Memphis, and Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), to expand High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten in their communities.

Key goals of this plan included:

- To significantly increase pre-K access among Eligible Children in High-Need Communities in Shelby County and Nashville
- To strengthen quality through upgrading existing pre-K seats in both communities to include all elements of High-Quality Preschool Programs. In particular, to add Comprehensive Services to existing classrooms that already address all other elements of High-Quality programs and to implement a teacher coaching model
- To strengthen alignment of the birth-to-third grade continuum
- To build Tennessee's pre-K infrastructure, particularly in the area of evaluating and ensuring program quality
- To measure the impact of several different models of High-Quality Preschool Programs

The work with these two urban school districts in Tennessee had some similarities as well as differences based on the unique needs of the children, families and communities they serve.

Shelby County Consortium

Increased access

The Shelby County Consortium is made up of four districts: Shelby County Schools serving the city of Memphis, Bartlett City Schools and Millington Municipal Schools serving a defined suburb of Memphis and the Achievement School District (ASD) which was created to catapult the bottom 5% of schools to the top 25% of the state within 5 years. These districts were awarded funding through the County Commission in 2014 to expand pre-K by 400 seats. This grant allowed the expansion of this initiative by adding an additional 660 seats in year one and a goal of adding an additional 340 seats over the next two years and maintain serving these additional 1,000 children in year four and beyond.

In year one, Shelby County Schools added 540 seats, Millington added 20 seats and the ASD

added 100 seats. Bartlett City Schools did not add any additional new seats because the district's population did not warrant any additional seats as they currently offer enough state pre-K programs to meet the income eligible population in their district. They do however remain as an active partner of this Consortium and continue to provide 60 children access to high quality pre-K through the one county commission funded classroom and two Voluntary pre-K classrooms. The Shelby County Consortium was successful with adding the 33 classrooms as written in the grant and maintaining the 20 county commission classrooms as well.

Improvement to existing classrooms

In addition to the opening of the 33 new classrooms, Shelby County Schools and ASD also added comprehensive services to 32 and 14 existing state funded preschool classrooms served by community child care programs as well other existing ASD classrooms, respectively. All of these programs received comprehensive services, which meet the definition of high quality preschool programs, through a partnership with Porter-Leath, an established, highly successful community organization supporting early childhood programs for 160 years. Services offered by Porter-Leath include developmental, vision, hearing, and dental screenings, family services and meetings, access to extended day services and "*Moving Up to Kindergarten*" kits for all ASD preschool classrooms to support students and parents during summer transitions to kindergarten. With the addition of services to these 32 classrooms, all new classrooms in the Shelby County Consortium have access to comprehensive services.

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Increased access

MNPS set a goal to add 440 new seats in their school district in year one and maintain the operation of those classrooms over the four years of the grant and beyond. Due to several administrative level staff changes in MNPS and the delayed hiring of additional grant support staff, the opening of a new preschool hub was pushed back to opening in 2016-17. This site would have housed eight of the 10 classrooms that did not open this year. A decision was made by the district to hold off on opening the other two classrooms until next year as well. The district was successful with meeting this new first year goal and is on target for meeting the year two goal of opening an additional 12 classrooms.

MNPS expanded their access to quality pre-K classrooms in 2014 with the opening of three Early Learning Centers (ELC) serving 540 children with the expectation that 390 children would meet the 200% of poverty income eligibility guidelines set by this grant. The children served in these classrooms as well as those in the existing 55 state funded pre-K classrooms received comprehensive services to meet the definition of high quality preschool programs.

Improvement of existing programs

A focus for MNPS is the implementation of a teacher coaching model to which significant resources to provide job-embedded, evidence based professional development to teachers were added. Based on past experience of the ELCs with this model, MNPS realized the greater need for differentiation in their approach to professional development. Because Pre-K teachers have never worked one on one with an instructional coaching framework, there has been some resistance to the coaching model. The grant supports job embedded coaching for teachers and educational assistants as well as access to over 100 hours of professional development collectively for teachers, educational assistants, administrators and other early childhood staff.

As presented in GPRA 1(a) table totals, the total number of students targeted to be served by all sub-grantees and the number of students actually served is short by 79 students or .5% of targeted goal.

Evaluation of effectiveness of new and improved seats

The state and both communities are deeply committed to better understanding not just whether pre-K is better preparing children for Kindergarten, but when, where, and how best to do this work. The state has partnered with Peabody Research Institute (PRI) in a study of the effectiveness of this pre-K expansion. Peabody researchers assessed 1,490 students enrolled in new or improved pre-k classrooms and through a battery of assessment tools collected individual measures on these students' skills entering pre-K. Assessments were completed between September and November of 2015. There were some challenges with the districts having accurate data for identifying which classrooms were participating in this evaluation and then identifying the income eligible children in these classrooms. A post assessment of these same 1490 students will occur in April 2016. The challenges of identifying students have been noted and a system is in place to ensure quicker exchange of information in 2016. This will result in student assessments occurring closer to the beginning of the school year rather than two or three months into the school year.

