1. Executive Summary

The Athol-Royalston Regional School District and area Preschool and Family Child Care Providers have come together to plan a multi-year effort to improve the academic and effective readiness of Athol children entering kindergarten. This effort is built on the central understanding that the ARRSD cannot alone prepare all Athol children for kindergarten and that this goal can only be achieved by the full engagement and mutually supportive participation of all of the community’s providers and stakeholders. Our basic operational goal is to have all preschool aged children engaged in high-quality early childhood activities that ensure Kindergarten readiness. We will attempt to do this by incrementally increasing the availability of preschool services and by working collaboratively to improve the quality of services provided. Being a rural community, we recognize that Family Child Care Providers serve more than ¼ or the early childhood population and provide most of the “full-day” care available to working parents. Therefore, Family Child Care is a very important provider of services in the Athol area and as such necessarily has to play a key role in our effort. Our plan has several key components:

Governance:

* Athol Royalston Regional School District will be the LEA and employ an Early Childhood Coordinator who will lead and implement this ongoing effort.
* As such, ARRSD will have ultimate decision-making authority.
* However, ARRSD understands that this effort will not succeed if it is not understood to

be a collaborative effort. Therefore, ARRSD will make every effort to arrive at policy and operational decisions though a group consensus process.

Program Design and Development:

* + The strategic plan has been developed based upon a needs assessment: a study of Athol’s current preschool capacities, a survey of parental preferences, a review of the readiness of entering kindergartners, and lengthy discussions among the communities stakeholders regarding ways to improve the quality and coordination of effort, resources, and ultimately services provided children and their families.
* A review of existing capacity suggests that a major impediment to improving the quality of care is the compensation of childcare providers. While this plan will result in marginal improvements in child readiness for kindergarten, making significant improvement requires a better-trained and more stable cadre of caregivers. This will only come with improved compensation funded mainly by the state. Local resources are simply inadequate.
* Designated Caseworkers/Family Engagement Specialist will work with preschools and FCCs to ensure children and families obtain needed comprehensive services and will work with the families

and the preschool providers to help support this process. Given the very high percentage of Athol children who are special needs; 27% and the amount that are high needs; 43.7%, we propose developing a network of Caseworkers/Family Engagement Specialist to serve the children and families of any preschool program that does not already have this type of service in place.

* A “Mapping Template” will be created to best ensure how and where children with special needs will continue to be provided services once the child turns three years of age. This “Mapping Template”

will determine what services the child will continue to need and the best location for this service; whether it is the school district or at the Family Child Care Center if the child needs full day care. In order to ensure all concerned parties are a part of this “Mapping Template”, we will improve the coordination of all our efforts in serving IEP children starting first with obtaining and sharing parental release forms as a standard operating procedure and having all parties be a part of IEP and Mapping meetings.

* While our common goal is to have all children prepared for kindergarten, we recognize that all providers do not need to follow the exact same curriculum in order to achieve this goal. . Therefore, an

Athol-Royalston Regional School District Kindergarten Standards Document will be created and shared with all preschool providers to ensure that each program is working towards the same goals. This will allow for each program to use the curriculum that works best for them, but works towards ensuring each child moves towards these ARRSD Standards. Although programs may be using different curriculum, all preschool programs will begin to use the same assessment tool; Teaching Strategies Gold. The quality of preschool services will ultimately be assessed based upon the readiness of kindergartners. Identified areas or persistent under achievement will be addressed through professional development sessions open to all providers.

* A “Lending Resource Center” will be created to help support program curriculum, kindergarten readiness, and at home family engagement. The Lending Resource Center will be available to all

partners as well as other comprehensive services; Parent Child Home Program, Healthy Families, and Early Intervention Programs.

Cost

Our team has figured out a budget broken down into five years. To begin the PEG

Program, a budget of $304,070.00 would be needed. To sustain the program over the following four years, a budget of $297,375.00 would be needed for each year.

