

B-5 for ME: Quality, Accessibility, and Affordability of Services for Maine's Children & Families

Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 Initial Grant Final Report

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Preschool Development Grant, B-5 (PDG) was awarded to Maine in December of 2018 and concluded December 30, 2020. The grant funding of \$1,011,080.00 allowed the state to fund a variety of projects/programs as well as to study and develop plans for improving the B-5 system. During this time period, all activities were completed, including the needs assessment and strategic plan, which were the major projects of the grant work. The results of both of these activities are informing Maine's ongoing work toward strengthening its B-5 early childhood landscape. Having this roadmap to direct the B-5 work brings awareness of the comprehensive planned strategies and a common vision across the state agencies and departments involved in the early childhood services and programs

Another exciting development has been the reconvening of Maine's Children's Cabinet and the role it is playing in the governance structure of the early care and education system. The Children's Cabinet brings multiple Commissioners and high-level staff together to coordinate programs focused on young children and at-risk youth. The Children's Cabinet Coordinator is involved in multiple projects across the state agencies, including the development of the B-5 strategic plan. Having this strong governance committee will play an important role in the implementation and sustainability of Maine's strategic plan.

As with all large projects, several challenges were met along the way. The initial time period of 1 year to complete the needs assessment and strategic plan was difficult to meet. At the beginning of the grant period, Maine had just elected a new governor and was facing many administrative changes, including a number of new leadership positions. Although these were all positive changes and will highly benefit the B-5 system, time was needed to build relationships and infrastructure within each department and across the agencies before the collaborative work of the PDG could begin.

Time and capacity also affected the progress towards creating an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). Several years ago, Maine made a bit of progress towards developing an ECIDS, and the PDG reinvigorated Maine's efforts. At the start of the grant, there were no qualified staff state available to manage the ECIDS project and hiring for the short period of the grant was challenging. Once the Children's Cabinet Coordinator was hired, she stepped in to lead the ECIDS work. However, the majority of the grant period was dedicated to learning and understanding integrated data systems and Maine requested an extension to the grant based on needed extra time. Fortunately, in the fall of 2020, the state received technical assistance to help develop a plan for leading the work forward.

Delays due to the COVID-19 crisis affected many areas of the PDG work, particularly for the strategic plan. The process for reviewing the strategic plan needed to be adjusted as availability of key individuals varied. There was also a need to revisit the strategic plan as managing COVID-19 challenges would affect funding and capacity to implement the plan.

The PDG aimed to build connections across the B-5 system and to engage stakeholders in the needs assessment and strategic planning process. These tasks did involve many individuals and organizations; however, they did not connect to all sectors of the field. For example, attempts to involve representatives from Maine's Native American tribes were not successful. Additionally, although there was contact with the New Mainer Community (immigrants) and migrant farm workers, more work is needed to understand their experiences with the B-5 systems

Maine appreciates the opportunities the PDG B-5 has provided the state to advance work that would not have been possible without the funding. Being able to complete all the tasks of the grant, including new ones added during the grant period, has given the state momentum to continue improving the B-5 mixed delivery system. The 5 grant activities and 17 projects are described below.

Activity 1: Maine's Statewide Needs Assessment Plan

In the PDG B-5 application, Maine committed to two goals in Activity 1. These include completing a needs assessment of the B-5 mixed delivery system and conducting a data pilot looking at unduplicated counts in early childhood programs.

1. The *State of Maine Needs Assessment: Vulnerable Children Birth to Age 5 and Their Families*, was conducted between 3/2019 and 12/2019. The process for collecting information and data about gaps, assets and solutions for the B-5 system involved:

- Convening B-5 stakeholders for gaining multiple perspectives of the system and exploring underlying issues affecting young children and their families
- Engaging a wide variety of stakeholders through interviews and focus groups to understand gaps in services and effects of policies and programs
- Hearing the perspectives of parents engaged in the B-5 mixed delivery system
- Collecting existing qualitative data, reports, plans and surveys
- Hosting specific topic area work groups to build out details of the identified needs and to move toward generating solutions

Working with RMC Research, the collected information was framed into the following topic areas:

- Connecting Parents to Services
- Child Care Services and Providers: Capacity, Distribution, Challenges
- Improving Program Quality

- Supporting Children with Special Needs
- Workforce Development
- Pre-K and Beyond: The Role of Schools

The Needs Assessment has informed the development of the strategic plan and was available to the newly reconvened Maine Children’s Cabinet as they begun to identify their priorities.

