# COMMONWEALTH PRESCHOOL EXPANSION GRANT

# STRATEGIC PLAN

# Lowell Public Schools

# Early Childhood Department

**Authorized to bind the applicant to the proposal:**

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# Lowell Preschool Expansion Strategic Plan

1. **Executive Summary**

The Lowell Public Schools (LPS) is a current recipient of the federally funded Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG). The LPS and its expansion partners are pleased to submit this strategic plan to move expansion forward. Our strategic plan reflects the basic principles of a successful expanded early childhood system by increasing the number of children served in 3 and 4 year old programs across Lowell’s mixed service delivery system by 176 slots by adding new slots in existing sites, and adding new space through mobile/modular classrooms in Year 2. The current Lowell PEG grant funds 156 slots.

The intent is to unite the city around the needs of young children and their families through a broad based public and private partnership, and to create citywide ownership and accountability. In addition to the FCC system and Center-based expansion partners, the tasks of leadership, management and accountability will be provided by the following entities: the Lowell Public Schools (LPS) as the Local Education Agency (LEA); the Lowell Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC); PEG Coordinator; and PEG Committee and its Subcommittees. These entities will refine the current Lowell PEG governance structure, define specific roles of each Committee member, and prioritize strategies to be phased in between Year 1 and Year 3.

The new Lowell PEG framework is based on the following assumptions:

* Options for families are critical. Some families may prefer to enroll their children in public or private center-based programs, others in Family Child Care (FCC) or Head Start.
* The intentional inclusion of FCC Systems in this plan recognizes and embraces the critical role that FCC Systems have played and will continue to play in the early childhood community of Lowell. For over thirty years, FCC Systems have provided quality care and education for families. Throughout their history in Lowell, FCC Systems have been committed partners on community-wide initiatives to support the city in its diverse neighborhoods with regards to family support and early childhood education.
* Involving all mixed settings in the expansion efforts provides parents with more choices, avoids some costs in new facility development and promotes accountability and quality across early education settings.
* Changes in teacher capacity and program quality can be fostered through an iterative and tiered approach to ensure that they can be absorbed and eventually sustained by current center-based and FCC system operational frameworks.

List of Organizations in PEG. The systems and programs (the expansion partners) who are providing early education and care are listed below. Our plan is unique because the PEG partners are comprised of family child care systems along with early education and care center-based programs.

**Preschool Expansion Organization Partners and Leadership**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Expansion Partner** | **Role in PEG** | **Current Title** |
| **Lowell Public Schools** | LEA, Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) Liaison, PEG Oversight  Site for Mobile Classrooms Child Support Services (CSS) Lead; Special Education (SPED), Inclusion Coordination | District Support Specialist for Early Childhood |
| **PEG Coordinator** | Management and Leadership |  |
| **Acre Family Child Care** | Expansion ECE Partner | Chief Program Officer, Child Care and Professional Development |
| **Bethel Child Care Services** | Expansion ECE Partner | Field Director and Assistant Director |
| **Clarendon Early Education Services, Inc.** | Expansion ECE Partner | Chief Executive Officer |
| **Community Teamwork Inc. (CTI) FCC** | Expansion ECE Partner | Director |
| **CTI Head Start** | Expansion ECE Partner | Director |
| **Little Sprouts** | Expansion ECE Partner | Associate Director of Education |
| **Lowell Day Nursery Association** | Expansion ECE Partner | Executive Director |
| **Lowell Community Health Center** | Family Services Hub | TBD |
| **Greater Lowell Pediatrics** | Family Services Hub | TBD |
| **National American Family Institute** | Family Services Hub | TBD |
| **International Institute (alternate)** | Family Services Hub | TBD |
| **South Bay Community Services** | EI Partner | TBD |
| **Thom Anne Sullivan Center** | EI Partner | TBD |
| **Consultants** | Behavioral Specialist, Transition Coordinators, mentors, coaches, Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators, PD trainers | TBD |

The framework covers children ages 2.9 to 5 years (kindergarten entry) and their families. Our plan offers unique elements in each of the areas of 1) capacity expansion; 2) teacher capacity and program quality; and 3) comprehensive services and family engagement.

PEG will enable the Lowell PEG partners to expand capacity where most needed, and provide choice and access to care for families through the purchase of two mobile classrooms in Year 2. The Plan allocates dollars for capital improvements in expansion partner classrooms. It hires a full complement of staff to ensure successful implementation of the administrative and quality requisites, including: Program Administrative Assistants, Teacher Assistants, coaches for participating teachers, mentors for the Pilot program teachers, Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators, a CSS Behavioral Specialist, and a Transition Coordinator.

The Strategic Plan targets program building beyond expansion and quality improvement on the classroom level. That is, it is designed to extend quality improvement initiatives to other educators and family child care providers within the expansion partner organizations. It leverages funding with a plan to extend PD, and ultimately teacher capacity and program quality, to non-PEG educators in the partner organizations through a rotating network of PD. It will build upon the high quality practices of the expansion partners to serve not only the children in these programs and systems, but as models for other programs throughout the city, with a targeted focus on improving practice in differentiating instruction and increasing Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Scores. Curricula will be standards-based and aligned to the Early Learning and Development Standards. The expansion partners will continue to implement Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) assessment, and will have a child to staff ratio of 8 to 1 with a maximum of 20 children per class.

While the initial focus is on working with a cohort of educators with BA degrees, the long term goal is to develop a competency based strategy for determining which educators across the mixed service delivery system are qualified for leading expansion efforts using not only education but experience and other indicators of quality. As such, the Strategic Plan contains a Tiered Teacher Qualifications Pilot for FCC teachers with at least two years of college or an Associates’ Degree, working with mentors to select coursework or professional development (PD) targeted to individual needs and goals.

Children’s school success incorporates a broad vision that includes not only school readiness and classroom quality, but also emotional health and physical development. The Strategic Plan provides enhanced systemic, responsive services by utilizing the successful, team-based CSS Model, staffed by a Behavioral Specialist. Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators support the needs of children and families across the City with screening, referrals, follow-up, mental health and other supports. The Lowell PEG Strategic Plan also establishes new Hubs of information and services in three agencies that specialize in serving hard to reach and/or at-risk families, who present stress and associated social and health related issues that diminish prospects for children.

The strategic planning process involved five Strategic Planning summits with the expansion partners, and draws from community-wide strategic planning initiatives conducted in recent years, including the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) initiative, Birth to Grade 3 Alignment, and Lowell Legacy grants. The costs to carry out our plan total $2,111,902, or $15,528.82 per child (136 children) in Year 1.

