**Holyoke Preschool Expansion Strategy**

**In Response to: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care RFR: SRF 160074 - Preschool Expansion Planning Grant - PEPG 001**

This strategic plan is an examination of the infrastructure, funding and supports needed to provide universal high quality preschool programs to all pre-school children (defined for purposes of this plan as children between 2.9 and kindergarten entrance) in Holyoke, Massachusetts by 2020. This plan can only be implemented if Holyoke is awarded adequate funding. The plan identifies the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to achieving this goal. It provides an analysis of the resources that could be leveraged should future funding become available.

Given the increasing number of children participating in Holyoke’s state licensed preschool programs today (nearly 1,000), reaching the city’s universal Pre-K goal of 1,300 children is well within reach. To expand access to high-quality preschool to every child in Holyoke, Pre-K partners have prioritized three critical goals. The first, that nineteen (19) additional Pre-K classrooms are needed to reach Pre-K *universality.* The second, is to increase the number of B.A. educators working in Holyoke Pre-K programs to sixty-five (65) by the year 2020. Thirdly, our leaders understand they must work with state and federal stakeholders to ensure that financial and other resources will be leveraged to support the cost of universal quality Pre-K in Holyoke. Additional substantive goals and suggested strategies to meet them, are described throughout this plan.

The principle driver for Holyoke’s comprehensive universal quality Pre-K strategy is the foundational relationship between Holyoke Public Schools (LEA) and the diverse community based early learning providers (ELP’s) that include: HCS Head Start Inc. (Head Start) and Valley Opportunity Council (VOC).

Holyoke’s comprehensive city-wide Early Literacy Initiative (HELI), now in its 4th year, is an important vehicle from which Holyoke will deepen its commitment to better the city’s under-par early literacy outcomes, to reduce young child achievement gaps and to work to ensure kindergarten readiness for all of Holyoke’s Pre-K children.

The Pre-School Expansion Grant (PEG), now nearing the end of its first year of implementation, has strengthened the collaboration between Holyoke Public Schools, ELP partners and representatives from a diversity of city-wide community organizations. PEG is a an important conduit through which Holyoke’s Pre-K partners have been able to coordinate and implement the productive processes needed to grow the systems and structures needed to provide universal Pre-K in the city.

HPS & ELP’S (Head Start and VOC + others) will continue to work together to ensure quality Universal Pre-K by engaging in planning and design efforts including: aligned curriculum, joint partner professional development, high quality classroom coaching, the provision & coordination of universal comprehensive services, effective family engagement outreach and support, and inclusive services of special education populations.

HPS, VOC and HS will continue to serve as the PEG Leadership Team. HPS and ELP’s will re-commit to the leadership roles outlined in the PEG Direct Service Summaries. HELI’s (Holyoke Early Literacy Initiative) 30 + community partners will further the work of its five diverse and active work groups to effectively engage and educate schools, community organizations, funders and families to work to improve inadequate early literacy outcomes across all Pre-K programs as an integral part of expanding universal Pre-K in Holyoke. HELI work groups are working to develop and support the conditions necessary to provide universal pre-k in the city of Holyoke.

HPS leadership will maintain key finance and administrative roles to help guide and support the broad based work of HELI. HPS will continue its front-line service, guidance, direction, and the governance necessary for a universal Pre-K program. Top leadership from Head Start, VOC, and other ELP’s are committed to taking an active and visible role in support of Holyoke’s universal Preschool expansion efforts.

HELI *Steering Committee* leaders will continue to move HELI goals forward. ELP leaders with the authority to make decisions and who understand the complexity of ELP operations and their organization’s strategic directions will participate on PEG and HELI committees. Front line ELP staff will continue to sit on the PEG Research Team and in the HELI work groups.

**Strong Leadership & Governance LEA & ELP’s**

HPS, VOC and HCS Head Start, Inc. will continue to serve as the PEG Leadership Team. HPS and the ELP’s are re-committing to the leadership roles outlined in the PEG Direct Service Summaries.