1. Leadership Plan

The Athol Royalston Regional School District will be Leading The Preschool Expansion Grant with the hiring of an Early Childhood Coordinator that would oversee all aspects of the PEG including the partnering agencies. The Early Childhood Coordinator will be housed in a neutral location, possibly the “Old Pleasant St. School” along with the Lending Resource Library accessible to all PEG Partners and other community agencies. The Preschool Expansion Grant Partners will be The Athol Head Start program, The Athol Area YMCA Preschool Program, Family Child Care Programs (Lead by the Child Care Association), and Little Tot Day Care, Inc. (center based program).

These partners bring many different skills and strengths to this collaboration. As the lead, The Athol Royalston Regional School District offers in house speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. A new elementary school (ACES) will be opening for the 2016-2017 school year which will possibly offer free preschool for up to 100 children including children with special needs and a full day program. Current staff of the ARRSD preschool are a Master’s Degree Special Education Teacher and a Master’s level teacher with an advanced degree as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. This combined experience in working with children exceeds 40 years. The ARRSD staff also includes trainers of the APL- SEL Standards, The Pyramid Model, Teaching with Poverty in Mind, as well as trauma sensitivity.

Head Start brings family engagement, home visiting, parent trainings, and parental involvement in programming, policies, and procedures. Head Start has a Dietician and a Mental Health consultant on staff and currently uses Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold.

The YMCA Preschool Program brings its continuity and longevity in the community which goes hand in hand with community engagement. The YMCA also offers many resources for the whole family and is a different option from the public school programs. Future plans include a weekly visit for preschoolers enrolled in the ARRSD preschool for swimming. Other family childcare providers already take advantage of this rich community resource.

The eighteen Family Child Care Programs (FCC) bring strong family engagement which usually consists of working with a family from the child’s birth to the age 12. FCCs offer constant, full-day service, state vouchers, financial assistance, DCF vouchers. These programs vary in QRIS levels from 1 to 3. Many of Athol’s Family Child Care Providers are Certified Play Makers and share this program at many community events.

Little Tot Day Care, Inc. brings over 40 years experience including contracts with voucher, IE slots though EEC and has an extensive collaboration with DCF and Early Intervention. With their strong support staff the children (ages 1 month to under 7) receive the referrals and services they need on or off site.

Curriculum includes ASQ, Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies Gold and QRIS.

Most members of all of these programs have been meeting together for approximately two and a

half years as members of the Early Childhood Education Team. Through this team, the partners have already created extensive partnerships and have experienced collaboration to develop programming through shared enrollment to best benefit the child and his/her family. Through the PEG, this collaboration and partnership will be enhanced through combining Professional Development opportunities, offering support with assessments, rating systems, and meeting regularly to work out obstacles and share best practices.

The individuals involved from each PEG Partnering agency range from Executive Directors, Special Education Directors, Teachers, Coordinators, Social Workers, and Paraprofessionals. Each role is important in supporting families and ensuring kindergarten readiness and school success.

In order to manage this collaborative process, the Early Childhood Coordinator will need to respect each partner by highlighting each program’s strengths, and supporting their weaknesses as well as the ability to problem solve with regard to all partners. The Early Childhood Coordinator will require strong facilitation and communication skills as well as the ability to coordinate meetings and trainings that work with each partner’s schedules and agency/school policies.

Because most members of this team have been working together for over two years through the Early Childhood Education Team, communication is a strength. The team emails each other regularly and meets monthly. The team has shown flexibility in meeting bimonthly through the PEG planning process as well as meeting at different times and in different facilities in order to accommodate all partner’s schedules. The team has begun to use “Google Docs” to share information and to work on ideas collaboratively.

Communication will enhance with the sharing of Professional Development information, coaching, and continued sharing of obstacles and best practices.