1. **Leadership Plan**

The Lowell Public Schools’ proven track record of managing the current Federal PEG as one of five recipients in Massachusetts, as well as its long history of managing broad scale initiatives in Lowell, will contribute to successful implementation – communication, leadership, management, and accountability of our proposed preschool expansion. Building from the knowledge base and experience gained from the leadership in the current PEG initiative, and under the guidance of a skilled and experienced Project Manager, these same solid structures of communication and collaboration between the LPS and the expansion partners will be applied to the proposed program. Design and implementation decisions will be based on consensus through the establishment of regular meetings with expansion partners and the formation of sub-committees to address specific areas of development for the program. Consistent meetings among partnering Directors will provide another vehicle for alignment and consistency. Based on a long history of partnership and collaboration in the city of Lowell, as well as a strongly rooted Lowell Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) that is overseen by the LPS and on which the expansion partners are members, a culture of communication and collaboration already is firmly in place. The LPS has a current system for the collection of enrollment data and a mechanism for the assignment of a SASID in its district student database, which will be used for each child enrolled in the expansion program. This creates a system that allows for tracking of student progress over time as students leave the program and enter into the LPS. In addition, the LPS can provide much support to the new program, as it does with the current PEG program, through the offering of expertise and support from its many department staff including Early Childhood, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Support, ELL’s, and Special Education. This support can take the form of professional development, training, program development, and various other resources.

**Leadership, Management and Accountability.** In addition to the ECE expansion partners identified above, the tasks of leadership, management and accountability will be provided by the following entities: the Lowell Public Schools (LPS) as the LEA; the Lowell Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC); PEG Coordinator; and PEG Committee and its Subcommittees. The LPS will serve as a liaison between the EEC, LECAC, PEG and Committee, and will work with the PEG Coordinator to manage fiscal aspects of the work. The PEG Coordinator will be employed by the LPS, and will have early education credentials and degrees, as well as interpersonal, management and communication skills necessary for this position.

The PEG Coordinator will supervise expansion partner leaders; track PEG initiative progress; work to link the PEG initiatives to other programs in Lowell to share costs; and oversee PEG communications and advocacy. In addition to providing oversight and direction to the PEG subcommittees, the PEG Coordinator will provide leadership to staff hired to implement specific PEG initiatives outlined in the Strategic Plan. These staff include: Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators, Coaches for the participating educators at all expansion sites; mentors for FCC Teacher Qualifications Pilot participants; a Transition Coordinator, and Behavioral Specialist.

The PEG Committee will be comprised of approximately 15 members: Lowell Public Schools Liaison; the PEG Coordinator; and one to two senior staff from each of the seven expansion partners. The PEG Committee will use research and data to: refine subcommittees and roles; identify expansion priorities; and timelines or phases for introducing strategies. The PEG Committee will develop a plan for ongoing communication, and an implementation and outcomes evaluation for tracking PEG initiatives. The PEG Committee will be comprised of working subcommittees responsible for implementing the strategies identified in our plan. Members will serve on a subcommittee in one of the following areas:

1. Capacity and Access (which will include transportation and mobile classrooms)
2. Program and Teacher Quality (Tiered Teacher Qualifications Pilot, CLASS administration, Coaching, PD);
3. Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement (including the CSS and Hub Models),
4. Inclusion
5. Data Systems and Evaluation

Three Lowell human services/healthcare agencies are targeted to be comprehensive service Hubs for families also will serve on the PEG Committee. The agencies that have expressed interest in being a Hub at this time are: the National American Family Institute, Greater Lowell Pediatrics, Lowell Community Health Center, and International Institute.

**Mechanisms for communication.** The LPS Liaison, PEG Coordinator, and PEG Committee will establish communication mechanisms, which will include a list serve, and a regular weekly schedule of in-person or online meetings. Monthly meetings will offer a forum to discuss implementation successes and challenges. Lowell has a long history of managing broad scale initiatives and strategic planning through the LECAC. The connection to LECAC is important to facilitate integrated and aligned collaborative planning with community stakeholders. The LPS Liaison, PEG Coordinator, and PEG Committee will attend monthly LECAC meetings.

Data gathering to support strategic decisions. Lowell PEG will plan for ongoing evaluation to measure progress. As part of the plan, the PEG Committee will develop a detailed Logic Model so that cause and effects can be tracked clearly. Likewise, evaluation will look at formative (implementation) and summative (outcome) data that correspond with objectives and strategies. Implementation data will be collected on intake and outreach processes; family characteristics; teacher qualifications; coaching and PD processes and effectiveness; transition and assessment practices; and the CSS and Hub activities. Impact data will be collected on enrollment, changes in classroom quality in teachers, knowledge of standards, and other indicators of teacher and classroom quality. Evaluation measures will include social, emotional and academic growth measures for children enrolled in expansion slots. Data measuring changes in family engagement, awareness, and access will also be collected. Early on in the project, the LPS Liaison, PEG Coordinator, and PEG Committee will develop a data system and select indicators and benchmarks for monitoring change. The system will – for example – track the overall availability and enrollment in high quality slots; and changes in access and outcomes resulting from initiatives.

Expansion Partner Strengths. The partners – Acre, Bethel, Clarendon and CTI FCC Systems; as well as Lowell Day Nursery, Little Sprouts and CTI Head Start center-based programs, are distributed across the five zip codes in Lowell and the surrounding area. All serve preschoolers; 89% serve toddlers; 79% serve infants and 67% serve kindergartners. All expansion partners serve children whose primary language is not English. Most of the partners (88%) offer childcare vouchers (100% of the FCCs offer them) and EEC contracted slots. Together, all partners have capacity for serving more than 2,062 children. All serve preschoolers and provide services for a full-day/full-year program.

The educational leaders participating in this initiative have an average of nine years of experience each in their current management capacity. All of the FCC leaders and nearly 90% of the center-based leaders have been working in early education and care for at least ten years. While one center-based

Director supervises a staff of two to five, the remaining individuals manage multiple site systems, and supervise staff of 11 or more.

The expansion partners offer numerous locations, flexible hours, transportation, home visits, information and referrals, individualized learning and free or subsidized slots to eligible families in all 5 Lowell zip codes. All programs are dedicated to mobility and prospects of the families they serve, and each has received city, state and/or national awards for the quality of their instruction and/or PD. All programs serve non-English speakers, and staff speak various languages, including Spanish, Khmer, Vietnamese, Portuguese and English.

Each of the expansion partners on the PEG Committee are well known throughout Lowell for sound management practices, educator and classroom quality, and participation in the Massachusetts Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). All actively participate on the LECAC, and have strong links with human services, touching 50,000 people in CTI alone. All expansion sites have the interest, capacity, and organizational competence to open up slots in existing classrooms; to meet the teacher, classroom, comprehensive services and family engagement objectives in the Strategic Plan, and to commit to active, sustained participation in the PEG committee.

