



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

November 29, 2016

Cynthia Tate Ph.D.
Executive Director
Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development
160 N LaSalle St, Suite N-100
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Ms. Tate,

On September 19-21, 2016, a staff member from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) conducted an onsite monitoring of Illinois's Office of Early Childhood implementation of its approved Preschool Development Grant—Expansion Grant (PDG). This monitoring aims to continue the collaborative relationship that began at the grant award and development of the scope of work. It provides the Department with a deeper understanding of each State's overall performance through the progress; success, challenges and strategies for the implementation of its PDG State Plan; and the fiscal management of the grant funds. It also helps us tailor the technical assistance to each State's specific needs.

The site visit included presentations and discussions related to all projects in the approved scope of work, including Grants Management, Capacity Building and Increasing Slots, Subrecipient Monitoring, Professional Development, Recruitment and Targeted High Need Communities.

Enclosed is a summary report based upon this review. The report included highlights of Illinois's implementation of PDG and a snapshot of Illinois's progress under each PDG program element. This report builds upon the findings of monthly monitoring activities and will be posted on the PDG website.

We want to thank your staff for their cooperation and hospitality during the site visit, and for the State's tremendous efforts in implementing early learning through the Preschool Development Grant—Expansion Grant. It is not necessary to provide a written response to this site visit report. We hope you will continue to communicate any needs or concerns to your ED/HHS project officer.

We look forward to continuing our work with you and supporting Illinois to ensure successful implementation of PDG. Thank you for your commitment to Illinois’s youngest children.

Sincerely,

/s/

Libby Doggett
 Deputy Assistant Secretary
 for Early Learning
 Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
 U.S. Department of Education

Enclosure

PDG Site Visit Report

Monitoring Information	
State Lead Agency	Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development
State Participating Agency(s)	Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services, Department of Child and Family Services
Grant Period	January 1, 2015-December 31, 2019
Current Year of Grant	January 1, 2016-December 31, 2016
PDG Monitoring Period	September 19th-21st, 2016
PDG Monitoring Activity (Desk or Onsite)	Onsite
Monitoring Review Date(s)	September 19th-21st, 2016
State Participants/Project Leads	Kathy Stohr, Deputy Director; Gail Nelson, QRIS Policy Director; Kate Ritter, Licensing and QRIS Integration Director; Donna Nylander, QRIS Implementation Director; Joanna Su, Community Systems Policy Director Penny Segura, University of Chicago Public Interest Program Policy Fellow; David Brown, RTT-ELC Grant Manager;

	Bryan Stokes, Preschool Expansion Policy Director; Beth Purvis, Ed. D., Secretary of Education; Cindy Zumwalt, Division Administrator, Early Childhood; Jenny, Metcalf, Principal Consultant; Reyna Hernandez, Assistant Superintendent; and Appropriate state staff/stakeholders as designed by state leadership
U.S. Department of Education Project Officer	Miriam Lund, Program Officer, U.S. Department of Education

Overview of PDG Monitoring

The Department of Education is committed to supporting States as they implement the expansion of high-quality preschool programs for eligible children through their PDG grant. Consistent with this commitment, the Department has designed a monitoring process to assess a State’s implementation of the program requirements and its approved Scope of Work for PDG and the State-level systems and processes needed to support implementation.

During the recent onsite monitoring, Illinois’ implementation of PDG was reviewed across several key areas which represent the core priorities for implementation as outlined in the PDG Monitoring Tool: Capacity Building and Increasing Slots, Subrecipient Monitoring, Birth to Third Grade Continuum, Budget and Sustainability, and Fiscal Accountability. In each area, the Department identified key elements that are required under PDG and are likely to increase the access to and quality of State Preschool programs and lead to increased high quality opportunities for young children and their families.

Illinois was identified for a site visit based on the following factors:

- Illinois is a PDG Expansion State and had not been visited by ED staff during the grant period;
- Illinois has had multiple changes in leadership across state agencies;
- The State of Illinois has had budget issues that impacted funding levels for early learning; and
- Illinois has dove-tailed their Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant with their PDG grant establishing shared early learning policies and procedures. Federal staff was interested in sharing Illinois’ best practices with the field.

