

For ME (Vertical Curriculum Alignment)

Vertically Aligned Curriculum PreK-2

Performance period Summer April 2023–December 2025

Across early childhood and elementary education, coherence in curriculum and instructional approaches across the early grades is widely understood as an important condition for supporting effective teaching and learning. When expectations, materials, and instructional practices vary substantially across Pre-K, kindergarten, and the primary grades, educators may face challenges in building on prior learning, and children may experience fragmented instruction during a critical period of development. Efforts to improve alignment across the Pre-K–2 continuum are often intended to promote continuity in instructional practice, support shared understanding among educators, and strengthen early literacy and language development within developmentally appropriate learning environments.

For ME builds on prior curriculum work led by the Maine Department of Education by enhancing the Boston Public Schools' Focus Curriculum, a developmentally appropriate, hands-on, inquiry-based, and playful instructional approach for classrooms serving children from pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) through Grade 2. The For ME program is intended to support alignment of curriculum and instructional approaches across grades within the Pre-K–2 continuum and to provide a coherent progression of learning experiences for students in schools that adopt the full program sequence. As a PDG-supported initiative, the program also emphasizes whole-child instruction, playful learning, and language-rich classroom environments, with a particular focus on strengthening early literacy foundations in the early grades.

This report presents key findings from the For ME Instructional Program, offering insights to guide future system building and policy decisions:

- **Impact**, including teacher-reported confidence in using their grade-relevant For ME program and instructional practices, as well as perceived impact on student learning.
- **Communication and cross-sector coordination** as teachers within schools adopt the instructional program and plan integration
- **System building**, including a more aligned curriculum from Pre-K through 2nd grade and potential adoption of Pre-K for ME across the mixed delivery system.
- **Supports and access**, including participation, training, and implementation considerations identified during the pilot.

Data sources for this report include teacher feedback surveys following each summer training session; focus groups, one with school principals and another with Pre-K and K teachers; and feedback from the state initiative lead and project manager.

Implementation of the **For ME** program focused on introducing the adapted curriculum and providing structured professional learning and support for educators across Pre-K through Grade 2. The For ME Instructional Program continues the work begun by the Maine Department of Education by enhancing the Boston Public Schools' Focus Curriculum, which features developmentally appropriate, hands-on, inquiry-based, and playful instruction for classrooms serving children from pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) through Grade 2.

With guidance from curriculum consultant, Melissa Luc, the Department is building from the Focus Curriculum and providing teachers in pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) through 2nd grade with initial training on the For ME program, as well as ongoing access to resources and consultation and support from mentor teachers. The initial training was provided during a free, multi-day summer training session and focuses on the program design, its tools, and instructional practices. Following each training, teacher feedback on content and format is collected. The Department has modified training since the launch, most recently adding a day of training specifically for kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd-grade teachers to focus on several literacy components of the programs and ease their feelings of being overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive in this area.

FOR ME (VERTICAL ALIGNMENT) FEATURES

Completed development of aligned curriculum for Pre-K through 2nd grade.

Piloting of the 2nd grade for ME curriculum and training for 2nd grade teachers.

Added enhancements, including developing centers/studios for math, an outdoor nature-based learning component, and a look-for tool.

Provided professional development for 680 Pre-K through 2nd grade teachers.

What was the impact of For ME?

Understanding the impact of PDG-R-supported initiatives requires assessing whether investments advanced their intended purposes. The state leads articulated **three general goals** for the **For ME Instructional program** that provide context for interpreting evidence of implementation progress and observed impacts:

- **Complete “enhancement work” on the program**, mostly in kindergarten through Grade 2, because they were largely in place for pre-K. For example: add content for mathematics; introduce supplemental text lists; add outdoor learning and nature-based lessons; design a “look-for” tool for school leaders and teachers.
- **Continue to increase the number of educators and schools utilizing the programs.**
- **Provide initial training at each grade and then offer ongoing implementation support.**

Progress toward these goals is summarized below, followed by evidence of observed impacts associated with participation in the For ME Instructional Program.

By the end of the PDG grant, the For ME program had completed most of the planned enhancements. Work on outdoor learning and nature-based lessons was in progress, as was the design and launch of “look fors,” but other features, notably work on math centers and studios, were in place.

Across the grant period, 680 teachers had participated in professional development through the For ME Instructional program, demonstrating broad engagement and program success. Teachers from all grades participated in training, with increasing participation in grades 1 and 2 over time, though participation remains lower among 2nd-grade teachers than in other grades. Increasing uptake in 2nd grade, especially, reflects the substantial commitment made through the PDG to pilot 2nd Grade for ME and to provide training to 2nd-grade teachers as part of the For ME program. Table 1 summarizes participation by grade level across the three-year grant period.

Table 1. For ME Professional Development Participation by Grade and Year

Grade	2023	2024	2025	Total by grade
Pre-K	150	97	85	332
Kindergarten	50	87	50	187
Grade 1	23	36	49	108
Grade 2	—	20	33	53
Totals by year	223	240	217	680

Teacher- and Leader-Reported Changes in Instructional Practice and Classroom Experience

Teachers and leaders provided several examples of the impact on teachers’ participation in For ME training and using the For ME instructional program through surveys and focus groups:

Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers reported that their teaching felt more developmentally appropriate for children’s learning and enabled them to use more play-based instruction and integrate learning across content areas. Most highlighted the increased language in the program. Survey responses from 2nd-grade teachers show changes over time in their reported competence with several instructional approaches (use of studios, literacy stations) from before training through the school year.