**Please see attached endorsements from the expansion partners.**

1. **Program Design and Development**

This section includes needs assessment results with implications for capacity, demand and unmet needs; teacher and program quality; and community and family needs. Sections B through F delineate objectives and strategies and emanate from the needs assessment data.

* 1. **Needs Assessment Results**

This Strategic Plan is based on rigorous study of recent research on the unmet needs of families, children, and educators; LPS data on capacity of the expansion partners to increase slots; infrastructure needed for expansion to occur; and increased capacity needed to better engage families in the community in a collaborative effort of growth and quality. Information for the Needs Assessment was generated via:

* A 72 question survey to expansion partners in Spring 2016 and five working meetings;
* A Spring 2016 Lowell Family Survey to 265 parents of young children from all Lowell Zip Codes;
* A focus group with nine different Lowell providers of services to at-risk or hard-to-reach families; and
* Five working meetings with expansion partners, including a full day retreat.

**Expansion Partner Capacity, Enrollment and Demand**

This section captures enrollment, capacity, capacity utilization and potential demand in order to place the scope of Lowell expansion in context.

More children need to participate in preschool in Lowell. According to LPS Data, over half (53%) of children enter the Lowell Public Schools kindergarten with no preschool experience. This percentage is consistent with data gathered in the Spring 2016 Lowell Family Survey distributed to parents with young children. In the Lowell Family Survey, nearly 50% of the parent respondents did not have their children enrolled in a program; 23% had children in the care of a family member or friend; and about the same percentage did not have a child enrolled in any program. Families next most frequently enrolled their children in Centers (18%); public schools (15%) and FCCs (14%). Moreover, just over half of the 263 parent respondents (56%) in the Lowell Family Survey, said they have enough early education or child care to meet their needs, with the remaining 46% saying either “no or not sure.”

Education indicators point to the need to continue to strengthen and expand Pre-K in Lowell.  DESE estimates that 61% of Lowell children do not attend Pre-K, compared with 40% statewide.  In the 3rd grade, retention of students (students who repeat a grade) is about equal to the state’s rate of .6%.  However, by the 9th grade, Lowell retention rates are 12.5%, compared to 5.7% statewide.  This data points to the importance of providing a strong early education foundation early on.

Hours of operation generally meet family needs, but transportation needs do not. Most of the expansion partners (78%) operate five days, with two sites operating six to seven days. All of the FCCs and some of the Centers (78% of the sites overall) operate in the summer and during school breaks, but about three-quarters of the partners say they are unable to meet the needs that families have for evenings, nights, weekends, and longer hours. With regard to daily hours of operation, all expansion partners operate for full days (mornings and afternoons) and report that their children tend to be enrolled for a full day, five days a week, with families generally satisfied with times offered. Similarly, in the Family Survey, the majority of parents (60%) prefer full day care. While nearly all of the expansion partners (78%) offer transportation assistance to their families, staff and families alike acknowledge a need for more transportation.

**While there is real need for childcare in Lowell, the expansion partners generally operate under capacity, and they need more stable enrollment.** The number of children enrolled among the seven expansion partners ranges from 90 to 548, and capacity utilization (enrollment/capacity) among the partners generally ranges from 70% to 99%. However, most expansion partners (63% overall and 100% of the FCCs), report that “there are often vacancies”, and the remaining 38% report there are sometimes vacancies.

**Expansion Partners’ Number of Classrooms, Enrollment, Capacity, Capacity Utilization, and Targeted Number of Expansion Slots**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Classrooms** | **Current Enrollment** | **Total Capacity** | **Capacity Utilization** | **Expansion Slots** |
| **Lowell Day Nursery (Center-Based)** | 6 | 90 | 109 | 83% | 20 |
| **Little Sprouts (Center-Based)** | 13 | 157 | 159 | 99% | 20 |
| **CTI Head Start** | 34 | 496 | 548 | 91% | 20 |
| **Acre Family Childcare (FCC system)** | 58 | 375 | 400 | 94% | 7 |
| **Bethel Family Child Care Services (FCC system)** | 12 | 50 | 80 | 70% | 7 |
| **Clarendon Early Education Services, Inc. (FCC system)** | 56 | 250 | 336 to 560 | 45% to 74% | 15 |
| **CTI FCC** | 47 | 216 | 318 | 70% | 7 |
| **Average Capacity Utilization** |  |  |  | 82% |  |

Additionally, according to the 2010 Census, there are on average, 1,541 children in each of the 3 year old and 4 year old age cohorts. Licensed capacity in Public Schools is 659.

The expansion partners operating under capacity are doing so not because of an inherent lack of demand on the part of families, or dramatic discrepancy between what families want in terms of hours and what providers offer. Rather, key contributors to lack of stability in enrollment include:

* Access and affordability. The Family Survey points to cost as the most important factor with regard to making it difficult to get early education or child care, which 53% of parents mention. Cost was a more important factor among the current PEG parents surveyed, where 80% mentioned costs as a barrier. While 60% of parents stated they have a need for full day child care (whether on a whole year or school year basis), more parents would choose a full day option if it was offered for free. When asked if they could have full day, high quality early education care, if they would use it, the vast majority (84%) said they would. The next most frequent barriers to getting child care include hours not meeting needs; not knowing where to get information on programs; and difficulty getting to the program, e.g. transportation.

Lowell has a higher percentage of residents who are poor compared with the State average. Between 2010 and 2014 there were 19,994 people in poverty in Lowell, or 19.1% of the population.  This poverty rate compares to 11.6% poverty statewide during the same time period.  Moreover, according to KIDS COUNT Data, in 2016, over half of the children in Lowell are considered “economically disadvantaged”.  The percentage of children who are economically disadvantaged in Lowell is 50.4%, compared with 27.4% statewide.

In the Lowell Family Survey, 27% of the parents report being eligible for some kind of financial assistance, while about the same percentage (26%) are not. However, nearly half (46%) are not sure, indicating more outreach is needed on financial assistance options. According to several expansion partners, when families age out of Infant/Toddler care, they find that they cannot afford pre-K. One expansion partner’s goal for PEG funding is to be able to continually serve children from toddler to preschool – to serve more children as they age up. The program also seeks to ensure smooth transitions of children emerging out of Early Intervention (EI). Sixty-two percent of the expansion partners say they have a waitlist, despite there frequently being vacancies. Waitlists tends to consist of younger children - infants and toddlers. The expansion partners need to be better able to inform placement of children through utilization of data, create stable demand for preschool among families; provide more transportation for families, and more financial assistance, particularly for low-income families who are ineligible for financial assistance.