One of Holyoke’s greatest strengths is HELI’s (Holyoke Early Literacy Initiative) 30 + community partners will further the work of its four diverse and active work groups: Family Engagement, Kindergarten Readiness/0-5, Attending for Literacy, and Instructional Partners. These work groups effectively engage and educate schools, community organizations, funders, and families to work to improve inadequate early literacy outcomes across all Pre-K programs as an integral part of expanding to universal Pre-K in Holyoke. The work of the HELI work groups in the near term will help to develop the conditions necessary to build a universal Pre-K system in Holyoke.

Top leadership from HCS Head Start, Inc., VOC, and other Holyoke’s ELP’s (i.e. YMCA, Kids Place, and Square One) remain committed to an active and visible involvement in Holyoke’s universal preschool expansion efforts.

**Strategy:** Leadership from the HELI *Steering Committee* and HELI Leadership Team will be asked to report to other meeting attendees what they have contributed to HELI efforts over each quarterly period.

**Strategy:** ELP leaders who have the authority to make decisions, understand the complexity of the ELPs’ daily operations and strategic directions will continue to participate on the PEG and HELI steering committees.

**Strategy:** Front line ELP staff will continue to sit on the PEG Research Team and in the HELI work groups.

**Strategy:** HPS and ELP’s will reach out to other Holyoke ELP’s to garner their support for the Pre-K expansion, especially in their ability to help access additional classroom space and high quality Pre-K teachers.

**Program Design and Development**

Pre-K partners have a shared understanding of Holyoke’s Pre-K Expansion Program Design & Development as defined & supported by:

* Strong Leadership & Governance: LEA & ELP’s
* Effective Grant Management
* Effective Program Design
* Aligned Instruction
* Aligned Curriculum
* Inclusion: Students with learning disabilities and English language learners
* Valid Assessment
* Family Engagement
* Comprehensive Services/Social Emotional Supports
* Teacher Quality and Commensurate Teacher Salaries

**Preschool Expansion Grant Management**

**Strategy:** The HPS Department of Finance and Operations will maintain the administration of the PEG grant. HPS will continue its responsibility for researching, developing, implementing, operating, and reporting on PEG. In carrying out these responsibilities, HPS will provide the necessary leadership and technical assistance to the PEG partners and other stakeholder groups as Holyoke moves to implement universal Pre-K.

**Strategy:** HPS leaders will take a leadership role in advocating local, state and federal policies and funding that will enhance the ability of multi-provider Pre-K networks to seamlessly serve all Pre-K children in Holyoke. HPS will work with the other Pre-K partners to solicit the financial and other resources needed for new classroom space and other assets.

**Needs Assessment Data**

**Holyoke Asset Map:** The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission has completed an Asset Map that describes child and family data specific to: Child Age (birth-6), child locale/neighborhood, language(s) spoken in the home & current attendance in licensed early education program, etc. (Asset Map is Attached).

**Educator Data:** A total of 28 Pre-K educators with B.A. Degrees are currently employed by HPS (10) HCS Head Start, Inc. (8) and VOC (10). According to the 2016 MA EEC PD Registry Data there are 49 licensed B.A. educators in Holyoke today. To meet quality Universal Pre-K standards by 2020, Holyoke will need 65 B.A. educators. 37 new B.A.s must be recruited and hired.

**Strategy:** HPS has commissioned a master facilities plan to professionally assess the capacity of the HPS’s current facilities. HPS will receive recommendations on improving space/capacity across the district this summer (2016).

**Strategy: Pre**-K Partners are exploring a variety of classroom space options to add 344 more children to meet the universal Pre-K goal.

**Strategy:** Holyoke Public Schools and its partners will explore options to build/renovate a central facility to house a state-of-the-art Pre-K Early Learning Center.

**Pre K Facilities**

Holyoke’s additional Pre-K classrooms will be located in the facilities noted below.

* HPS will house 8 Pre-K classrooms in each of its eight K-8 neighborhood schools: HPS will offer 16 (½ day) Pre-K sessions in these classrooms. Head Start and or VOC will be housed in an adjoining room in each of the K-8 schools and will provide 16 (1/2 day) sessions.
* Four (4) classrooms will be renovated at *Dean Tech* to house an HPS *Early Learning Laboratory School* that will serve 80 Pre-K children. HPS will hire VOC to oversee these classrooms.
* The *Holyoke Housing Authority* will open up three (3) new classrooms to serve sixty (60) Pre-K children. HCS Head Start will oversee these classrooms.
* Currently there is space at the Holyoke YMCA for one (1) Pre-K classroom to serve 20 Pre-K children. There is space at the Kid’s Place at Holyoke Community College for one (1) classroom to serve 20 Pre-K children.
* There are available slots in family child care in Holyoke for those families who prefer that option.
* There is space (in need of renovation) at Enlace de Familias in Holyoke for 1-3 classrooms.