2. Unduplicated Counts

See Activity 2

Activity 2 – Strategic Plan

For Activity 2, three goals were accomplished. These include:

- Developing a strategic plan for the B-5 system
- Building a governance structure
- Progress work in developing an ECIDS

Strategic Plan: *State of Maine Strategic Plan for Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Children Birth to Age 5 and Their Families*

The strategic plan work began in August 2019, during the needs assessment process, and was completed in November of 2020. The areas identified in the needs assessment informed the goals, outcomes and strategies of the plan. Additionally, stakeholders from across the state were involved in creating and prioritizing solutions that became part of the plan. The steps involved in developing the strategic plan were:

- Stakeholder workgroups and convening to determine top priority needs and solutions, late summer and fall, 2019
- PDG oversight committee met in large and small groups to build out the details of the plan, December- March 2020
- Review and feedback from state leaders and the Children’s Cabinet Early Childhood Advisory Council, May-September 2020
- Review and feedback from B-5 community programs/organizations, October 2020

Based on the information from the needs assessment, stakeholder input, and the Children’s Cabinet focus areas, 5 goals and 17 objectives were identified. The goals include:

- **Goal 1: State and Regional Coordination.** Increase and strengthen connections and communication among state agencies and with community partners to expand access to services, create efficiencies, and reduce overlap and redundancies
- **Goal 2: Workforce Development.** Recruit, prepare, and retain a strong and diverse early childhood workforce
- **Goal 3: Access to Childcare.** Increase availability of affordable childcare and access to family services for vulnerable children
- **Goal 4: Quality Improvements.** Increase the availability of high-quality early care and education
- **Goal 5: Integrated Data Systems.** Create an efficient, cross-agency early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS) to inform policy, programming, and evaluation

During the winter of 2020, the cross agency PDG oversight committee worked to build out the details of the goals, objectives and strategies, and identified indicators for success. This group also identified leaders, collaborators, and resources needed as well as assigned timelines. The level of details for the strategies vary depending on availability of funding, capacity and level of planning at the time. Additionally, as the B-5 Strategic Plan and the *Children's Cabinet Plan for Young Children* were being developed simultaneously, special focus to align the two plans was essential. The Children's Cabinet Coordinator joined the PDG team and was heavily involved in the development of this plan.

The first draft of the strategic plan was completed at the beginning of March 2020 with the intention to reach out to key people at the state level for review. The work was disrupted as key people were focused on the COVID-19 crisis for a period of time. The process for reviewing and editing slowly began in June 2020 with some key people not available until much later which decreased the time available to involve a large number of outside stakeholders in the process. The COVID-19 crisis also created the need to update some of the plan, especially timelines.

After the completion of the B-5 Strategic Plan, three information forums were offered virtually to B-5 stakeholders. Originally, the hope was to offer these forums across the state and to gain a greater understanding of local coalitions, partnerships and regional concerns. As travel was not feasible, the forums were held virtually and aimed to present the strategic plan and current early childhood work at the state level, discuss what families and organizations are currently struggling with and what state supports have been available and helpful to organizations.

Moving forward, the Children's Cabinet and the PDG committee will play critical roles in the oversight of the implementation of the strategic plan

Early Childhood Governance

Maine's Children's Cabinet was established in 1996 and placed into Maine Statute in 2001. After an eight-year hiatus, the Cabinet was reconvened in 2019 and has a vital role in convening and facilitating state agencies in coordinating initiatives and policies focused on young children and at-risk youth. Maine Children's Cabinet members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections. The Cabinet also has staff members, assigned from each department to meet regularly to work on their strategic plans. In the fall of 2019, after hiring a coordinator, the Children's Cabinet established priority focus areas using the PDG Needs Assessment. Throughout 2020, the Children's Cabinet also identified strategies and benchmarks to measure progress for [The Children's Cabinet Plan for Young Children](#), and was actively involved in several activities overlapping with the B-5 Strategic Plan.