* **Financial structure of FCCs**. According to the expansion partners, particularly the FCCs, underutilization of childcare hurts both families and providers. When FCCs cannot keep their slots filled and their required income drops, they sometimes close their programs. When enrollment increases and funding is restored, parents need care and cannot find it. According to the expansion partners, this dynamic has been occurring for at least a few years. A Spring 2016 focus group was held consisting of representatives from organizations and agencies providing services to at-risk families – Community Teamwork; Greater Lowell Pediatrics; Head Start; International Institute, Lowell Community Health Center, LPS; South Bay Mental Health, and Thom Anne Sullivan Child and Family Services. The focus group respondents agreed that understaffed systems in Lowell prevent classrooms opening up. For example, there are not enough slots for Head Start in Lowell, especially ages three to five years old.
* Barriers at-risk families face, according to the providers in the Spring 2016 focus group, include job schedules, unrealistic Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) requirements, classes, transportation, language, awareness of how to access financial support such as vouchers, long and confusing waitlists, confusing paperwork, and cultural and trust issues. When parents start working, they often lose their vouchers. Families in EI often say they are afraid of group care, according to one of the center-based expansion partners. These issues speak to a continuing need to reach out to families who are not aware of pre-K opportunities or able to pay for them yet need more services. Refugee families often are under enrolled and need community support/advocacy. Some parents do not know what a classroom or school program looks like. There is a continued need for inclusion of everyone that touches children and families (faith based organizations, housing, parents, pediatricians, library, family playgroups), because so many families (47%) are not sending their children to preschool. The PEG will help fund initiatives to more effectively reach underserved communities and families within them.

PEG would improve parents’ ability to access care with a fuller picture of where there is capacity in the Lowell, and what the potential demand is.

**Estimated demand for preschool is 1,171 preschool age children in Lowell.** Data collected to inform capacity, demand, and unmet need for early childhood education and care includes the population of Lowell children by age; capacity among the public school, FCC, and center-based expansion partners; compared with information on demand for preschool in Lowell. Assuming 1,541 children per single age cohort, per Census 2010 birth to 5th grade average above, 53% enter kindergarten with no prior preschool, which is equivalent to 817 kindergarten students per year (53% of 1,541).A Massachusetts survey showed 85% of families with preschool-age children expressed interest in enrolling their child in a high-quality early education program. Therefore, the total number of children likely to enroll is estimated to be 1,171 children.

**Estimated Demand for Preschool in Lowell and Expansion Slots as a Percentage of Estimated Demand**

**Four Year Olds Demand:` 85% of 1,541 = 1,310 total slots needed to meet likely demand. Up to 231 likely to decline (15% of 1,541)**

**Three and Four Year Old Demand:** 85% of 3,082 (1,541 x 2) = **2,620** total slots needed to meet likely demand

**Target Children (Not Enrolled, but Likely to Enroll): 817** estimated Kindergarten children without pre-K experience **– 231** children likely to decline = a demand for pre-K for **586** children per single age cohort, or **1,171** three and four year olds

**Expansion Slots as a Percentage of Total Estimated Demand: 176/1,171** demand for slots by 3 and 4 year olds = **15%**

Expansion slots will meet 15% of total estimated demand for pre-K across 3 and 4 year old cohorts.

Sources: Local kindergarten screening data provided by two-district project; Opinion Dynamics Corporation (2006). Early Education Survey of Massachusetts Households. Commissioned by Strategies for Children.

**Teacher Capacity and Program Quality Needs**

**Finding high quality staff can be challenging in Lowell, with the expansion partners saying they are finding it “more difficult over time to replace staff who are leaving**.” The expansion partners “somewhat agree” they can find staff with experience in early education; who can work with children from culturally different backgrounds; and who have degrees or training in early education. They are “neutral” about their ability to find staff who can teach and nurture children with special needs; and staff who have degrees in early education.

Ability to Find Qualified Staff (N=10)

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Strongly Agree

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Average Rating** |
| **I can find staff with experience in the early education field** | 3.4 |
| **I can find staff to work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds** | 3.4 |
| **I can find staff with degrees or training in early education** | 3.0 |
| **I can find staff with ability to teach and nurture children with special needs** | 3.2 |

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

When asked how easy or difficult it has been to fill positions in the past two years, half overall (50%) and 67% of FCCs said it is “extremely difficult”.

How easy or difficult has it been for you to fill positions in the past two years? (N=8)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Level of Difficulty** | **Percentage of Mentions All Sites** | **FCC Only** |
| **Extremely easy** | 0% | 0% |
| **Somewhat easy** | 13% | 0% |
| **Neither easy nor difficult** | 0% | 0% |
| **Somewhat difficult** | 0% | 0% |
| **Extremely difficult** | 50% | 67% |
| **Depends on staff role** | 38% | 33% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** |

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

**Expansion partners are high quality, tend to be part of larger system, and are well established in Lowell.** The vast majority of expansion partners (87%) are part of a multi-site program. All have been operating for over ten years. All partners utilize curricula linked with Early Learning Guidelines. Two-thirds of the partners’ curricula are aligned with the K-12 curriculum. All programs conduct developmental screenings, with most partners – and all of the FCCs –utilizing Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). All partners use TSG to administer formative assessment. The frequency with which they use TSG varies among the expansion partners. Still, for many educators, attending and completing academic programs is close to impossible. Therefore, expansion partners assert that an educator who is advancing on the QRIS, has been supervised by family child care system staff for many years, and has provided quality child care, should be recognized for his/her merit.

**Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores show classroom quality in the mid-high range for Emotional Support and Classroom Organization; and low-mid range for Instructional Support**. Lowell has created a common definition of program quality across the entire birth to grade 3 system, and effective teaching is a cornerstone of recent Lowell Birth to Grade Three Alignment work. Lowell’s work using the CLASS as a unifying framework to understand and implement high quality programs is unprecedented in Massachusetts and has received national attention. Lowell conducted CLASS observations in over 50 elementary, pre-k, toddler and family child care homes. There have been extended conversations on classroom quality and on education leadership on the importance of using the CLASS tool in all early elementary classrooms. Early Childhood Associates (ECA) a social science research firm, held informational meetings with school teams, administrators and the alignment team to learn about the benefits of using the tool and application for PD and ways it is supporting higher quality instruction/interactions. ECA launched a concerted effort to include the family child care system in this effort. We now have a series of guidelines and recommendations to implement the CLASS findings.