**Effective PreK Program Design**

All Pre-K partners are committed to a program design that includes:

* Full Day/Full Year Programming
* Shared and Aligned Professional Development and Curriculum
* Teacher Education Levels: 1 B.A. in each classroom.
* Maximum Class Size: 20 and Child Ratio 10:1
* Family Engagement and Comprehensive Services
* Inclusion of Students Receiving
* Special Education and Other Supports.

* Birth-Age 3 Linkages

**Comprehensive Services**

Serving the *whole child* means Holyoke Pre-K partners must work together to serve all Pre-K families. Research shows that specially chosen and targeted comprehensive services benefit children’s health outcomes (e.g., connecting children to a regular medical home; integrating comprehensive screening; requiring immunizations) and increases the receipt of primary medical and dental care.

Holyoke Pre-K partners have made the commitment to expand collective efforts to better help Pre-K families gain access to the comprehensive services they may need, i.e., health, mental health, social services, etc. Community-based early education programs like VOC have a history of being integrated with social services and regularly refer families to these services. HCS Head Start Inc. offers comprehensive services that support the mental, social, and emotional development of children by providing them with health, nutrition, social, and other services.

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will share comprehensive services to the best of their ability

**Strategy:** A comprehensive list of local Child & Family services will be provided to Pre-K parents at Pre-K registration by all Pre-K providers.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will work with (BHN) & other mental health service providers to improve the quality of mental health services: the EEC Child Mental Health Contractor & local Home Visiting Programs to improve child/ family referral services.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will consider development of a *Holyoke Maternal Child Health Commission* to engage community & health service providers in regular dialogue to increase the effectiveness of the city’s comprehensive services and to advocate for measures to reduce the complexity to Holyoke families of accessing these services.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will leverage economies of scale and efficiencies (i.e. locations of classrooms, reducing transportation costs, sharing staff) in order to provide comprehensive services as needed.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will work closely with the Holyoke Department of Children & Families (DCF) and homeless services to optimally ensure that all DCF and homeless Pre-K children are served in quality care.

**Family Engagement**

Engaging families is a primary goal of Holyoke’s Pre-K partners who recognize and support the parent's role as their child's first teacher. This is a team effort. Through Family Access and Engagement Coordinators and other staff, Holyoke Pre-K partners will:

* Ensure that all parents have easy-to-access information about all Pre-K options delivered by HPS and ELP's, and a common portal or information gateway for Pre-K registration.
* Post HPS and or ELP registration and up until the first month of pre-school, offer a series of activities to help families to get their children ready for school, to understand Pre-K program expectations & policies, and the early education literacy practices they can implement at home.
* Family support options may include home visits, welcome to pre-school events, orientation sessions, parent peer learning circles, etc. Special emphasis will be placed on practices to support effective parent-teacher partnerships that boost their child's learning

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* Ensure that all families will receive an updated directory of city and regional services and resources to address a variety of needs and explore opportunities for lifelong learning and family stability. As much as possible, Pre-K staff will facilitate services at each site and or connect programs to trusted contacts at these services and coach parents on how to access them.

**Family Engagement**

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will assign a requisite HPS SASSID (student) # and folder for all Pre-K children perhaps as early as 2.9 years.

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will develop & use the SAME Pre-K registration forms across all Pre-K programs.

HPS will continue to provide a central office location for all early education data collection and Pre-K student registration services.

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will, with the help of a local college tech support, create a Smart Phone App and or Universal Pre-K Link to educate parents about city- wide Pre-K education programs by age, type, etc.

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will work together to create a community-wide PR campaign: *Universal Pre-K in Holyoke by 2020*. Possibilities for PR campaign include: Road Race. Citywide Concert, Children’s Fair, Taste of Holyoke.