Additionally, The Children's Cabinet Early Childhood Advisory Council (CCECAC) was established in the spring of 2019 to advise the Children's Cabinet and serve as the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care. The council is responsible for ensuring statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs and services in the State. Members on the CCECAC represent parents, family child care providers, community organizations that advance the well-being of children and their families, child health, legislators, philanthropy and early childhood investment groups, child abuse and neglect prevention, and postsecondary education.

In April 2020, the Early Intervention Work Group, a subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet, was established. This cross-agency group was formed to focus on coordinating early intervention and prevention efforts to assure easy access and availability for families. They are also focused on assuring all children have developmental and health screenings and on creating a central management system.

Maine will benefit from the Children's Cabinet leadership as they are a strong model for the collaborative work that will be needed for the successful implementation and sustainability of the B-5 Strategic Plan.

Early Childhood Data Integrated System

In 2016, Maine took the first steps toward developing an ECIDS by completing a Data Linkage Map and working toward developing data sharing agreements with an independent data broker. Both projects were informative and useful for future work. Unfortunately, this work was discontinued until the PDG funds were available.

In 2019, the PDG B-5 aimed to build ECIDS understanding and interest across the agencies, to update the data mapping information and create plan for developing the ECIDS. As explained previously, work around an ECIDS was the biggest challenge of the grant work due to lack of expertise, capacity and resources across state agencies. Most of the grant period was focused on learning about integrated data systems and understanding how to develop such a system. In 2019, a consultant was hired to collect updated information about the state's multiple data systems and to connect with other states to learn about their established ECIDS. Additional ECIDS knowledge came from Maine's DOE and DHHS data staff and DOE staff facilitating updating the 2016 data linkage map. Maine participated in the "ECIDS

Leadership Workgroup on Stakeholder Engagement” through the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program and is currently working with the PDG B-5 TA center.

Working with the PDG B-5 TA Center to create a road map for building an ECIDS has been key to moving this work forward. Using information from the updated data linkage map, the TA Center has created the following visual (figure 1) representing Maine’s B-5 existing data systems which will be used for education and interest building across the state agencies. Additionally, the TA center is helping to build a road map to guide Maine’s ECIDS work forward. Maine has been most appreciative of the availability of this great resource and looks forward to continuing the work together.