In order to accommodate the needs of new approaches and to build community wide interest and support of Preschool Expansion, it is important that a community wide effort is in place. This process has already begun due to the cross collaborations of the partners. Several members of the PEG Team sit on Valuing Our Children’s CFCE Governance Council and Task Force Teams through The North Quabbin Community Coalition alongside Public Officials, Public and Mental Health Organizations, and Social Service Agencies. The team also has a member that sits on the area Board of the Department of Children and Families,and most members of the team have extensive collaboration with the library and local private organizations that support healthy living. These collaborations have given all partners the experience of sharing the Preschool Expansion Planning process.

III. Program Design and Development

1. Needs Assessment

In order to understand the needs of the preschool families in Athol and Royalston, an Early Childhood Education Survey was created. This data that was collected from this survey along with community statistics have been used as the base for designing Preschool Expansion and Enhancement. Within the district, 27.6% of students are identified as having disabilities, 56.2% are considered high needs, and 43.7% are considered economically disadvantaged. The need for transportation and full day preschool were evident in the surveys showing 24% of families in need of transportation in order for their child to

attend a program and 34% showing the preference for a full day program.

Currently, ARRSD has two preschool classrooms each offering a half day morning program and a half day afternoon program. Children on an IEP receive free tuition and transportation. The peers of these children require their own means of transportation and pay a tuition fee. Based on the data collected from the needs assessment, the district hopes to make changes to the preschool program beginning in September 2016.

The first will be the elimination of tuition for all students, the second will be the opening of a third preschool classroom which will offer a full day program and possibly a fourth preschool classroom offering an additional half day morning program. These changes would bring the number of available preschool slots from 60 to 100.

Another change in the works is the relocation of the Athol Head Start. Montachusett Opportunity Council (MOC) is hoping to move their Athol Head Start program to Pleasant St. School, which will be closing due to the opening of the new elementary school (ACES). This building will allow for a larger classroom capacity bringing the total number of students from 16 to 20. This building is in close proximity, less than one-fourth of mile, to ACES, which will house the district’s preschool program, allowing for more collaboration between Head Start and the school district, joint professional development opportunities, and more family engagement and Kindergarten transition opportunities.

Next steps that need to be taken would be to remove the barrier of transportation. Many families within the community do not have means of transportation, and being a rural community, what little public transportation there is, it is not accessible to preschool programs. Because of this barrier, many children are unable to attend a high quality preschool program. One plan the PEG Partners wish to implement is the sharing of transportation costs and vehicles between Head Start and the district’s preschool program. With the possibility of both programs being in close proximity, this collaboration will expand preschool opportunities to children that do not have means of transportation. According to the needs assessment, this is 24% of preschool children in Athol and Royalston.

When addressing the needs of the preschool programs, QRIS levels were studied. The district’s only Center Based Program, Little Tots Childcare, is a level 1. Currently, Little Tots has 36 children enrolled, 20 of which live in Athol. Out of these 36 children, 23 attend through a DCF voucher and the other 19 attend through income eligible vouchers. This program struggles to offer High Quality Preschool Services for a number of reasons. The first being the amount of money the program receives through the Income Eligible Vouchers is very low. With the program bringing in very little money, it does not allow for competitive wages to be offered to their preschool teachers. Second, the student body is made up of children that come from high risk, lower income homes. These children bring many behavioral, social, and emotional problems, learning disabilities, and trauma to the program everyday. Learning and curriculum most of the time takes a back seat to these children’s high needs. Because of these factors; low wages offered to staff and the high needs of the children, Little Tots struggles to keep high quality preschool teachers.

Athol has 18 Family Child Care programs that offer full-day care along with a preschool curriculum.