 **Strategy:** Survey Pre-K parents to inform expansion planning processes and facilitate parent focus groups.

**Strategy:** Based on the information collected during the Pre-K intake process and the results of parent surveys, Pre-K programs will develop parent education and support events that offer additional support to track their child's progress and to develop and strengthen family protective factors.

**Strategy:** In addition, specific services can be coordinated for individuals or groups based on specific needs.

**Strategy:** Pre-K program staff will offer regular parent volunteer opportunities. They will also identify and support leadership development and networking among parents (i.e. through HELI).

**Strategy:** Program staff will facilitate opportunities for parent voices to be heard and to offer parents a way to meaningfully contribute to program improvement.

**Strategy:** Pre-K program staff will facilitate the transition to Kindergarten by providing information to families about all program options and the registration process.

**Strategy:** Professional development for teachers and program staff will be provided that align values, initiatives and practices for effective and positive family engagement.

**Inclusion**

Holyoke public schools has provided rich high quality Pre-K education to Pre-K aged children since 1999. In 2016 HPS offered integrated and dual language preschool education to 274 children that served a mix of typically developing children, children with disabilities and children who attended the full day Spanish/English dual language program. Holyoke’s Pre-K partners recognize and support the fact that children with disabilities gain from interactions with peers who do not have disabilities and that children without disabilities are being exposed to high-quality preschool programs in Holyoke that they might not otherwise receive. Of the 274 children served in Holyoke’s Pre-K classrooms this year, 132 were bussed to community based early learning programs including Head Start and VOC daily.

**Strategy:** HPS administrators will evaluate the Massachusetts DOE funding guidelines to determine if and how HPS can deepen the impact of its current commitment to 3-5-year-old special education and peer partner students with full day programming.

**Strategy:** To promote grade level academic achievement, bilingualism, bi-literacy and multi-cultural competence for young children, in the Fall of 2016 HPS will be opening a 2nd Dual Language Pre-K classroom.

Aligned Instruction

Developing a shared vision among all Holyoke’s Pre-K partners is essential to support a continuum of high quality early learning through the third grade. Pre-K aligned instruction requires strong state, district, community, and public school leadership. Holyoke’s Pre-K partners continue to make it possible sustain its commitment to Pre-K alignment and the strategic actions necessary to develop an integrated pathway of learning. This work will promote Pre-K children’s healthy development, social & emotional skills, motivation and engagement in learning as well as progress in learning literacy, language, mathematics and science.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners agree to align Instruction that is rooted in “Quality”.

* QRIS Level: Pre-K programs will move to attain Level IV in QRIS
* Educator attainment of a #5 on the CLASS rating scale.
* Shared written objectives for quality instruction.

* Review of the HELI Pre-K assessment for efficacy and or validity. Shared implementation of a valid HELI pre-k assessment in fall, winter, and spring
* Integrated PD for all Pre-K educators on a schedule that works for all partners.

**Aligned Curriculum**

A key mechanism for creating high-quality early learning environments in Holyoke is a coordinated approach to aligning curriculum that will provide all Pre-K educators across settings, with a shared framework for meeting Pre-K children’s academic and social needs. Given the current juxtaposition of the city’s persistent sub-par early literacy outcomes and the high needs population, aligning Pre-K Instruction with a particular focus on developing young children’s language and reading skills and healthy social emotional development are priorities in Holyoke.

**Strategy:** All Pre-K partners agree to implement developmentally age- appropriate engaging curriculum across programs to ensure kindergarten success for all Pre-K children. (Curriculums currently being reviewed or used by partners are: Focus on K1, Big Day and Teaching Strategies GOLD.)

**Strategy:** Pre-K literacy readinesswill be measured and evaluated using data collected on the HELI (and or other valid) Pre-K assessment tool. HELI’s “0-5” goal remains in place: Holyoke children, at kindergarten entrance, will be *On Track for Literacy.*

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners understand and agree to align Pre-K curriculum across programs and will target Pre-K children’s healthy social-emotional development as a vital early learning domain.

**Birth to Three Alignment**

Holyoke’s Pre-K partners understand that all children should have access to a high quality educational continuum that connects all programs from birth to 3rd grade in a coherent system of services and supports. Holyoke is committed to providing children with strong foundational cognitive skill (literacy/communication and math), developing social and emotional competence and establishing patterns of engagement in school and learning.