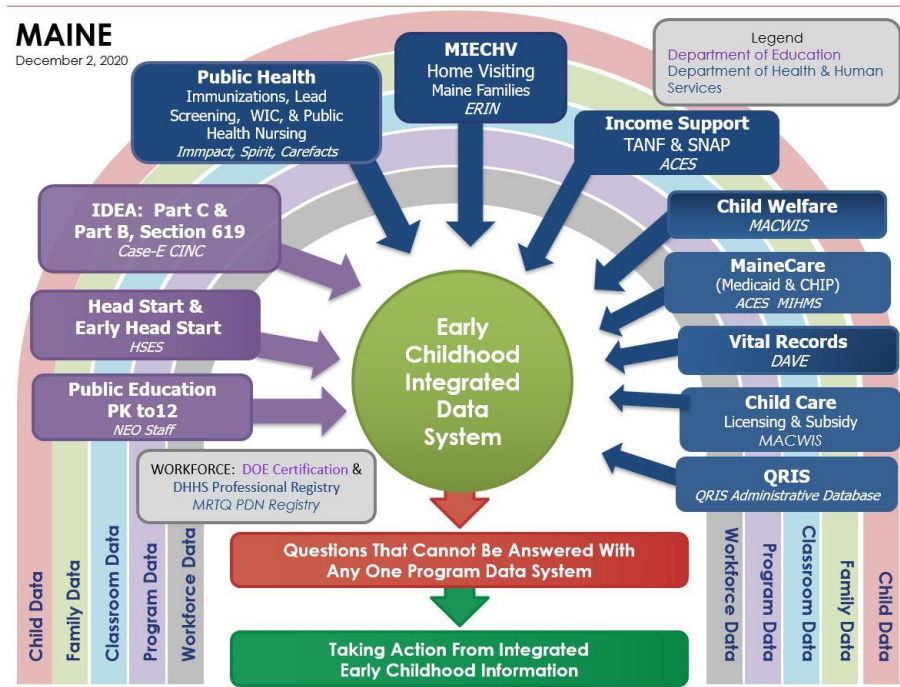


Figure 1. Rainbow graphic of Maine’s B-5 data systems

Although technically part of Activity 1, exploring unduplicated counts provided another opportunity to increase knowledge for the ECIDS project. A data pilot project was developed to examine “overlapping” program enrollment and wait lists for early education and care services for 4-year olds. The purpose of this pilot was to learn about the data sharing agreement process, create a system for matching data across systems and have recommendations for moving the ECIDS work forward. The pilot was limited to a small region of the state and used data from a regional Head Start agency, Maine’s Child Care Subsidy Program, Child Development Services/Section 619 of the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Department of Education’s Pre-K programs. Maine DOE contracted with Maine Education Research Policy Institute (MEPRI) out of the University of Southern Maine to act as a data broker and analyze the data. Section XIII of this report will discuss the recommendations for future ECIDS work.

Activity 3 – Parent Knowledge and Choice

Maine's PDG B-5 originally planned for three projects under Activity 3 and later added a fourth to address parent knowledge and choice.

Expand the Parent Ambassador Program (PAP)

In 2019-2020, Educare Central Maine, part of the Educare Learning Network, expanded its Parent Ambassador Program (PAP) to include additional Head Start programs throughout the State. PAP is a year-long leadership and advocacy program, designed to empower parents to advocate for their children and themselves. The program aims to build parents' confidence and skills to advocate in education and community settings.

The new Maine State Parent Ambassador Program officially began in the fall of 2019 and had 44 in-person and virtual gatherings. The funding from the PDG allowed Educare to plan additional gatherings and purchase supplies for marketing and promotion purposes. Topic areas such as Leadership Skills, Local Government, Voter Rights and Responsibilities, Policy, Public Speaking, and Advocacy for your Child and Family were discussed during the gatherings, which moved to all virtual format in March of 2020. Using data from a pre and post training evaluation format, participants' confidence in all areas significantly rose between October 2019 to May of 2020 indicating the success of this program. The Maine PAP program has been offered again in the fall of 2020 without the PDG or other state funding.

Enhance Child Care Choices Website

The Child Care Choices (CCC) website is the state's Child Care Resource and Referral Network funded through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDGB). This child care search resource is managed by Maine Department of Health and Human Services (HDDS), Office for Children and Families (OCFS) along with Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN). Wanting to increase the usage of the page, OCFS and MERT PDN planned to increase the promotion of the website. The PDG, B-5 funding contributed to this goal with the following:

- Printed 50,000 CCC brochures for MRTQ PDN to distribute around the state, fall 2019
- Translated the brochures from English into the ten most spoken foreign languages in Maine's PK-12 system, fall 2020
- Printed 1,350 translated brochures for distribution, Fall 2020.

Additionally, PDG funds paid for an independent evaluator, Early Childhood Associates (ECA) to analyze the web site. Of particular interest to OCFS/MRTQ PDN was the readability of the website and how families searched for child care using the search tool. ECA was able to provide this information that can be used to make improvements to the website.

Transitioning into Kindergarten, Information for Families

The Maine DOE website now includes a page focused on children transitioning into public school, particularly into Pre-K and/or kindergarten. Information is posted for families to support their children during this time. This included what families may expect from their local public schools around transitioning into their program, what information families can provide the school, and questions families may want to ask about the school/program that will support smooth transitions. The web page also provides information for families who have children with special needs and students who are English learners. DOE intends to seek feedback from families about this page and to make changes that will better support families.

