

Massachusetts
Department of Early Education and Care
Universal Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program (UPK)
Report to Legislature

February 15, 2007

Background

The Massachusetts Legislature appropriated \$4.6 million in the Fiscal Year 2007 budget for a Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Pilot initiative, and charged the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) with developing this pilot to begin implementing universally accessible, quality early education and care for children in the Commonwealth. The purpose of the UPK Pilot initiative is to promote school readiness and positive outcomes for children, and to inform the longer-term implementation of the program. This report is a brief summary of the work on this project to date.

With the completion of the Pilot RFR application process on February 20, 2007, EEC will move one step closer to implementing one of its major policy goals – a high-quality Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program for Massachusetts.

The implementation of this program is firmly based in an understanding of the current system's strengths-- its mixed and diverse delivery system, and the accessibility it provides to some degree for 89% of pre-school age children. The program is also being implemented in a way that recognizes the current system's challenges-- providers who accept state subsidies face administrative burdens and inequitable/inadequate reimbursement; standards, policies and licensure requirements are not aligned to support continuous quality improvement; and differing eligibility criteria for financial assistance, as well as inconsistent information, leads to uneven access for families.

With these considerations in mind, EEC set the following key goals for this UPK pilot year:

- To define measurable quality program characteristics for the program that lead to school readiness;
- To enhance the quality of services for children, and especially for children at-risk of school failure;
- To maximize parent choice by ensuring participation from all program types within a mixed public and private service delivery system; and
- To support programs' use of child assessment tools to effectively measure children's progress across all developmental domains.

FY07 Progress, To Date

EEC has used the first half of the fiscal year planning carefully to ensure the above goals are met through the FY07 award process. We collected key information on the current system of early education and care in Massachusetts, identified quality characteristics that funding recipients must exhibit, and crafted a first year pilot that will serve as an informative foundation for a larger-scale UPK system in the future. EEC plans to use the information gathered during this process and the pilot project to guide the implementation of a state-wide UPK system.

The first step in the program development process was to develop a set of potential quality criteria that programs would need to meet in order to be eligible for UPK funding. At the

October 2006 Board of Early Education and Care Meeting, EEC Commissioner Ann Reale presented preliminary recommendations for these criteria and outlined many additional outstanding issues that needed to be addressed before the Request for Response (RFR) could be drafted and awards made. EEC issued a Request for Information (RFI) to gather critical information about the existing system that was necessary to inform further development and estimate the minimum number and extent of providers likely to be eligible for UPK funding based on the proposed quality criteria.

The on-line RFI was issued on November 3, 2006, and received 830 responses in just ten days. Of the 830 responses, 218 providers reported information that indicated they would meet all of the UPK Pilot proposed eligibility criteria. These potentially eligible providers represented all parts of the early education and care mixed delivery system, including family child care, group child care, private and public schools, and served a significant number of low-income children. It was a positive indication that the quality criteria were adequate to meet the goals of the pilot year. Further detail on these 218 RFI respondents is outlined below.

**2006 UPK Request for Information:
Massachusetts Providers Potentially Eligible for UPK Pilot Funding**

Provider Type	Eligible Programs Responding to the RFI	Pre-k children served by Eligible RFI Respondents	Pre-K children receiving EEC Fin. Assistance, served by Eligible RFI Respondents
Independent Family	10	70	@ 2,700
System-Affiliated Family	54	172	
Center-Based	132	8,504	
Public School	20	1,022	
Private School	2	54	
Eligible RFI Responses	218	9,822	

Informed by these RFI findings, the Board of Early Education and Care had extensive conversations at their November and December meetings regarding the award process. In addition, the EEC Transition Team of stakeholders discussed various options and approaches. One of the major concerns was that the number of potentially eligible providers and enrolled children was too great to be supported by adequate awards with the FY07 appropriation.

The consensus was that awards should be large enough to be meaningful, and that they should be focused on programs serving the largest numbers of the neediest children, on geographic diversity, and on the inclusion of a variety of provider types to represent the current mixed system.

With these parameters in mind, the EEC Board voted in January 2007 to establish the criteria for the UPK Pilot Grants. As a result, the FY07 UPK Program Pilot Grant funding has two components:

1. UPK Pilot Classroom Quality Grants- Grant Applications due February 9, 2007:

FY07 funding for UPK Pilot Classroom Quality Grants: \$2.3M

FY08 funding needed for full-year implementation of FY07 awards: \$4.6M

FY08 funding needed for expansion to additional eligible programs: TBD

These grants will provide funding for preschool classrooms and programs that meet all of the UPK quality criteria outlined below. Licensed center-based programs, Head Start programs, public school programs, independent or system-affiliated family child care programs and private schools serving preschool children were all eligible to apply.

UPK Pilot Classrooms must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for a Quality Grant:

1. Serve or be willing to serve children receiving financial assistance;
2. Provide or be willing to provide access to full-day, full-year services for working families;
3. Provide a minimum number of hours of a developmentally appropriate program as evidenced by:
 - a. Use of Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences;
 - b. Use of one of four EEC approved assessment tools, since January 2006:
 - Work Sampling,
 - High Scope Child Observation Record (COR),
 - Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum, or
 - Ages and Stages;
 - c. Access to a qualified professional to ensure appropriate administration of developmentally appropriate program.
4. Meet two out of three additional quality criteria:
 - a. Be EEC Licensed or License-Exempt;
 - b. Have a teacher/provider with a bachelor's degree (BA/BS) in any subject along with specialized training in early childhood education for each EEC qualifying classroom/family child care home;
 - c. Have National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation for group child care programs or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation for family child care.

2. UPK Assessment Planning Grants- Grant Applications due February 20, 2007:

FY07 funding for UPK Assessment Planning Grants: up to \$1.4M (one-time)

FY08 funding needed for expansion to additional eligible programs: TBD

These grants will provide funding for preschool classrooms and programs that are not currently using one of the four assessment tools specified for the UPK Pilot Classroom Quality Grants, but otherwise can meet all of the UPK quality criteria. Licensed center-based programs, Head Start programs, public school programs, independent or system-affiliated family child care programs and private schools serving preschool children were all eligible to apply.

The intent of the grant is to encourage programs to begin using assessment to help inform and guide developmentally appropriate practices in their classroom, and to qualify for UPK Classroom Quality Grants in the future.

Eligible applicants for both grant opportunities will be prioritized for funding based on the percentage of low-income children being served in each program. EEC will also ensure representation of all program types (public and private, center and home-based) and all geographic areas across the Commonwealth in the Pilot program. Awards for both grant programs will be announced in March.

The remaining \$900,000 in FY07 funding will be used for the department to provide professional development and technical assistance to grantees on the implementation of on-going child assessments; to hire a project manager for the UPK Pilot Program; and to develop an information technology system to support the long-term implementation of UPK.

Next Steps

EEC plans to announce the awards for the UPK Classroom Quality Grants during the week of March 9, 2007, and the awards for the Assessment Planning Grants during the week of March 16, 2007. Information regarding the size of these grants, as well as the names and locations of the awardees will be available on EEC's website at that time, and will be submitted as a supplement to this report.

Based on the information gathered through the grant review and awards processes, as well as information gathered in the initial months of the pilot, EEC will make recommendations to the Governor's Office, the Legislature and the Executive Office for Administration and Finance as to the future resources and improvements necessary to sustain and expand the program.