Holyoke is working diligently as it builds a coherent Pre-K infrastructure that includes standards, curricula, assessment and professional development that are strongly aligned across and in the context of high quality developmentally appropriate early care and education settings.

**Strategy:** Ongoing development of the HELI *On Track for Literacy* indicators for Pre-K to 3rd grade ages

**Strategy:** Ongoing work to improve the development of the HELI Pre-K assessment

**Strategy:** Effective facilitation of all Pre-K and Kindergarten Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for all Pre-K educators in the city of Holyoke

**Strategy:** Ongoing strong partnership and support for HCS Head Start Inc., VOC classrooms within the PS Pre-K classrooms in the elementary school

**Strategy:** Ongoing strong partnership and support for HCS Head Start Inc., VOC classrooms within the HPS Pre-K classrooms in the elementary schools.

**Strategy:** Further development of Kindergarten Registration events at each Pre-K-8 school.

**Strategy:** Expanding Pre-K access to every 2.9 to kindergarten entrance aged child in Holyoke.

**Strategy:** Development of a *Social Emotional Indicator Checklist* for Pre-K teachers to pass along to kindergarten teachers for every student.

**Teacher Quality**

The knowledge and skills necessary to teach effectively in early education are every bit as complex as in K-12, with equally high stakes for children’s development and lifelong success. Research shows that improving higher education and professional learning for all educators who work with young children is correlated with positive child outcomes. A large and growing body of research as noted in the Institute of Medicine Report on the childcare workforce shows the need for teachers with B.A. degrees who can deliver educational programming and who are paid at sufficient levels that promote retention. For this reason Holyoke’s Pre-K partners are committed to having at least one B.A. early educator in every Pre-K classroom and to better understanding, valuing, training supporting and rewarding all educators in the Holyoke’s Pre-K system

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will design, disseminate, collect, and analyze a community-wide educator survey to inform the Pre-K expansion planning process to attract, develop and retain the highest quality teachers in Holyoke. (\*\* See Sample Survey in Attachments).

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will facilitate focus groups with a sampling of teachers/educators and their employers to assess Holyoke’s Pre-K workforce strengths and weaknesses.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will collaborate to analyze current compensation structures across programs and determine a community wide teacher compensation scale.

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will work with the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, the 5-colleges and other local colleges to bring early education student teachers into Holyoke Pre-K classrooms with the goal in mind to recruit some of them when they graduate.

**Strategy:** Pre-K partners will develop a pathway to education careers for HPS high school students.

**Strategy:** HPS will continue to market and brand teaching opportunities in Holyoke through the *Teach Western MA Initiative.*

**PreK Program Costs and Sustainability**

**Funding:** Current funding provided by DESE (Chapter 70) Head Start and EEC (reimbursements based on family income)

**Strategy**: Work with state stakeholders (DESE and EEC) to investigate the political and economic viability of combining funding streams through strong memorandum of agreements that would bring total per Pre-K pupil cost up to the level of the current PEG grant cost, allowing for increases in compensation for educators and associated administrative costs.

Combined funding:

$ 3,600 DESE

$ 9,500 EEC

**$13,100 per pupil** (This figure while less than the $16K per child PEG cost is likely more achievable from a political and financial standpoint readily and would make a significant impact on Holyoke’s current Pre-K programming).

**Strategy:** Pre-K Partners will engage in fundraising efforts as state, federal and philanthropic grants become available.

**Strategy:** To strengthen *Holyoke’s Universal Pre-K by 2020* efforts and to ensure sustainability, Pre-K partners will inventory and depict the community’s financial and economic resources on a resource asset map. Universal Pre-K planning will be aided by understanding what the community has to work with, how it is strengthened by its current assets, how to develop new assets and how to address foreseeable problems. This resource asset map will depict community networks as well as key people from organizations such as DCF, DTA, Housing, Health and Human Services, Mental Health organizations, & Homeless services, and what they bring to the table, i.e. physical assets (buildings), knowledge and skills, political connections, legitimacy in the community, and access to the public.

**Strategy:** Locating Holyoke’s Pre-K classrooms within walking distance of a majority of families with young children is the most effective way to reduce the need for and high cost of transporting children to and from diverse Pre-K settings.