

First 10

First 10 Community School Pilot

Performance Period 4/2024 – 3/2026

Community schools focus on developing partnerships between schools and community partners to provide access to programs and services for children and families. In the years prior to school entry, this work includes engaging children in both formal and informal care arrangements, as well as those not in out-of-home care. The First 10 Community Schools model emphasizes family and community engagement and supports children's transitions into school. These partnerships are critical for connecting children and families from across a mixed-delivery early childhood system to schools and for supporting successful entry into the early grades.

First 10 launched in 2023 to test the feasibility of a community school model designed to strengthen school–family–community connections during children's first ten years of life. Seven sites from diverse Maine communities participated (three launched in 2023; four in 2024, with one exiting early). Sites implemented the First 10 model developed by the Education Development Center (EDC), which is designed to foster school–community–family relationships and align services and resources for families and their young children prior to and during the early years of school.

This report presents **findings from outcome-focused assessment activities** conducted in fall 2025 as part of Maine's Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R) program. Drawing on diverse data,¹ the report examines the First 10 Community School Pilot initiative with respect to the following PDG-R outcome areas:

- **Impact** including intended outcomes related to school–family relationships, school–community partnerships, transition-to-kindergarten practices, and family awareness of local supports and services.
- **Communication and cross-sector coordination**, including relationship-building and coordination among schools, community partners, and early childhood providers at the local level.
- **System building**, including early contributions related to partnership-based approaches, coordination across a mixed-delivery early childhood system, and insights relevant to strengthening transition practices statewide.

¹Data sources for this report include interviews with site coordinators, team members, EDC coaches, and state staff; surveys of First 10 team members; site visit observations; and review of site documentation, including meeting records and activity materials.

The **First 10** initiative supported seven sites in implementing a school-based, cross-sector approach to strengthening early school transitions, family engagement, and community–school collaboration. Each site formed a local team anchored in a hub school and hired a dedicated coordinator responsible for organizing activities, facilitating communication across partners, and adapting the First 10 framework

to the local context. Sites implemented the First 10 model developed by the Education Development Center (EDC), with ongoing technical assistance from EDC coaches, and a state First 10 Community School Specialist at the Maine Department of Education.

While all sites implemented the same overarching model, the ways in which activities were planned, sequenced, and emphasized varied across communities. Sites entered the pilot with differing levels of readiness, staffing stability, and prior experience collaborating with community partners, which influenced the pace and focus of implementation. These differences shaped how quickly sites moved into coordinated transition activities and how much time was devoted to early team development. This flexibility allowed sites to align implementation with local needs and capacity, though it also contributed to variation in the scope and intensity of activities.

Across sites, implementation drew from a common set of recommended First 10 activities focused on transitions to kindergarten, family engagement, and community connection. While all sites implemented core transition activities—such as school-connected Play & Learn opportunities, a parenting campaign, and welcome-to-kindergarten events—implementation emphasized sequencing and integration rather than one-off activities. Several sites described developing visual transition maps to align key dates and events leading up to kindergarten entry, and some combined activities—such as pairing kindergarten registration with a Play & Learn event—to increase coherence and family engagement. These examples illustrate how sites adapted the First 10 framework to make transition supports more intentional and connected.

What was the impact of the First 10?

Understanding the impact of PDG-R-supported initiatives is essential to assessing whether investments are contributing to intended changes for children, families, and communities. The evaluation emphasized implementation and early outcomes rather than long-term impacts on children, reflecting the pilot's purpose as a feasibility test of the First 10 community school model.

The **intended outcomes** of the First 10 were:

- **Strengthened communication and trust** between schools and families of young children.

FIRST 10 FEATURES

7 pilot sites across two cohorts (3 launched in summer 2023; 4 launched in summer 2024) representing diverse communities statewide

Implementation of the **First 10 Community School model**, developed by the Education Development Center (EDC)

Dedicated local coordinator at each site to lead cross-sector planning, communication, and activity coordination

Ongoing technical assistance provided by EDC coaches and a **state First 10 Community School Specialist** at the Maine Department of Education

Primary focus areas: supporting transitions to kindergarten, strengthening family engagement, and advancing school–community collaboration

- **Strengthened relationships** between schools and community-based partners serving children prior to school entry.
- **Clear, coordinated, and intentional** approaches to supporting transitions to kindergarten.
- **Increased awareness** of local supports and services among families with young children.

Evidence related to impact was examined across multiple sources, including surveys of First 10 team members, interviews with site coordinators, team members, EDC coaches, and state staff, site visit observations, and review of site-developed documentation. Together, these sources provide insight into how the pilots functioned in practice and how sites experienced change over the course of implementation.

Table 1 summarizes how the intended outcomes appeared during early implementation across pilot sites.

Table 1. Early Progress Toward Intended Outcomes

Intended Outcome	Evidence of Early Progress	Boundary / Notes
Strengthened school–family communication and trust	Sites described earlier engagement with families prior to kindergarten entry through transition events, Play & Learn activities, and outreach efforts. Families who participated were reported to have greater familiarity and comfort with school settings.	Participation varied across sites; evidence reflects experiences of families who engaged rather than universal reach.
Strengthened school–community partnerships	Sites reported new or strengthened relationships with community partners, particularly libraries, family-serving agencies, and municipal organizations, often supported by shared planning and outreach activities.	Collaboration varied, especially with community-based child care providers. More details in the Communication and Coordination section.
Clear, coordinated, and intentional approaches to transitions to kindergarten	Documentation and interviews indicate that sites increasingly treat transition activities as a connected sequence rather than as isolated events, including aligned timelines, shared messaging, and combined registration and family-engagement activities. In a small number of sites, improved on-time registration rates provided additional support.	Evidence is primarily descriptive and site-reported; administrative data were limited to a subset of sites.
Increased family awareness of local supports and services	Sites described sharing information about community resources through events, newsletters, social media, and take-and-make materials. Families who engaged were reported to have greater awareness of available supports.	Changes in access or service uptake cannot be quantified across sites.