These programs mostly provide education and care to children of families of full time working parents. Sometimes a child in an FCC may have a delay or disability and they receive Early Intervention services at their Family Child Care Center. This allows for the child to remain in a comfortable setting and also causes little disruption from their routine. When these children, who need full time, year round care turn three years of age and continue to need services, there are limited options. The first option is for the child to attend the Inclusive Preschool Program offered by ARRSD. This option can sometimes be overwhelming to a child who arrives at their FCC early in the morning and then later transported to the ARRSD preschool program for a couple of hours and then transported back to their FCC, especially when the child is three years old. For the FCC, it can also be an issue. The program is faced with losing money as the child may then qualify as only part time, and a provider cannot fill the remaining time to recoup that lost income. They may be unable to provide required assessment data as the child may only attend during rest time (if the provider even allows those hours). It may also disrupt the program in that the provider now has to be available for bus pick ups and drop offs, limiting the availability for the provider to utilize field trips and community activities for curriculum. The PEG Partners solution for these issues are discussed in the Inclusion portion of this document.

Athol and Royalston have many programs that work with at risk families through Home Visiting Programs. Because of the PEG Team having extensive partnerships with these programs such as Healthy Families, Early Intervention, and Parent-Child Home Program, many families will learn about new opportunities and the benefits of these programs for their preschool aged children.

Family Engagement is an important aspect of the design and development of this program. The ARRSD preschool teachers are eager to work with the Head Start staff, whom are leaders in parent engagement, leadership, and parent trainings. All PEG partners are affiliated with Valuing Our Children, a Family Center in Athol which serves the North Quabbin area. VOC offers Parenting Classes, Leadership Workshops, Family Events, Information and Referral, and Family Support. PEG partners have collaborated with VOC by referring families to their programs as well as participating in family events, for instance The Big Read, Literacy Fair, Munch and Move, and Family Fun Day.

The PEG Partners are currently committed to family engagement and improving family outcomes. The 19 Family Child Care Centers see families on a daily basis. They assist in Kindergarten transitions, are present at many IEP meetings, and are familiar with and refer families to community resources. They also become advocates for many of the families that they work with.

ARRSD preschool staff, Head Start, YMCA, and Little Tots meet with families throughout the year to problem solve with families around issues in the home, such as behavior, potty training, and ways to strengthen academic readiness skills for children. Many opportunities are had for families to gather to develop relationships with each other for natural support. ARRSD also offers developmentally appropriate kits with materials to help teach families about how to support skill development in their child.

In order for Expanded Preschool to be successful, barriers such as transportation and tuition need to be eliminated. Supporting preschool programs with salary differential in order to staff high quality preschool teachers and create a more collaborative effort in supporting all families, especially children with special needs, is also key in this process. Most importantly, the community will need to be made aware of the new opportunities for preschool aged children. This will be done through educating the entire community about these options: Healthcare workers, Public officials, Mental Health counselors, social workers, home visitors,teachers, etc. Visual information would be displayed at supermarkets, laundromats, storefronts, social media, newspaper, and cable television.

1. Teacher Capacity and Classroom Quality

The preschool programs within the communities of Athol and Royalston offer a wide range of teaching qualifications. The 18 FCCs range from having no early childhood educational background to some currently enrolled in Master’s Programs. The three teachers in the ARRSD inclusive preschool program hold Master’s Degrees in Special Education and one is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. The paraprofessionals in the ARRSD inclusive preschool and throughout the District are considered “highly qualified” per Title one requirements. Head Start’s and the YMCA’s teachers hold Bachelor's in Early Education and Little Tot’s holds an Associates degree.

The PEG Partners have discussed strategies to support programs in enhancing their education and to help improve teacher capacity and classroom quality.

* + The first would be to offer paid differential to the preschool teacher at Little Tots Preschool and Childcare. This will enable Little Tots to hire and sustain a high quality preschool teacher. As discussed in the Needs Assessment, Little Tots struggles in this area due to inability to pay their teachers competitive wages as well as the demanding student body consisting of very high needs children.
* Accessible and free Professional Development opportunities for all PEG partners including the partners’ teacher aides and paraprofessionals.
* Offering local and free trainings for all PEG partners that are available at different times to

allow for each programs schedules. These joint trainings will allow for Partners to be able to share best practices and troubleshoot together as a district.