The report contains the following sections:

- ***Summary of Visit.*** This section describes, in brief, the topics covered, the lead agency and subrecipients visited, as well as personnel participation in any meetings or activities.
- ***Highlights of the State’s Implementation.*** This section identifies key accomplishments in the State’s implementation of PDG as identified during the site visit.
- ***Status of Implementation of PDG.*** This section indicates the State’s implementation progress based on the monitoring and information collected.
- ***Elements Requiring Next Steps.*** This section identifies any elements for which the State is not on target for meeting its timelines outlined in the approved scope of work and

includes next steps that the State must take to meet the grant outcomes, as identified during the monitoring.

- ***Recommendations to Strengthen Implementation.*** This section provides recommendations to support the State in continuing to meet the goals and timelines of its PDG grant, as identified during the monitoring.
- ***Additional Comment.*** As appropriate, this section includes any additional information related to the State's implementation of PDG not included elsewhere.

Summary of Visit

The onsite monitoring was a combined Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC) and Preschool Development – Expansion Grant (PDG) visit. The site visit was conducted the week of September 19- 21, 2016. Illinois wrote their PDG grant to dovetail with their RTT-ELC grant.

The first day of the visit, the ED project officer discussed a variety of topics with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) and the Interagency Team (IAT) whose members include the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Department of Child and Family Services. Topics pertaining to PDG implementation were discussed including programs that are part in the State's Quality Rating Improvement System; the birth to third grade continuum; data; outreach activities; teacher recruitment and the Innovation Zones where expanded high-quality preschool programs were targeted to serve 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families.

The second day of the visit, ED and PDG officials traveled to Springfield, Illinois to meet with Illinois State Board of Education staff to discuss fiscal management of the grant. Accountants and State and federal program staff reviewed established internal controls, cash management policies and procedures that the State has in place to safe guard federal funds. The creation of a spending plan was also discussed outlining how the State intends to utilized all grant funds by the end of the grant period.

On the third day, ED and the State PDG team traveled from Springfield, IL to East St. Louis to visit two PDG sites located in an elementary school and a community based center. Vivian Adams Elementary school includes one classroom serving 20 children in an inclusive preschool setting. Cahokia (Lighthouse Learning Center) provides space for a PDG classroom where 20 children are served. ED and Illinois PDG staff met with the local PDG officials to discuss PDG implementation challenges and noteworthy activities. ED officials noted that PDG personnel who opened classrooms in East St. Louis are dedicated to providing high-quality preschool programs for eligible children and the programs meet the criteria of high quality as set forth in the PDG notice inviting applications. One noteworthy item learned through this visit was how the community came together to engage families and recruit children to participate in the program. The various providers set aside their competing interests and put the needs of eligible children first.

Highlights of the State's PDG Implementation

- Illinois was strategic when planning their PDG grant. The grant was developed as a robust and comprehensive preschool Expansion program model built on their existing Preschool for All program and incorporate all twelve elements of a High-Quality Preschool Program. A particular emphasis of this model was targeting grant resources to support the most at-risk children and families. A weighted eligibility form was developed which assigned point values to risk factors as required for PDG-funded slots. Four factors are included—families in deep poverty (less than 50% of FPL); children with IEPs, children experiencing homelessness and children involved in the child welfare system were assigned the highest values and prioritized for immediate enrollment.
- To ensure Illinois’ subgrantees met the definition of High-Quality Preschool Program the State developed an addendum of the Preschool for All compliance monitoring checklist with twenty additional items directly addressing the twelve required elements of a High-Quality Preschool Program and elements from the State’s submitted and approved application. The checklist is used with the ECERS assessment tool by the State’s monitoring contractor to assess program compliance and quality during monitoring visits. The State also contracted with a technical assistance contractor, the Early Childhood Center for Professional Development to implement a support program. Technical assistance and administrative staff training are provided at the program-level and incorporate two primary components: a Program Support Specialist assigned to each program to support administrators in building strong systems to support quality and development of trainings resources to support comprehensive services and instructional leadership.
- For State fiscal year 2016, 740 of Illinois’ 3,200 funded slots were improved and the others were new. Improved programs converted partial-day program slots into full-day slots and included additional PDG required elements to their programs, such as comprehensive services to families, instructional leadership and staff salary parity. Through this process these 740 slots were improved to full compliance. The remaining 2,460 slots were implemented as new slots designed to meet all twelve quality elements.
- Illinois hired parent educators at a ratio of one per 100 children. These parent educators serve as dedicated family support and engagement staff whose roles include supporting the development of community partnerships for the benefit of families and acting as a link between families and schools. Successful implementation of comprehensive services for families in Illinois’ model includes:
 - Ensuring that each family has a medical and dental home. Ensuring that each child has a medical, dental and social-emotional screening.
 - Conducting a comprehensive assessment of the needs of each family and assisting families in setting and achieving ambitious goals.
 - Actively referring families to community resources through established relations and clearly defined referral processes.