Together, these patterns reflect how First 10 functioned on the ground, particularly in shaping early relationships and transition practices.

Teachers described the value of familiarity with incoming students and families, noting that knowing children’s names, family contexts, and needs before the first day of school helped ensure smoother starts and stronger early relationships.

How did First 10 build collaborations?

Building school–community collaboration was a central goal of the First 10 Community School Pilot. Across sites, collaboration developed primarily through intentional relationship-building and ongoing coordination, rather than through formal agreements or new structures.

Sites **reported new or strengthened relationships with community partners** by the end of the pilot period. Libraries, family-serving agencies, municipal partners, and community organizations most frequently emerged as engaged partners, reflecting both shared interest in supporting families with young children and the accessibility of these partners for outreach and joint activities. In many communities, collaboration took the form of shared events, coordinated outreach, or resource distribution.

Connections with community-based child care providers were more challenging to establish and sustain. Barriers included scheduling constraints, limited awareness among providers, particularly of home-based programs, and concerns about the expansion of public pre-K. While some sites took steps to address these challenges through targeted outreach, communication with providers remained uneven across the pilot.

Across all sites, **local coordinators played a central role** in facilitating communication and coordination.

Coordinators served as consistent points of contact, organized meetings, and supported follow-through across multiple activities. At the same time, variation in coordinator time, tenure, and turnover affected sites’ ability to sustain collaboration, underscoring the importance of role stability for cross-sector coordination.

Overall, First 10 supported early progress in local collaboration through relationship-based approaches and the coordinator role, with variation shaped by local context, staffing stability, and pre-existing partnerships.

How has First 10 contributed to building a strong statewide early learning system?

The First 10 Community School Pilot functioned as a **system-learning effort**, generating insight into how schools can engage families and community partners around early transitions and related points of coordination within Maine’s mixed-delivery early childhood system. Although implemented locally, the pilot addressed **a statewide challenge**: children enter school from a wide range of early learning settings, while transition supports and partnerships are often fragmented.

At the state level, the First 10 experience contributes practical understanding of how partnership-based approaches operate across varied contexts. Rather than producing uniform outcomes, the pilot provides **insight into the conditions needed to support consistent coordination**, informing how community school strategies can be integrated into broader statewide efforts focused on transitions, family engagement, and system coherence.

Sustainability and Continuation

Sites expressed commitment to continuing school–community collaboration beyond the pilot period, though approaches to sustainability varied. Rather than maintaining the full pilot team structure, many sites viewed smaller, issue-focused groups—such as transition-to-kindergarten teams—as more feasible for ongoing coordination and planning.

Lessons Learned

First 10 generated several cross-cutting lessons relevant for future scale-up:

- **Readiness matters:** Sites varied in their preparedness to implement a comprehensive model, influenced by staffing stability, prior partnerships, and leadership continuity.
- **Time is essential:** The 2–3-year pilot window limited the depth of implementation and team development.
- **Leadership matters:** District leadership can encourage collaboration among schools and with community partners, can provide resources, and may be able to adjust district-wide policies, procedures, and schedules. Local leadership support is essential to set the tone and expectations for school staff participation, leverage school resources, and engage families.
- **Family engagement requires flexibility:** Sites that adapted formats, locations, and timing in response to parent feedback and attendance patterns were more successful in reaching families.
- **Data-informed adaptation strengthens implementation:** Sites that tracked attendance, gathered parent feedback, and adjusted activities accordingly demonstrated stronger family engagement over time.
- **Sustaining collaboration is fragile:** Partnerships often relied on personal relationships and the coordinator role, raising concerns about continuity after pilot funding.

In addition to previously noted lessons, the pilot highlighted:

- The importance of **stable leadership** for maintaining momentum
- The need for **explicit team development** early in implementation
- The significance of **the coordinator role as the nexus** of project activities and effort to build and maintain collaboration and partnerships
- The value of allowing sites **flexibility while maintaining clarity** of core expectations

These lessons suggest that future pilots or scale-up efforts would benefit from longer planning phases, clearer role definitions, and explicit support for partnership development.

Summary

The First 10 Community School Pilot was implemented across multiple Maine communities to support family engagement, school–community partnerships, and children’s transitions into kindergarten. Sites formed cross-sector teams anchored in schools, hired local coordinators, and implemented a range of First 10 activities focused on outreach, coordination, and transition-related practices with ongoing technical assistance.

Across the pilot period, sites implemented most recommended activities and adapted approaches to fit local context, resulting in variation in emphasis and sequencing across communities. Evidence of early progress was most apparent in school–family relationships, local collaboration, and more intentional transition practices. The pilot underscored the importance of local coordination, flexibility in implementation, and sufficient time to build and sustain partnerships—considerations that are central to future community school and system-building efforts. A more comprehensive evaluation of the First 10 Community School Pilot, including site-level implementation profiles, is documented in a companion report.