* Head Start currently offers their staff local trainings and workshops. Through The Preschool

Expansion Grant, collaboration will allow for these classes to be offered to all PEG Partners.

* Due to data collected in the Needs Assessment, that showed a high percentage of children in the district coming from high needs/at risk homes, it is important that some professional

development focuses on working with children and families from a strength based platform. Ideas for PD are, but not limited to:

Strengthening Families Trauma Informed Mindfulness

APL SEL Standards

QRIS levels differ throughout all the Partners. The FCCs range from level 1 to level 3. Head Start is a level 2, Little Tots is a level 1, and the district and YMCA are currently not involved in QRIS. In order to support all Partners to move up in QRIS:

* + PEG money would be available for partners to “apply for” to help move ahead as far

as QRIS levels.

* + Furniture, classroom supplies, etc. that are not be moved to the new elementary school (ACES) will be auctioned off to the Partners which may support QRIS leveling.
  + The Creation of The Resource Lending Library for all Partners to access will also

have equipment, teaching resources, teaching kits, etc to help support Classroom Quality.

The Athol Royalston Regional School District has also begun the application process to become NAEYC Accredited. They will be supported by the district’s Kindergarten Team which was recently awarded NAEYC Accreditation.

1. Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement

When considering the needs of the families within ARRSD, it is important to point out that 56.2% of students are considered as having high needs and 43.7% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Many of these children are coming from homes that have experienced generations of economic insecurities and trauma. These dynamics most often create obstacles between family and school connections.

The relationships between families and providers of preschool are key to creating a healthy base for children’s school success through supporting the families needs, encouraging home learning, and playing an important role in Kindergarten transition. Trainings for preschool programs focussing on strength based practices with families and understanding the effects of trauma in children will be essential to help providers create these healthy and supportive relationships in this community. Take home kits from The Lending Resource Library and the encouragement of parents to understand that they are their child’s first and most important teacher will aid in the encouragement of home learning.

There is a multitude of Comprehensive Services available to families within the communities of Athol and Royalston. These services are in place to help support the needs of the families and promote school readiness and success. Valuing Our Children is one of eight Family Centers in Massachusetts that offers Family Advocacy and Family Support Services through home visiting, support groups, parenting classes, and information and referrals for fuel assistance, food stamps, WIC, DTA, health services, and child care vouchers. Valuing Our Children also holds the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant (CFCE) for Athol and Royalston. The CFCE offers parent-child events, playgroups, and workshops that encourage parent child engagement, brain building, and kindergarten readiness.

Clinical and Support Options (CSO) provides counseling services to adults, children, and families in order to support stability, growth, and a positive quality of life. CSO collaborates externally with community partners to establish and participate in a comprehensive system of assistance and resources for families.

CSO also offers school based clinicians within the Athol elementary schools and the Athol Royalston Middle School through the CHART Grant received by Heywood Healthcare and Athol Hospital. This grant works to strengthen the partnership between schools, behavioral health providers, and families.

Home Visiting Programs are also a part of the Comprehensive Services within the community. Parent Child Home Program offers home visiting for families to help support parents as their child’s first and most important teacher. This program promotes school readiness for children within Athol and Royalston and aids in the support of transitioning into preschool programs.

Healthy Families home visiting program offers support to first time teen parents from pregnancy to the child’s third birthday. This program strengthens families through child development information and modeling, healthy parenting, and goal setting for the parent’s futures.

Criterion and REACH are two Early Intervention Programs available to families in Athol and Royalston. Home visitors work with the child and parent or caregiver to help support any delays or differences the child may be experiencing.

The PEG partners are familiar with all of these agencies due to years of collaboration of families, events, and services. Members from all of these agencies and many PEG partners sit on Valuing Our Children’s CFCE Governance Council and frequent The North Quabbin Community Coalition meetings. Both of these arenas allow for sharing of information including agency programs and the referral process. Also, The ECET (Early Care and Education Team) meetings have been used to invite members of agencies to discuss their programs and to share the referral process. The Department of Children and Families area supervisor was a recent guest at an ECET meeting to share and discuss best practices of working with DCF, filing of 51As, as well as to troubleshoot boundaries and miscommunications.