The most recent CLASS Summary Report for the Lowell Birth to Grade Three Alignment Grant (ECA, Spring 2015) shows average CLASS Scores of 47 teachers in Lowell who work across the Infant/Toddler, Preschool, Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 age groups. With regard to the pre-K classrooms:

* Average scores for the Emotional Support Domain are in the high-mid range of 5.7, and they are nearly identical across all types of settings in Lowell, e.g. Centers, FCCs, public schools. The overall Lowell average for the Emotional Support Domain is below the National average score of 6.1.
* Average scores for the Classroom Organization Domain range from 4.7 for FCCs to 5.0 for Centers, with the LPS in the middle. All scores are in the mid to high-mid range. As with the Emotional Support Domain, all of these scores are below the National average score of 5.8.
* Average scores for the Instructional Support Domain range from 2.5 in FCCs to 3.0 in Centers. While Lowell pre-K FCCs Instructional Support scores are lower than the National average, center-based and Public School pre-K Instructional Support scores exceed the National average of 2.9 but are not at the level associated with gains in child outcomes.

A majority of the partners overall (86%) and all of the FCCs (100%) participate in the Massachusetts Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), with 78% at level 2 or 3. Partners are utilizing QRIS to select PD and evaluate staff. The expansion partners report wanting to continue to improve their QRIS rating, saying that more support is needed to achieve higher levels, specifically, more support is needed for BA level teachers; the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS); funding for more localized PD; and more trainings in different languages.

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

The expansion partners report many indicators of program quality. Collectively, they are proud of their close work with the community; 15 years of accreditation; loyalty and dedication of staff to the program, children and families; their family supports; and curriculum. All “agree to strongly agree” that their program has had a sustained impact on the children that is built upon in subsequent years; that their staff is familiar with learning and development standards for the ages below and above those with which they work. However, they are more neutral about staff having the necessary knowledge, skills and support to enhance the development and learning of children with whom they work, and families fully understanding what is expected of children’s learning. Two-thirds of the expansion partners report that support for educators to improve classroom quality and differentiate instruction is not adequate.

**Most (86%) of the expansion partners’ staff, with proportionately more center-based programs providing this benefit, receive health insurance through their work, partially paid by the program.**

The benefits that programs provide compared with FCCs varies. Center-based programs provide paid holidays, vacation and sick time, life/accident insurance, child care discounts, back up child care in one case. FCC systems provide paid holidays and earned sick time according to their state contract.  Centers provide other professional supports for staff, including paid preparation and planning time, paid time to attend staff meeting after work, overtime paid time for parent meetings, paid release time to attend onsite in-service trainings and offsite trainings. FCC Systems also provide other professional supports for their educators, including assessment and curriculum support, arrangement of back-up care for closures, technical assistance in applying for QRIS/UPK Grants, and professional development training and/or reimbursement, and paid release time to attend onsite in-service trainings and offsite trainings.  Centers are more likely to provide paid lunch breaks/breaks, and cost of living increases.

A consistent, skilled, diverse and appropriately compensated early childhood workforce are cornerstones to providing high quality education and care, but compensating educators in Lowell continues to be a challenge since the expansion partners report that their staff most often leave for a higher paying position.

**Reasons for Staff Turnover (N=8)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reason for Staff Turnover** | **Percentage of Mentions** |
| **Left for higher paying position** | 78% |
| **Personal/Respite** | 33% |
| **Other (career change/moved out of area)** | 22% |
| **Dissatisfied with schedule** | 11% |
| **Terminated/Fired** | 11% |
| **More work hours needed** | 11% |
| **More contact with other providers** | 11% |
| **Dissatisfied with PD opportunities** | 0% |
| **Laid Off** | 0% |
| **Retired** | 0% |

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

Similarly, the most important work incentive, identified by all respondents is “better pay” followed by more respect for their position.

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

Likewise, increased pay was the most frequently cited way to improve retention rates (60%), followed by keeping enrollment at capacity (20%), more accessibility, and more money for families.

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

The chart below shows that the main barriers to PD for expansion partners are being able to attend PD during the school day and costs being too high. Barriers to participation in PD vary between Centers and FCC systems.Centers are more likely to report that PD is not offered at convenient times or location; getting substitutes, and transportation is difficult. FCCs are more likely to report that there is not enough time to participate in PD; cost is too high; and not enough information about opportunities is available.

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

The largest challenges to running a high quality early care and education program continue to be the interrelated issues of not being able to retain teachers with enough pay, and finding qualified educators. Other key challenges identified were enrollment/accessibility/affordability of pre-K for families. Meeting QRIS requirements, Continuing Education Units (CEU), language barriers, costs, transportation were also mentioned but less frequently.

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

Lowell Family Needs

Parent respondents in the Family Survey (N=265) identified the “most to least important” aspects of a program that influence enrollment decisions. As the Table below shows, respondents rated all items to be important. They ascribed critical importance to qualified teachers; clean child care space; the ability of the program to prepare their children for kindergarten; convenient hours; and teachers teaching English to their child. Affordability and location were also important factors.

What Matters Most To You When Choosing A Program Or FCC?

1=Least Important; 3=Most Important;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Program Quality that Matters Most to Families** | **All Respondents** | **PEG only (N=15)** |
| **Teachers are qualified** | 2.98 | 2.93 |
| **The child care space is clean** | 2.97 | 3.00 |
| **This program will prepare my child for kindergarten** | 2.95 | 3.00 |
| **The hours meet my needs** | 2.90 | 2.93 |
| **The teachers teach English to my child** | 2.90 | 2.53 |
| **I can afford it** | 2.85 | 2.93 |
| **The center or family childcare is close to my home** | 2.77 | 2.73 |
| **The program serves lunch/other meals** | 2.74 | 2.60 |
| **The teachers speak my home language** | 2.73 | 2.00 |
| **The center or family childcare is free** | 2.72 | 2.71 |
| **The program provides transportation** | 2.72 | 2.36 |
| **I have friends or family who are in the program or have been in it** | 2.67 | 1.53 |

Lowell Family Survey Spring 2016

**How successfully do programs engage with families and improve family outcomes?** Lowell expansion partners reside in a community where comprehensive services and family engagement are a central component of children’s education and life prospects.All of the expansion partners report providing suggestions to families around how learning can be supported at home. Nearly all (89%) work with families to make decisions on children’s learning. They provide families with materials to use at home with their children, and hold regular conferences to discuss children’s development. The center-based programs are more likely to communicate regularly through notes, etc. to families. The FCCs, on the other hand, are more likely to offer family workshops and work with families to plan field trips. However, all expansion partners agree that “We are missing opportunities to involve/educate families.”