Status of Implementation of PDG

In the onsite monitoring the Department used a monitoring and accountability rubric to help determine progress of the State’s implementation. The rubric includes three implementation status levels:

- **Level 1 – *Developing***: the State is in the process of developing this activity, or the activity is very new. The State may be facing challenges in implementation, roll-out, or communications with subrecipients and other stakeholders.
- **Level 2 – *Implementing***: the State has developed and implemented the activity, although the activity might still benefit from adjustments, training, or communications with subrecipients and other stakeholders.
- **Level 3 – *Sustaining & Continuing Improvement***: the activity is well-established in the State, and may be undergoing a process of evaluation or program improvement. Subrecipients, stakeholders and users have been trained and/or communications strategies have been established.

Element	Status
Capacity Building and Increasing Slots	
The State public awareness and recruitment activities are targeted towards eligible 4 year old children in high need communities and families 200 percent below poverty.	Level 2-Implementing
The State's expansion efforts are targeted towards increasing the access to high quality preschool programs for 4 year olds.	Level 2-Implementing
The State has a plan to ensure that existing State Preschool slots met the twelve standards of a High Quality Preschool Program under the PDG funding.	Level 2-Implementing
Subrecipient Monitoring	
The State Lead Agency has a process to monitor grant and sub-recipients activities to ensure implementation of the goals and performance measures outlined in the approved PDG State Plan.	Level 2-Implementing
The State is on schedule with its monitoring of subrecipients to ensure that all of the high quality standards for Preschool are met within PDG funded preschool classrooms.	Level 2-Implementing
The State is providing access to comprehensive services to all children enrolled in the PDG funded preschool classrooms.	Level 2-Implementing
Birth to Third Grade Continuum	
The State has aligned the PDG funded program within the Birth to Third Grade Continuum of early learning standards and activities that help prepare children for kindergarten thru third grade.	Level 2-Implementing
The State is implementing a data collection system for tracking student outcomes from prekindergarten to kindergarten entry through third grade.	Level 2-Implementing
The State is implementing a transition protocol to ensure that children transitioning from early care and education environments to kindergarten to third grade settings receive the supports necessary for a smooth transition.	Level 1-Developing
Budget and Sustainability	
The State has policies and procedures to track the State and Subrecipient budget activities to ensure that funds are expanded according to State, Local and Federal procurement laws.	Level 2-Implementing

The State has in place a system to track the “use of funds” under the PDG grant.	Level 2-Implementing
The State has a plan to ensure that High Quality State Preschool Programs will remain of high quality after federal funds are no longer available.	Level 1-Developing
Fiscal Accountability	
The State has policies and procedures in place to ensure the grant funds are expended according to the federal laws outlined in the federal Super Circular and EDGAR.	Level 2-Implementing
The State has a system in place to ensure that its Subrecipients are meeting the federal laws of the Super Circular and comply with the “supplement not supplant” requirements.	Level 2-Implementing

Elements Requiring Next Steps:

- While Illinois has an overall attendance rate of 84% for their twenty-five subgrantee sites there are a four programs below 70 percent attendance rates needing additional supports from the parent educators. And even an 84% rate is low with children missing at least one day every two weeks. Overall Illinois is working to address chronic absenteeism through the creation of the Illinois Attendance Commission. PDG subgrantees have and continue to develop and refine plans for resolving attendance challenges however, intense support may need to be provided to One Hope United, Children’s Home and Aid, North Chicago SD 187 and the City of Rockford-Department of Human Services (Head Start) to identify reasons for and address core causes of their chronic absenteeism.