In addition to student assessments, PRI is currently conducting classroom observations, enabling analysis of how teacher practices correlate with student learning.

TDOE staff members have been trained by and are working alongside Peabody staff in student assessment protocol and conducting observations. This collaboration will build the state's ongoing capacity for monitoring classroom quality and identifying successful practices to implement statewide.

Alignment of birth to third grade continuum at the state and local level

Both the Shelby County Consortium and MNPS are committed to fostering a continuum of learning, birth through third grade. Both communities have focused resources and existing infrastructure to ensure successful transitions from pre-K to Kindergarten for all families served. Porter-Leath has purchased "Moving Up to Kindergarten" kits for all ASD preschool classrooms to support students and parents during summer transitions to kindergarten. The state is also investigating other opportunities to address the summer slide as the research identifies this as a major factor in students' demonstrating readiness for Kindergarten.

Much work continues to be done to ensure alignment of Kindergarten to third grade instruction with the foundations of pre-K. MNPS has contracted with an organization to assist them with development of a plan for alignment of pre-K with their district's early grades plan for alignment. The Shelby County Consortium is also in the negotiation stage of developing a birth to grade three continuum with much work to continue in the next three years of this grant.

The state department of education has identified early learning foundations as one of their priority areas in the department's strategic plan. To meet this priority the state will:

- support and monitor programs serving students birth to age 5 to ensure implementation of high quality practices necessary for building a solid foundation for ongoing learning,
- identify and implement a kindergarten entry screener to provide solid data on the readiness skills kindergarten students present at entry into the formal educational system, and
- provide professional development across the birth to grade 3 continuum to support high quality educational experiences across all birth to 4 settings and grades K-3.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Year one of this grant has been an exciting one in Tennessee and while we have celebrated much success it has not been without its many challenges. While funding for this grant was awarded in January 2015, Tennessee was limited in moving forward with implementation of many activities and strategies due to the delay with our state legislators to approve acceptance of the funding which did not occur until late spring. The state set a very ambitious goal for year one. As a result of this, much of the work done up until this time was completed by state and sub-grantee employees on top of their already full time job responsibilities on other projects. In spite of this, the state supported the sub-grantees as they successfully opened the number of classrooms identified in the grant or as amended with approval from the state.

Another challenge, related to the delayed approval for implementation, was both the loss of strategic staff at the sub-grantee level as well as the delayed hiring of support staff at the state and sub-grantee level. MNPS lost both the director of the school district as well as the early childhood grant manager and project manager for their early learning center hubs. Hiring of new staff included not only learning a new job but taking on tasks written and developed by someone else and trying to interpret how the data was identified. As a result of this, the state and sub-grantees are asked to fully document their work so that others can follow any future work.

A third challenge is understanding data collection and the use of technology to interpret the data. There are several different departments who play a role in the collection of data. Identifying each player, the data they collect and how to streamline the collection is a major task. Through ongoing communication and understanding of each other's systems we are gaining a better sense of how to work together. Each system and state is unique and a one size fits all system does not appear imminent but communicating needs is improving access and understanding of each other's data collection.

A final challenge is ensuring that the work we are doing does not impede our first priority which is to provide high quality early childhood experiences for children. Our teachers, assistants, administrative and support staff need to feel valued and supported and not overwhelmed with collection of data and classroom visitors. We can best do this by keeping them and the children and families they serve in the center of all that we do.

Conclusion

Tennessee has much to celebrate through year one implementation. It was a very successful year with opportunities afforded to meet many of our year one goals, and to learn about the challenges of implementation as we continue planning for years two, three and four.

Although funding was awarded in January 2015 it was not until May that our state legislators approved acceptance of this funding. Monthly dialogue between the skeletal crew of both the state and sub-grantees during this time allowed for timely implementation of most activities.

Collaboration between the state and the communities engaged in this work has been strengthened through regularly scheduled monthly opportunities for intentional, ongoing, and open dialogue. This proved crucial to ensuring the work was completed in a timely manner and to learn from each other through this process. In numerous instances did many team players agree that we were learning how much we didn't know and what a great experience it has offered to us. Some of the lesson learned:

- Allow time to get team in place and for them to plan before full implementation is expected.

- Focus on what you learn from your plan not going exactly as written, rather than thinking you failed. It's okay not to be right all the time.
- Celebrate the successes no matter how big or how small!