How Expansion Partners Engage Families (N=9)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Method of Family Engagement** | **Percentage of Mentions All Sites** | **FCC Only** |
| **Provide suggestions to families on how to support learning at home** | 100% | 67% |
| **Work along with families to make decisions about children’s learning** | 89% | 67% |
| **Provide family with materials to engage children in learning at home** | 78% | 67% |
| **Communicate regularly with families through notes, phone calls, and newsletters** | 78% | 33% |
| **Hold regular conferences to discuss child’s development and learning** | 67% | 100% |
| **Offer family workshops/events consistently** | 56% | 100% |
| **Ask family members to volunteer in the classroom** | 56% | 67% |
| **Offer language translation** | 56% | 67% |
| **Have a space dedicated to parents and family resources** | 44% | 33% |
| **Work with families to plan field trips** | 33% | 67% |
| **Other** | 11% | 0% |

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

With regard to transitions from preschool to kindergarten, all of the expansion partners help familiarize parents with kindergarten routines and expectations; and nearly all share information about children who are transitioning to kindergarten with the public schools. To a lesser degree, both Centers and FCCs have children visit kindergarten classrooms. However, the transition data below show that there is room to inject more types of transition activities, especially on the part of the FCC systems.

Transition Activity among Expansion Partners (N=10)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Transition Activity** | **Percentage of Mentions All Sites** | **FCC Only** |
| **Get parents familiar with kindergarten routines and expectations** | 100% | 67% |
| **Share information about children who are transitioning to kindergarten with the public schools** | 80% | 100% |
| **Have children visit a kindergarten classroom** | 40% | 33% |
| **Meet with kindergarten teachers** | 20% | 0% |
| **Hold meetings between preschool and kindergarten staff** | 20% | 0% |
| **Offer transition workshops for parents** | 20% | 0% |
| **Have staff visit a kindergarten classroom** | 10% | 0% |
| **Other** | 0% | 0% |

Lowell Expansion Partner Survey Winter 2016

**The most important factors in making it easier for parents to participate in their child’s program are convenient times and feeling welcome, followed by the location of the program**. Staff speaking their language, knowing other parents, having child care for their other children or having attendance mandatory were less important.

In the Spring 2016 Lowell Family Survey, parents most frequently mentioned they need places to have fun with their child followed by transportation. A large percentage said they needed basic services: 35% need help with health and wellness; 34% needed financial assistance to participate in early care; 31% needed help with food; 26% English as Second Language (ESL), and 23% housing. They next cited help with speech and language, health and wellness, places to be with other parents and children, and financial assistance. Housing is a higher service priority for the PEG families, as is transportation, and help with school transitions.

**Family Needs for Services/Activities (N=251)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Services** | **% of Families** | **Percent of Current PEG (N=14)** |
| **Places I can go to play or have fun with my child** | 50% | 36% |
| **Transportation** | 40% | 50% |
| **Help with my child’s speech and language development** | 37% | 29% |
| **Help with health and wellness (physical and behavioral)** | 35% | 14% |
| **Places I can go to be with other parents and children my child’s age** | 35% | 7% |
| **Financial assistance to participate in an early child care program or home** | 34% | 21% |
| **Help with food** | 31% | 36% |
| **English Language Learning (ESL)** | 26% | 7% |
| **Help with housing** | 23% | 43% |
| **Adult Basic Education/GED/HS Diploma** | 19% | 0% |
| **Help moving my child from one program to another one** | 19% | 29% |
| **A library** | 15% | 7% |
| **Early Intervention (ages 0 to 3)** | 15% | 14% |
| **Home visiting** | 10% | 0% |

Lowell Family Survey Spring 2016

**Meeting the needs of many Lowell families continues to be challenging**. The Spring 2016 focus group with organizations that provide services for hard-to-reach and at-risk families, highlighted many challenges that families continue to face, which this Strategic Plan addresses. The focus group made it clear that more discussion and research is needed on how to get families enrolled and involved, and to explore what comprehensive services are needed before enrolling a child in a program. They noted that the quality of programs is not often a first priority for at-risk families. At-risk families often look for openings close to home, meals, or transportation. When parents do find programs, the complexity of social, medical, and basic needs they demonstrate makes it difficult for programs to serve them adequately. The focus group respondents said there is a need for a more therapeutic model in programs for children with trauma. Children presenting autism and trauma do not do well currently in group care. They identified CSS as a service that, while no longer funded in Lowell, should be reinstated because it addressed many issues this population faces. The CSS Model provided immediate referral and support through a neighborhood-based traveling team of service staff. Interpreters are lacking and are costly for agencies. There is a need to explore how to better share costs and for a community wide plan.

There are plans already in place between the Lowell Public Schools, the International Institute, and EI to provide case management for families. However, resources are stretched according to service providers. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often are not able to be supported in preschool FCC or Center systems. LPS services are squeezed. There is not enough capacity in Lowell to provide services to all the families who need it, and families often are not aware of which services exist.

1. **Teacher Capacity and Program Quality**

**Objective: Involve all mixed service delivery settings in expansion to enhance choice and allow fluidity between partners in placing children.**

**Strategies:**

* Develop criteria to prioritize placing children. For example, increasing capacity/slots to a mix of family incomes, while prioritizing families in high need underachieving neighborhoods.
* Employ a center-based combined with FCC PEG model. Utilize open slots in both Centers and FCCs that meet Federal criteria PEG.
* Serve an additional 176 preschoolers in Lowell’s mixed service delivery system with about 30% of children co-located with non-PEG children in four FCC System programs: Community Teamwork Inc. (CTI), Acre Family Childcare, Bethel Family Child Care Services, Clarendon Family Day Care and three center-based programs, Lowell Day Nursery; Little Sprouts and CTI Head Start. Of these, 96 will be placed in open slots available in one of the seven partners, anchored by teachers with BAs. The estimated number of 3 and 4 year olds not enrolled in Lowell preschool but likely to enroll is 1,171 children. Therefore, 176 children is 15% of this estimated demand.
* Place an additional 40 children in an FCC home-based Pilot, with educators who have an Associates Degree and meet other quality criteria. Support these educators with mentors who will help them select coursework and PD, and add additional onsite supports. Since FCCs serve mixed ages, and not just preschoolers, FCC partners may choose to create preschool age-only homes/settings, or integrate the PEG children into mixed home/settings. The goal is not to take a child out of a home or shuffle children from one home to another so that a participating FCC educator would only have PEG qualified children.