In order to maintain collaborations and information sharing between PEG partners, comprehensive services, and families, “Family Engagement Specialists” (FES) would be hired through the Preschool Expansion Grant. The Early Childhood Coordinator will oversee these Family Engagement Specialists which will mirror the work the Head Start and Little Tots Social Workers already have in place. FESs will work with ARRSD, YMCA, and FCCs and the families they service.They will conduct home visits, make referrals, and offer support for at home learning, discipline, and problem solving. They will also help support the family through transitions to kindergarten or inclusive preschool programming/ IEP services. It will be important that the Early Childhood Coordinator and the Family Engagement Specialists have a strong working relationship and an understanding of all area agencies and services. An understanding of the programs and the referral process will be maintained through the ECC’s and FESs attendance at meetings and ongoing communications with the appropriate staff from these agencies.

1. Inclusion

In order for children with special needs within the Athol Royalston Regional School District to receive a continuum of services with minimum disruption and transition, it has been decided a “Special Needs Mapping Template” will be created. This template will be used to help guide decisions regarding how and where a child will continue to receive services when the child turns three years of age. This approach will be a supplement to the IEP process/meetings. It is essential that all concerned parties/stakeholders are involved in this process; the family, child care provider, preschool program staff (including teachers), social workers, and/or family engagement specialists.

The Mapping Template will support the process of determining if the Inclusive Preschool Program offered by ARRSD will be the best fit, or if the best fit would be for the child to continue to receive these services at their FCC or Preschool Program (Little Tots)

* + If it is determined that the child will benefit most from the Inclusive Preschool Program through ARRSD, the child will receive transportation to and from the FCC/Pre-K Program, which will

continue to be handled by ARRSD, and the FCC/Pre-K Program will receive financial compensation through PEG to sustain their program due to the loss of the full time slot.

* + If it is determined that the child will benefit more by remaining in their FCC/PKP, and the FCC/PKP can accommodate, then ARRSD will send a speech, occupational, or physical therapist to the FCC/PKP to service the child.
  + The Early Childhood Coordinator will be the “point person” for all involved in this process including the family.
  + In order to ensure all concerned parties involved in the decision of the child’s needs are part of this process, the ARRSD will be revising the IEP Parent Consent Form to include space for families to write in all parties they want to be involved in the IEP/Mapping process.
  + All PEG Partners will be implementing Teaching Strategies Gold to assess the children in their programs. Any concerns of children’s development will be discussed by each program’s own staff to the families. Appropriate steps will be taken to screen these children either by ARRSD or if under three years of age, Early Intervention.
  + When children on IEPs are transitioning to Kindergarten and they are enrolled in an FCC/PKP or other preschool program other than ARRSD, the process will be the same: all concerned parties will be involved in the IEP meetings regarding the transition to Kindergarten.
  + It will be the responsibility of the Early Childhood Coordinator to ensure that all Kindergarten Packets created by each PEG program have been collected and distributed to the proper ARRSD teachers and staff.

1. Curriculum and Assessment

The assessment tool that has been selected by the Preschool Expansion Grant Partners is Teaching Strategies Gold . This tool is currently being used by the Head Start program and a small percentage of the FCCs. These partners that have experience with TSG will assist in supporting the partners that will need to transition to this tool. The Early Childhood Coordinator will be in charge of the hiring and supervision of a coach that will conduct trainings on Teaching Strategies Gold and offer support to the PEG programs on their continuous use of the tool. Trainings will be offered to PEG members at different increments in order to accommodate the different work schedules of the partners that will need the training. Other opportunities that the PEG partners will have to receive support with TSG will be through PEG meetings. Partners will have the opportunity to exchange views on best practices and to discuss troubleshooting.