Teachers observed students’ increased engagement, perseverance, and language abilities over the year and reported that teachers in subsequent grades could distinguish students coming out of For ME classrooms because of differences in how they approached learning and in their language skills. Several teachers noted that when using For ME, *all students* were engaged in learning, including students for whom English is not their first language and children from diverse backgrounds.

School leaders noted that their teachers seemed to enjoy teaching more when using the For ME instructional program. Especially in schools where teachers across the early grades had adopted the program, there was greater interaction among teachers, and instruction was more coherent for students year after year. One leader noted that her school had become defined by For ME, and that

teachers had largely adopted the model across their classrooms. This gave her a way to talk to families and community partners about the school, and it also informed her recruitment of new teachers.

How did For Me build collaborations?

State lead Larsen noted that while some schools send teams to the training, schools have not been required to send teams for teachers to participate, nor have school leaders been required to attend training. However, teachers and school leaders noted in focus groups that as more teachers collaborate, especially across grades, instruction is more coherent from year to year.

State Lead Larsen noted that others have become interested in learning from Maine's experience, including the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) collaborative focus on high-quality instructional materials, as well as the Gates Foundation, which is funding the University of Michigan to do an implementation study of high-quality instructional materials in a couple of states. Maine and the For ME program is one of them. Both opportunities are bringing Maine's efforts to improve the Pre-K to 3rd grade systems into spaces for potential collaboration across states.

How has For ME contributed to building a strong statewide early learning system?

Because the program and training have now been launched for Pre-K through 2nd grade, they potentially provide coherence to a Pre-K to 2nd-grade system. There are a striking number of schools in Maine that are configured for Pre-K to 2nd-grade (approximately 170 Pre-K/K to 2nd-grade in 2025-26), suggesting that as whole schools adopt the instructional program, a large portion of the system will become aligned, in addition to other elementary schools that include Pre-K to 2nd grade.

One school leader participating in a focus group noted that all the Pre-K teachers in the school were using Pre-K for ME, as were four community partners with 4-year-old classrooms. She noted that this meant the class of kindergarten children largely had similar experiences in the year before school entry, making transitions to school easier for children, families, and teachers.

Several teachers reported that they had sought training for Pre-K for ME when their school began offering pre-kindergarten, in some cases through the Pre-K Expansion grant, and needed to find a curriculum aligned with developmentally appropriate practice. As the system expanded, they sought ways of providing instruction that aligned with their expectations for teaching young children. Others noted that they were drawn to the For ME instructional program because their school did not appear to have a curriculum in place for their grade level(s).

Sustainability and Next Steps

Because the For ME program is **open-source and available for free** to interested schools and teachers, there are no immediate barriers to its continued implementation. The state has secured funding to continue providing no-cost professional development for teachers in summer 2026, with hopes of continuing support beyond. State lead Larsen noted that multiple state agency staff have completed training in the For ME program and approach and can provide training moving forward. In addition,

they continue to seek Melissa Luc's support as a consultant when possible. Finally, among the cadre of previously trained teachers, a group of mentor teachers has emerged to support newer adopters. In addition to continually adding resources to a shared online space, these teachers also support the training sessions, lead PLCs, and as was apparent during focus groups, have formed a small network of expertise to support each other as well as teachers starting to implement For ME.

In what ways did the For ME initiative support access and effective participation for teachers?

The For ME initiative uses curriculum and materials available online through the Maine Department of Education website for any teacher in the state, making them accessible to all teachers with an interest. Some of the training materials are available online as well. In-person training has been provided during the summer at no cost to teachers, though they must cover any travel expenses.

Data from teacher surveys show dozens of SAUs represented across the state, but State lead Larsen noted that the training has tended to attract teachers from the southern and eastern parts of the state. She also noted a planned emphasis on engaging teachers in special education roles and instructional coaches in the future, as they have not been as highly engaged as classroom teachers.

What did we learn?

- **Training may need to be modified.** Based on feedback from the first series of summer training, the schedule was modified to break the training into 2 sessions for kindergarten, 1st-grade, and 2nd-grade teachers (a single-day session and a 2-day session) to allow more focused time on early literacy instruction.
- **Adoption was often organic.** Teachers and leaders reported that once one or two teachers in a school participated in For ME training and adopted the program and instruction in their classrooms, other teachers became interested in what they felt was a preferred or more natural approach to children's learning.
- **Early adopters are those who have bought into the For ME approach.** The state completed program updates sequentially, moving progressively from Pre-K to 2nd grade. This meant that the earliest adopters were from Pre-K, and the last teachers recruited were from 2nd grade. In the focus group, participating teachers all noted that they found the For ME approach more aligned with what they thought instruction should look like and were quick to take the training and put it into practice. They speculated that 1st and 2nd-grade teachers may be less comfortable with an approach more consistent with early education than with elementary education. It will be important to understand how 2nd-grade teachers respond to the training and how it affects their instruction.

Summary

The For ME Instructional Program completed the adaptation and enhancement of Boston Public Schools' Focus Curriculum through grade 2, increased adoption of the For ME instructional programs, and provided teachers in Pre-K to 2nd grade with initial professional development in its use. By the end of the grant period, more than 650 teachers had participated in training and were implementing the program in their classrooms. Teachers who participated in training reported that it supported their developmentally appropriate instruction, in turn supporting their children's engagement in school and language skills. In schools where multiple teachers have completed the training and are using the program, there is increased alignment and coherence across the early curriculum. Because the instructional program is open source, it remains available to interested teachers and leaders, as well as prior years' training sessions (that were recorded).