Translation for Pre-K for ME Curriculum

Maine offers an open source curriculum, PreK for ME, to public and private preschool programs which is available on the MDOE website. Pre-K for ME, a research-based, whole child curriculum was adapted from the Boston Public School's Focus on K1 curriculum. Included with this curriculum are Home Links, documents that enhance learning and interactions at home that are aligned with the classroom unit of study. The PDG B-5 funding paid for the translation of the 6 curriculum units into 10 different languages. These Home Links have been posted on Maine DOE Website and is available for educators to print and send home to families.

Activity 4 – Sharing Best Practice

Sharing best practices included nine projects, three planned in the original PDG application and 6 added during the grant period.

Increase Access to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma Informed Training

The State contracted with Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN) to provide training around ACEs and trauma informed practices. MRBN developed and offered “Strong Kids, Strong Families, Strong Communities: The Impact of ACEs and Resilience Building” to Pre-K and child care educators together. This professional development opportunity aimed to build a common understanding about child and family challenges and their developmental impact, as well as to build knowledge of strategies around trauma-informed practices which are critical to working with children. The Fall 2019 offerings peaked interest from other entities and, additional trainings were offered to multiple audiences, funded through the PDG. In total, MRBN completed:

- Twelve sessions with 271 child care and Pre-K educators in different locations across the state, fall of 2019.
- Trainings with both the Child Care Licensing staff and the Maine Afterschool Network, for a total of 82 individuals, early 2020.
- Six virtual trainings for 355 child care and Pre-K educators, spring 2020.
- Four virtual trainings to 174 Home Visiting, Public Health Nursing and Child Welfare Staff, spring 2020.

Transitioning into Kindergarten, Information for Educators

In addition to the previously mentioned web page for families that focused on young children's transitions into public schools, DOE also created web pages for educators. The pages provide educators suggestions for planning the transition of children into and out of their programs. The *Transitioning into Public School* web pages, found at this [link](#), provides information for creating a program/school transition plan, collaborating with the programs children are entering from and leaving to, and connecting with children and their families early. Information is provided for community programs to understand the role they can play in aligning the transition of children out of their program. Moving forward, Maine DOE was recently awarded a grant from The Education Commission of the States to receive technical assistance focused on transitioning into school that will focus on improving the webpage and offering professional development to educators.

Additionally, Maine is currently piloting the K for ME open source curriculum adapted from the Boston Public School's Focus on K2 Curriculum. There are 28 kindergarten classrooms participating in the pilot, each offering Pre-K programming. PDG funds paid for part of this project that is focused on curriculum alignment between Pre-K and kindergarten, another important component of creating smooth transitions for young children.

Provide Mini Grants for National Accreditation

The goal of this project was to support childcare programs as they move toward national accreditation or re-accreditation. This work was contracted through Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) and provided mini grants to center-based and family child care programs to help meet accreditation standards based on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). Eleven center based and seven family based child care programs were awarded mini grants of \$1200 each, benefitting 696 children and 203 staff.

Provided Scholarships for Annual Early Childhood Conference

PDG funds were used to award scholarships to early childhood educators and students in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs to attend the Early Childhood Education annual conference in the fall of 2019. This conference is sponsored by key early childhood organizations and state agencies and is a highlight for ECE professional learning in the state. Participants represented center and family child care, Head Start Programs, and public Pre-K through third grade schools. The PDG funds supported 40 educators and students to attend, including those from the Passamaquoddy tribe Head Start, Mano e Mano (migrant education) in Washington County, several students from different Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and early educators from small programs in rural counties. The PDG funds would have supported additional scholarships for the 2020 conference, however, it was canceled due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training

Maine DOE, Maine DHHS and MRTQ PDN partnered to provide a training focused on supporting diversity in the classroom and creating equitable learning communities for all children. MRTQ PDN was contracted to revise an older version of a diversity training to:

- Increase participants' fuller understanding of historic and system issues that have created inequities and discrimination in society and early care and education,
- Provide participants opportunities for self-reflection on their own cultural attitudes, personal beliefs, values and biases, and
- Increase participants' knowledge of the design and implementation of authentic culturally responsive pedagogy, learning environments, assessments, curriculum, interaction and material.

