



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: IL

PR/Award #: s419b150004

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.

Building on the strong foundation of our state-funded Preschool for All program, Illinois successfully launched the first Preschool Development Grant-funded classrooms in the nation in spring 2015. Four classrooms in Aurora West School District 129 (Aurora) and Lighthouse Learning Center (Metro East area) prepared a total of 68 children for kindergarten success through a pilot of our comprehensive, full-day model. Since the launch of those classrooms, Illinois has rapidly established our Preschool Expansion program model in communities across the state, connecting our most at-risk young learners to early education opportunities that meet and exceed the nationally-recognized elements of a High-Quality Preschool Program.

Key Accomplishments

In our second year of implementation, Illinois successfully served 3,934 children across 19 high-need communities. Of these, 5% were children experiencing homelessness, 3.3 % were children involved in the child welfare system, 6% were from families below 50% of the federal poverty limits and 10.2 % were children with IEPs. This data demonstrates that our Sub-grantees have successfully developed systems and strategies to recruit and enroll the most at-risk children in Illinois, placing us on a clear trajectory towards our state goal of preparing 80% of Illinois children for kindergarten success by 2021.

The programs serving the 3,934 children are implementing all twelve elements of a high-quality preschool program and have built new and sustainable capacity to meet the needs of the most at-risk children and families. Each Sub-grantee has hired a staff member as an instructional leader, with specific and dedicated responsibility for planning and implementing embedded professional development and advancing instructional quality. In addition, programs have hired staff dedicated to parent education, family engagement and support, and implementing linkages to comprehensive services.

Illinois has supported the enhancement of this infrastructure in our Sub-grantees by continuing an innovative program support initiative. Inspired by the framework of the State's highly-successful model of teacher coaching, connecting instructional coaches to teachers for a two-year period to develop their instructional capacity and skill-set, this program support initiative engages specialists to work individually with programs in building sustainable systems and administrative capacity. Our team of five specialists has worked closely with programs since the late fall of 2015 and have recorded some notable accomplishments. These have included: strengthening relationships between school districts, early childhood centers and other organizations providing early childhood services in communities; helping grant-funded programs in a community to coordinate recruitment and enrollment; and working with programs to increase enrollment of children in priority populations.

Another notable success is that our Sub-grantees continued to partner with their communities to strengthen existing and develop new and innovative collaborative partnerships that increased access to high-quality programs, supported sustainable delivery of services and empowered families with the tools and resources needed to reach their goals. The Preschool Development Grant has served as a catalyst to bring together stakeholders who share a mission and commitment to serve young children and their families. Several programs

reported exciting examples of these successful partnerships in year two:

- In the South Suburbs, grant funded school districts and child care centers participated in a collaboration meeting hosted by a local early childhood organization. The purpose was to build collaboration with all programs serving children birth to age five, use community based strategies to identify most at risk families to collaborate on community outreach and to coordinate resources for families. Follow up meetings were held with each administrator at their individual site to discuss future collaboration, and specifically addressing additional support for those families experiencing homelessness.
- In the Addison community, the school district underwent a process to review which services families identified as being accessible and what the families identified as unmet needs. The administration and team set out to connect with the existing social services network, developed a relationship with a local organization to support families accessing insurance, and developed relationships with local medical and dental providers to help families create medical homes. There has been a significant growth in delivery of comprehensive services to enrolled families.
- In Rockford, the school district's early childhood screening and placement team has increased collaboration with Catholic Social Services in an effort to increase enrollment of immigrant families. On-site screening and enrollment occurs at the organization's facility when they are meeting with families new to the area. Rockford Head Start collaborated with a local mental health provider to conduct in-take appointments with families and sessions in the early childhood center during program hours.
- In Wheaton, the sub-grantee identified a need for appropriate car seats for their families. The program partnered with the Wheaton Warrenville Early Childhood Collaboration to connect with a car seat program through Northwestern Medicine in DuPage County. The program provided families with training on car seat safety and access to booster and convertible car seats.
- Multiple programs had success building partnerships with organizations which support specific needs of children and families, including domestic violence shelters, alcohol and drug rehab programs, housing programs, and family counseling.

Barriers and Lessons Learned

Illinois' second year of implementation has been a productive opportunity to explore and learn from the challenges and barriers facing programs in implementing a High-Quality Preschool Program serving our State's most at-risk children and families. Through our program support project, described above, and regular webinars and phone calls with programs, the State-level team has received consistent and candid feedback about issues as they have arisen, informing guidance and technical assistance offered to programs and plan for continuous improvement in future years.

In general, barriers experienced by programs have clustered in the following key areas:

- *Workforce* - Illinois proudly exceeds the minimum teacher qualification requirements for a federally-defined High-Quality Preschool Program, requiring a professional educator license with an early childhood endorsement, above and beyond a Bachelor's degree. Many of our Sub-grantees additionally require teachers with bilingual or special education endorsements. Although Illinois has made great strides in improving our early childhood workforce in recent years, particularly through strategic investments made as a part of Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), our expansion has increased the demand for a limited supply of highly-qualified teachers.
- *Social-Emotional Needs* - Illinois' Sub-grantees were successful, as described above, in reaching and enrolling significant numbers of the most at-risk children in the state. This success has brought challenges in preparing staff to meet the increased number and more complex needs of these children and families. We are working to address this by identifying opportunities to support social-emotional learning at the State level through capacity-building and supports using the Pyramid Model. Training is being planned for technical assistance providers to begin offering topic-specific workshops and

individualized support to programs. Role-specific training is also being developed for grant-funded Instructional Leaders and Parent Educators to incorporate pyramid model strategies into their work with teachers and families.

- *Absenteeism* - Chronic absenteeism of enrolled children has been a challenge reported from some of our programs. Programs have increased the involvement of family support staff in working with families where attendance is a challenge. As a State, Illinois has taken on the challenge of addressing chronic absenteeism through the creation of the Illinois Attendance Commission. This entity was legislatively created within the Illinois State Board of Education to study absenteeism, beginning in preschool, and making recommendations for data systems, best practices, and potential new initiatives. This systematic approach will empower the State to create a consistent and cohesive plan to directly address irregular attendance of children, including those in the High-Quality Preschool Program. In addition, programs have increased the involvement of family support staff in working with families that struggle with child attendance issues.

Program Adjustments

In general, Illinois' approach to implementation of our Preschool Development Grant - Expansion Grant reflects the plan outlined in our initial application. Where there have been some minor adjustments to our plan, we have indicated these in our monthly Scope of Work. None of these changes will impact Illinois' attainment of performance targets and program goals for the duration of this project.

The most significant change in our project is reflected in our plan for Community Systems Development, described below as Competitive Preference Priority 2. While we began our approach with a structure based around regional boundaries, it was critical in our implementation process to obtain feedback from key stakeholders in communities across the State. This feedback has informed and refined our plan, leading us to approach this work as a comprehensive system of responsive and flexible State supports to communities, centered around five strategies: aligning community outcomes, the community systems development subcommittee, development of policies and practices, promoting clear communication, and training and technical assistance to local communities.