The Preschool Expansion Grant Partners all have a specific goal in common: Kindergarten Readiness. Each program chooses a curriculum that works best for their teachers, students, environment, and the families. In place of all programs using the same curriculum, the partners will continue to use their current curriculum, but will work with the ARRSD administrators and kindergarten teachers to document what the definition of Kindergarten Readiness is for the Athol Royalston Regional District.

The ARRSD Kindergarten Readiness Standards will be a working document that will outline core values incoming kindergarteners should possess. These standards will be used by the partners as a guideline alongside their own curriculum to nurture children as they move through their programs and transition into kindergarten.

In addition to the ARRSD Kindergarten Standards, a Lending Resource Library will be created consisting of materials that will support all PEG partners and the families they serve as well as extended partners including Early Intervention programs, Parent Child Home Program, and Healthy Families. This Lending Resource Library will be located at a neutral location, possibly what will soon be “the old Pleasant St. School”. The materials in this library will consist of children’s books, puzzles, manipulatives, segment kits, technology, etc. that will help support curriculum and the Kindergarten Readiness Standards. Also available would be “take home kits” for families to borrow to support parent-child interaction, brain building, and kindergarten readiness at home.

1. Birth to Grade 3 Alignment

The communities of Athol and Royalston have aligned greatly in the past few years with strong collaborations between community agencies, home visiting programs, and Health Care facilities. The CHART Grant, which was awarded to Athol Hospital, teams children's mental health councilors from Clinical Support Options with Athol Elementary and middle school students during the school day to receive services. Families whose children receive these services also receive support.

Valuing Our Children, which holds the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant for Athol and Royalston offers playgroups and family events for families with children newborn to age 12 year round. Some of these events include Kindergarten Readiness events in collaboration with Athol and Royalston schools.

Home visiting programs such as Parent-Child Home Program and Healthy Families, and Early Intervention are extremely familiar with agencies, schools, and services within the community. They all often collaborate with Valuing Our Children and the schools with community events.

Partners involved in the Preschool Expansion Planning Grant are also important in the birth to grade three alignment. Family Child Care Providers often work with families from the child's birth to approximately the age of 12. The constant support for families from their FCC and the FCCs knowledge of the communities resources prove to be a powerful continuum for families.

The YMCA Preschool Program is housed within an agency whose mission is to strengthen and enhance the health and lives of people within the community. The Athol area YMCA is a strong collaborator with the Athol-Royalston Regional School District offering after school programs for middle school aged children. The YMCA is involved in community events and hosts many events for the whole family.

These relationships and collaborations stem from all members of schools and agencies participating in meetings within the community from Valuing Our Children's CFCE meetings, to The North Quabbin Community Coalition meetings, as well as the Early Childhood Education Team

meetings. All PEG partners will continue to attend these meetings to remain informed on agency changes and to preserve relationships and collaborations.

IV. Plan for Cost and Sustainability

Local resources are already being used and will continue to be used to support and enhance the quality of early childhood education (preschool education) in the Athol Royalston communities.

However, the significant improvements in both the quantity and quality of services EEC has asked us to plan for, and that we will strive to achieve, is simply not possible without significant increases in Commonwealth funding.

Athol Regional School District is making a major financial commitment to improving the quality and quantity of preschool services to Athol children ages 2.9 – 5 years. This is reflected in the current 60 preschool slots fully funded by ARRSD and the additional 30 slots planned for next year. ARRSD also provides extra services to all preschool children ages 3 -5 identified with “special needs”. Also, ARRSD works closely with the local Head Start program and has facilitated Head Start’s pending relocation of its programming to former public school classroom space. Lastly, through this plan, ARRSD is committed to sharing with the local Family Child Care Providers ARRSD staff time and professional development funds to attain the shared goal of improving the quality of preschool services provided by each individual provider and the coordination of those services as children move among providers and ultimately into ARRSD kindergarten classrooms. This financial commitment is partially reflected in the in-kind portion of the proposed 5-year budget.