The PDG B-5 funded the revision of the older training into "Creating Equitable Early Learning Communities," an 18-hour facilitated module training. Additional funds will pay for the process of uploading content to the training platform and the implementation of the training. MRTQ will also look to incorporate content from this training into other trainings they offer.

Early Childhood Administrator Training

An Early Childhood Administrator training series is being planned for the school year 2021-2022 by a collaboration of Maine DOE, MRTQ-PDN, Maine Principal's Association (MPA), Center for Community Inclusion and Disabilities Studies (CCIDS), and Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC). This training will provide elementary school administrators the opportunity to build their PK-3rd

grade knowledge and competencies. This will be a 6-month cohort experience including in-person and online components, consultation and an application project. PDG funds were used to hire curriculum developers who then completed 3 out of 5 modules. Funding for the development of two additional modules, uploading to a training platform and implementation will come from non-PDG sources.

Professional Development Books

Use of professional books is a common practice in professional learning opportunities. However, supplying books requires funding which is often limited. At the end of 2020, the PDG funds were used to purchase professional learning books for programs supporting the early care and education system across the state. Books were purchased for:

- Maine AEYC, who will use some of the books to build bridges between community child care programs and public schools. They will pilot a book group in one community with the intention of building common understanding across the different sectors. Additionally, Maine AEYC will use other books for three professional learning events planned for 2021, two focused on Equity and Diversity while the other is focused on understanding trauma and effects on families and children.
- Family Child Care Association of Maine will host book groups with their members focused on the Pre-K for ME open sourced curriculum. They use children's books associated with the curriculum to build understanding and familiarity of each unit.
- MRTQ PDN will use the books in their Community of Practice groups. There are multiple COPs focused on different topics, including; Equity and Diversity, topic specific curriculum, Trauma Informed Practices, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, and children's social emotional wellbeing, just to name a few.
- Maine DOE Early Learning team will use books for text studies focused on Equity and Diversity, Family Engagement and Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). These internal book studies allow staff to build knowledge and then be able to support schools and educators through professional development.

Other books were purchased to prepare for the upcoming Inclusion Initiative and the Early Childhood Administrative trainings. Having these book purchased in advance will reduce the funding need to implement the trainings or will reduce the cost for the participants.

Activity 5 – Improving the Overall Quality

Inclusion Initiative

Building on the success of a 2018 pilot program, *Creating Inclusive Preschool Settings*, PDG B-5 funds were used to offer a second cohort of educators. This training aims to increase the competency of Maine's early care and education settings to serve children with disabilities or suspected delays. This inclusion training was provided by a partnership between Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN), the Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (CCIDS) and Maine Department of Education. Pre-K staff and administrators as well as Child Development Services/619 (CDS) partners were invited to participate together in this professional development opportunity which offers:

- On-demand training, *Inclusive Environments in Public Pre-K*
- On-line facilitated module training, *Creating Inclusive Preschool Settings*
- Professional learning community meetings
- Classroom based onsite consultations and/ or observations
- Administrative onsite consultations

The 2nd cohort was offered during the fall of 2019 and was funded partly by the PDG funds. During the fall of 2020, a 3rd cohort of the training was planned. PDG funds were used to revise the existing training based on feedback from participants and the independent evaluation of the 2nd cohort. The implementation of the training will be funded through other sources.

Recruitment of the Pre-K teams for the 3rd cohort has been a challenge. Although there was interest in the training, most educators were not able to commit to the training due to other demands resulting from the COVID pandemic. Discussions are underway about delaying the training start date to Spring and working with teams over the summer to be prepared for the 2021 year.