**Expansion Partners Plans for Expansion Year 1**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Lowell PEG Expansion System/Program Name** | **Total Classrooms** | **Total Current Slots** | **Estimated Open Slots\*** |
| **Lowell Day Nursery Center-Based** | 6 | 109 | 20 |
| **Little Sprouts Center-Based** | 13 | 159 | 20 |
| **CTI Head Start** | 34 | 548 | 20 |
| **Acre Family Childcare (FCC system)** | 58 | 400 | 7 |
| **Bethel Family Child Care Services (FCC system)** | 12 | 80 | 7 |
| **Clarendon Family Day Care (FCC system)** | 56 | 448 | 15 |
| **CTI FCC** | 47 | 318 | 7 |
| **Subtotal of Slots in Classrooms with Bachelor Degreed Teachers** |  |  | **96** |
| **FCC Pilot across programs with AA educators tracking to BA (equivalent of two classrooms)** |  |  | 40 |
| **Two Mobile Classrooms (Year 2) located at LPS** |  |  | 40 |
| **Total Children. SFC estimates 3-4 year old children not enrolled but likely to enroll at 1,171. Therefore, we aim to serve 15% of this estimate, or 176 children.** |  |  | **176** |

* Hire seven Program Administrative Assistants to assist FCC system directors and center-based administrators at participating expansion sites so that the leaders can better support teachers and manage various aspects of the PEG initiative.
* Hire nine Teacher Assistants to work in each of these sites, including the FCC home-based sites.
* Expand capacity in Year 2 by opening up new slots through the use of mobile/modular classrooms. In Year 2, utilize PEG funding for two mobile classrooms to hold up to 40 children, both of which would meet licensing regulations, to be housed initially at a Lowell Public School. Pre-fabricated annex facilities units represent a quick, movable option to create additional high quality slots. Consider initially placing the mobile classrooms at the Lowell Public Schools to be able to access LPS services. Because these facilities are portable, they can be moved into other parts of the city when enough permanent quality slots are available in a given neighborhood. Locate the units in two areas with a high number of four years olds and a low number of quality slots available, and on properties offering shared access to playgrounds.

**Objective: Improve data utilization to support and inform outreach and placement of children, and to increase stabilization of enrollment in the expansion programs and systems.**

**Strategies:**

* Hire four Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators who would work in Lowell’s neighborhoods to manage the recruitment process and slot allocation to maximize provider capacity. The Family Recruiters will reach out to families, pediatricians, and social services to obtain referrals for children who may need preschool. They will collaborate with the PEG Data Subcommittee and expansion partner Program Administrative Assistants to conduct a slot assessment and allocate slots. The Family Recruiters will serve a dual function as a Resource Navigator and will lead families to other services as needed.
* Form a PEG Data Subcommittee to collect, and analyze information on underserved children and families to inform the work of the Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators. The Subcommittee will locate preschool openings in Lowell, and determine why some programs are under capacity and others are over capacity.

**Objective: Develop a transportation infrastructure that includes new leasing arrangements.**

**Strategies:**

* Develop coordinated interagency transportation. Implement a transportation system to transport children who do not have a high quality facility within one-half mile of their home. In Year 1, contract with a reliable, licensed transportation already utilized in Lowell. Assign one of the five PEG subcommittees to focus on analyzing and developing a transportation infrastructure.
* Identify levels of need for transportation. Fund transportation to and from the expansion partner sites for high-need eligible families. Expand transportation options such as bus subsidies (bus passes, etc.) for parents. Depending upon trends in use, consider purchasing a bus in subsequent years.

**Objective: Develop a tiered educator qualification Pilot in two FCC sites among expansion partners as a first step in developing a competency based strategy for determining which educators across the mixed service delivery system are qualified for leading expansion efforts.**

**Strategies:**

* Anchor the Strategic Plan in the Federal BA requirement for Centers and FCCs participating in PEG with a cohort of educators with BAs.
* Pilot a Tiered Qualifications Model in Year 1 with 40 children served in FCC settings where educators have at least two years of college or an Associate’s degree. Carefully select educators for the Tiered Qualification Pilot based on experience, QRIS rating, core competency assessment, CLASS scores, accreditation, participation in Universal pre-K (UPK) or other initiatives, degree reciprocity from other countries, a commitment to both stay with the program and work toward their BA, or another specific quality improvement benchmark. The PEG subcommittee on Teacher Capacity and Program Quality will monitor Pilot educator performance. Provide Pilot educators access to an MA or BA level educator to provide oversight and support, and co-teaching for their work. Pay the Pilot educators a stipend ranging from $1,000 to $2,500 yearly to advance course work, one full or part time Teacher Assistant per educator, and up to $5,000 for funding for quality improvements in the home. FCC educators without a BA will receive mentoring to support coursework and degree attainment.

**Objective: Use funding to adequately compensate BA teachers and to develop a more predictable revenue stream for participating FCCs and Centers that is sustainable over time.**

**Strategies:**

* Establish a payment structure for both Centers and FCCs equivalent to salaries of BA level educators in public schools. Provide FCCs, who do operate on a salary structure, with administrative funding or stipend add-ons per child equivalent to Public School and center-based salaries and proportional to the number of children served.
* Use funding to provide other professional supports, including flexible staff support – time off, incentives, paid curriculum planning time, education stipends, and reimbursement for courses.

**Objective: Design strategies that increase QRIS and accountability.**

**Strategies:**

* Use a hybrid quality criterion consisting of either QRIS Level 4 or accreditation as the Year 3 benchmark. Ensure that all programs participating in the QRIS system are committed to improving QRIS ratings, and/or demonstrating quality through accreditation, documented action plans and quarterly reporting.
* Hold professional learning communities with participating PEG educators once or twice a month to collaborate, share ideas, and issues related to QRIS, CLASS, and curriculum alignment.
* Fund quality improvement initiatives consistent with programs’ QRIS goals and to ensure skill development for children for greater school success: oral language, social/emotional development, and foundational skills.
* Use expansion funding to increase coaching around quality improvement for all setting types. Hire two coaches with BAs available for each site for a half to one day weekly to ensure proper training, implementation and familiarity with preschool guidelines. Support coaches on how to help educators better understand what the QRIS levels look like in practice to provide TA to improve quality, for example, on how to use ECERS and CLASS data to move through QRIS. Offer participating FCC educators coaching and site visits weekly to provide added support for the PEG initiative.

**Objective: Extend PEG PD benefits to programs beyond the PEG classrooms or homes to non-PEG educators working at the expansion programs and homes.**

**Strategies:**

* Leverage costs of PD by extending PD to Non-PEG educators. Hire a core group of PD providers, a network of trainers that will rotate to each expansion program or system, and be available to all teachers in the program or system. Apply the following criteria: (1) Every training must be tied to core competencies; (2) Training will link to professional goals and align with K-3 competencies. For example, the needs assessment data points to a need for PD on QRIS; differentiating instruction; and addressing development and learning needs of all children; and (3) Training delivery should address barriers to PD unique to Centers (time, location, getting substitutes, transportation) and FCCs (time, cost, the need for information on PD opportunities).
* Provide perks for non-PEG programs who meet the following criteria:
* A QRIS Level 2 rating
* Ongoing PD towards accreditation, higher QRIS level or degree
* Fully using TSG for all children in their program
* Linking their curriculum to MA Preschool Standards

Providers who wish to participate in the PEG PD must submit an application and be accepted as a high quality provider.

