



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: AR

PR/Award #: S419B150025

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.

The State of Arkansas has utilized the Preschool Development Grant funds to expand the current state funded preschool program, Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program, by 1,364 slots and improve an additional 1,506 currently state funded slots. This is an increase over Year 1 by 126 expansion slots and 106 improvement slots. The State enrolled 92% of the enrollment opportunities provided by the Preschool Development Grant. During Year 3, the State will continue to provide additional resources and technical assistance to sub-grantees that focus on eliminating service barriers for children and families and strong recruitment efforts.

The State has continued to build upon and strengthen its robust early child and education (ECE) system. Use of the funds, combined with funds from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, have resulted in the completion of the following projects: 1) Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: Birth through 60 Months adopted by the AR Early Childhood Commission in April 2016 and approved by the AR State Board of Education; 2) A Family Engagement Framework and state infrastructure; and 3) Connection of the Kindergarten Readiness Indicators with the Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards for Teachers. Because of the changes in the State's procurement requirements, the selection and piloting of the new Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) is targeted to begin in Fall 2017. These projects have primarily been funded by the Kellogg grant, supplemented by existing state funded resources (e.g. Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF), Arkansas Department of Education Funds). In addition to these projects, the State utilizes funding from the Preschool Development grant to: implement statewide training promoting relationship/ leadership based practices; develop statewide training for the Child Development and Early Learning Standards with plans to roll out the training to programs during 2017 and implement the State's system of monitoring and continuous improvement. A portion of the PDG funding was dedicated to support the revision of the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework to specify the qualifications and ongoing development required for early care and education professionals. However, the PDG funds were not used as the subcommittee located resources via a national expert that is using their organization's funding to assist AR.

Arkansas recognizes that a well-educated and qualified workforce is critical to nurturing the learning and development of young children, particularly those with high needs. Arkansas has utilized funding provided by the Preschool Development Grant to provide support the expansion of the Powerful Interactions Program to Early Childhood Education providers. Since the Fall of 2016, ECE providers continue to participate in the staff development for the Powerful Interactions Program. Programs funded by the Preschool Development Grant have been attending this training and will continue into the upcoming year.

The State agrees to the implementation of a new Kindergarten Entry Assessment, and working through the procurement process for selection is underway. The new KEA plan aligns with the Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards, is culturally and linguistically appropriate, targets sound measurement properties, and intends to provide strength based reports for parents, teachers, and administrators. The State has proposals for agencies to assist in the completion of the KEA and is targeting roll out in the upcoming school year. Until this is complete, the Qualls continues to be the KEA being used and the ability to separate the data of the children from PDG is proving to be challenging or nonexistent at this time. Because of the changes in the State's procurement requirements, the selection and piloting of the new Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) is targeted to begin in Fall 2017. New procurement requirements and practices were being refined for implementation with ongoing adjustments to the procedures and process resulting in the delay to roll out the new instrument of KEA. When the KEA was vetted out for a bid, a suitable vendor was not located resulting in

additional bid process.

The State has completed the Family Engagement guide, which provides supports for early childhood programs in building a family engagement system. The guide consists of the state's definition for family engagement, guiding principles, brain development, benefits, pyramid framework, strategies for each of the family engagement outcomes, models for continuous improvements, and a state-wide resource list. A training DVD is available to assist programs with the use of the Family Engagement Guide.

Challenges and Lessons Learned: In the first year, the notice of the initial grant award was in the middle of the year when all programs were up and operational creating a push to get staff in place, conducting subgrantees selection and clear implementation plans in place. There were unexpected challenges of rolling out the funding to subgrantees via contracts. At the same time new procurement requirements and practices were being refined for implementation with ongoing adjustments to the procedures. At the beginning of the second year, the procurement challenges have been much less and the subgrantees are embracing the PDG funds to assist in improving their state funded preschool program and expanding school readiness services to more children in the community. The new procurement requirements are in place and while the process of submitting invoices for services rendered is new to the local educational agencies, this seems to be working out favorably.

When the PDG grant was drafted, Arkansas made a conscious decision to require higher educational levels or a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education for the paraprofessional to assist the teacher and to enhance greater opportunities for programs to impact the developmental readiness level for children. While this sounds like a good concept to improve the teacher pipeline, fourteen of the seventeen PDG subgrantees have struggled to locate and employ these individuals with an associate degree in early childhood education within their communities across the state and this included the areas where institutions of higher education had a degreed program to offer. All state funded preschool programs were already required to have a minimum of a child development associate (CDA) credential for paraprofessionals and when the state accepted the PDG funds, there was no way to anticipate a limited number of individuals with an associate degree to fulfill this grant requirement. Also, some paraprofessionals with a CDA credential working in the state funded preschool program and in many cases, had been employed with the program for many years, did not want to seek a higher credential resulting in programs having to decide to seek a waiver from the state or risk losing a valuable and well trained preschool paraprofessional. Although this has been a struggle for the subgrantees, the state encourages subgrantees to take advantage of supporting their paraprofessional employee with training opportunities including tuition assistance from PDG. All lead teachers meet the PDG program staff qualification requirement of a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a bachelor's degree in any field with a State - approved alternative pathway, which may include coursework, clinical practice, and evidence of knowledge of content and pedagogy relating to early childhood.

Other challenges include developing the job description or how to utilize the family services personnel. Job descriptions were gathered from multiple sources and provided to subgrantees to assist in establishing the position and how to assist those individuals selected on the expectations to implement services for the families and their children. Technical assistance was also provided at a state PDG meeting and those subgrantees that have a clear grasp on the job description and expectation provided mentor-ship to those who were struggling. Because this was a new type of position for the local education agencies, which is the majority of the PDG subgrantees, the administration had to create the availability of this position. The second year has proven to have less issues with how to fully utilize the family services personnel and some subgrantees have work within their internal administration to have this service available more broadly to the state funded preschool services. Clearly this position has been more invaluable to the program than initially expected.

Conducting dental screenings was a difficult concept for most of the local education agencies to understand how they needed to be involved and then attempting to locate dentists in some of the subgrantees' locations to provide this service was challenging. Comments paraphrased from a subgrantee wrote, that although this has been a timely process, frustrating to obtain parental consent and providers hesitant to commit working with them, this has been a new experience getting to know their community better and allowing them to serve the children and their families. Information is provided to the subgrantees on mobile dental clinics that may be available to visit their geographic location from AR Children's Hospital. This has been helpful to those subgrantees who can

benefit in the mobile dental clinics traveling radius.

Recruitment to enroll children was easier for the second year as compared to the first year. The PDG classrooms have been stable and consistent with the exception of one subgrantee, which is a community Head Start Service. At the request of the Executive Director with the agreement from the Board of Directors and the Policy Council, the program was unable to sustain the services with the amount of funding they received to do PDG and/or ABC. Additionally the Executive Director indicated a need to change and focus of services for particular age children, this program has indicated a plan to relinquish the state funded preschool program as well as the PDG services consisting of 16 improvement and 29 expansion slots. Until written notice is received, technical assistance has been offered to assist with their recruitment process. This change may result in nearby subgrantees picking up the children that may need services in this locale after notifying our Project Officer to confirm the relinquished program and request for approval to offer services through another existing subgrantee.