* Hire an administrator to introduce and/or increase use of CLASS in all expansion sites and settings. The administrator will require three to four hours a week with teams.
* The PEG subcommittee on teacher capacity and classroom quality will help plan how PD on curriculum and assessment will be shared across partners, and provide leadership in making connections between PD, professional competence and child outcomes.

1. **Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement**

**Objective: Use PEG funding to better meet the needs of the many families in Lowell that emerge in the needs assessment by enacting new policies and a Hub Model to deliver services more effectively to families.**

**Strategies:**

* Form a Comprehensive Services Subcommittee/Policy Group. This subcommittee will determine policy around hard to reach and high risk families. The subcommittee will delve into issues such as: What infrastructure would help this population? What services do each of these populations need, e.g. more psychologists/doctors to diagnose ASD, summer programs, and other specialized programs. It would identify best policies to increase access to families quickly. It will determine who will handle referrals to comprehensive services and who will provide them; provide more coordination between systems and providers who support families. The Subcommittee will consider ways to share resources, cross training efforts between agencies. A key goal of the Comprehensive Services Subcommittee will be enhanced outreach/utilization of pediatricians who continue to be an important link between hard to reach families and needed services. The Committee will determine metrics of success and tracking mechanisms.
* Utilize a Hub Model. Target three Hubs: The North American Family Institute (NFI); Greater Lowell Pediatrics; and Lowell Community Health Center, which all serve high risk families. The Hub Model provides a centralized or one-stop resource and referral approach in different locations in the City in multiple languages. The North American Family Institute Hub for example, could be started with cross system staff and resources from across the community. Consider an Early Childhood team located at LCHC and Greater Lowell Pediatrics with Social Work support and transitions between healthcare and early childhood.

**Objective: Implement the Children Support Services (CSS) Model to Support At-Risk Children and Families**

**Strategies:**

* The CSS team would meet once a month for on-going case management of referred children. Based on referral needs, they would spend four to six weeks in each expansion setting and would model strategies and/or train teachers. Hire a Behavioral Specialist as part of the Model.
* Evaluate other Models and strategies:
* Funding one to one/additional paraprofessionals in FCC settings and classrooms to work with at risk children who present with Social-Emotional, behavioral, mental health and/or trauma related challenges.
* Revisiting the CPC Model
* Assessing the need for more playgroups

**Objective: On a neighborhood level, support family-school connections, build families’ understanding of child development and ways to support children’s learning at home, and refer families to other services as needed.**

**Strategies:**

* Identify four Resource Navigators (who also serve as Family Recruiters) to connect families to education, health and community resources. Every expansion site will be assigned one of the Resource Navigators to connect families with health and community resources. Clusters will consist of two expansion sites located within a reasonable radius. The Resource Navigators will be stationed at a site central to his/her cluster of sites and link up with one of the Hubs in the Hub Model for access to nurses, social workers, and counselors. The Resource Navigators will work with families to distribute services and avoid duplication. They will assess the individual needs of the students and families to make the appropriate connections with professional and community resources. This strategy holds the greatest potential for alignment with the Lowell Public Schools and it links with the Schools’ Family Engagement-Outreach Model. Finally, the Resource Navigators would be responsible for creating family events, coordinating parenting workshops and classes, building awareness of the importance of the role of the parent as a partner in schooling, and support recruiting for 3 year old placement as necessary.
* Family engagement activities, including support for the kindergarten transition and information and resources about child development, will take place through informational Parent Meetings/Cafés throughout the City to reach and educate parents. Hold resource fairs through the Hub Model above on a regular basis, once a month. Hold “Community Fairs” events in Lowell’s neighborhoods. Host events at WIC and at different agencies. Include community leaders in these events to change culture and attitudes about family engagement on a broader basis. Community leaders can be funded to host the community events for families where educators provide information on the community-wide initiatives and resources. Host monthly sessions at a different community business location each time. Fund a series of Kindergarten Information Nights across the city to provide information for parents and providers about ways to prepare children for kindergarten, expectation for students and families moving into kindergarten and tips for ensuring smooth transitions.
* Implement a community-wide early education awareness campaign to elevate understanding of what preschool is and how to access it within a mixed delivery system for parents and other community stakeholders. Implement community education across sectors including businesses and health care providers on the importance of early education.
* Through the proposed PEG subcommittee, conduct a review of the leadership landscape and convene to discuss the current system and additional vision for the community.
* The PEG subcommittee on Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement will develop an education and advocacy campaign to be disseminated to stakeholders, business leaders, and community groups. Incorporate lessons learned from the federal PEG advocacy and outreach.
* Develop/promote an on-line Hub for providers to identify and locate resources to respond to needs.

1. **Inclusion**

**Objective: Improve the delivery of inclusion services by serving PEG children onsite through the hiring a grant funded part-time Intervention Team. Fully utilize the LPS expertise and experience to manage and implement inclusion services.**

**Strategies:**

* As part of an embedded, inclusive, and on-site service delivery system within the expansion classrooms and FCC homes, the LPS will hire a grant funded part-time Intervention Team, comprised of special education staff representing the areas of academic support, speech and language, occupational therapy, and/or physical therapy. The Intervention team would serve approximately 10 children on IEP’s in year one and approximately 15 children on IEP’s in year two based on 6.9% of our anticipated enrollment of 136 children in year one and 176 in year two.
* The team will visit the expansion settings on a regular basis to work with small groups of children, conduct screenings, provide recommendations for FCC /classroom modifications, and make referrals for further evaluation via the LPS Special Education Department, if needed. In addition, any children already identified with disabilities and on an IEP would receive their services via this Intervention Team, according to the services specified in the IEP. This model results in little to no disruption or transition of children needing services and provides direct support and intervention in the expansion settings for all children enrolled.
* As needed, the LPS will enhance service delivery through the incorporation of an ELL teacher if for consultation and support for dual language learners, refugees, or newcomers. The Intervention Team will have access to the LPS Special Education and ELL’s Department networks for training, PD, workshops and resources in order to provide the necessary supports and services needed to deliver high-quality curriculum modifications and instruction to support individual children’s needs.
* Family communication will take place in several different ways. At each of the expansion sites, teachers will gather input from families and caregivers through a variety of strategies including home visits, regular face-to-face communication with parents at arrival and dismissal times, parent conferences, phone calls and/or emails. In addition, the use of Kaymbu (a licensed software), will be an additional source of communication through photos, e-mail, and daily notes to parents to highlight learning taking place on a daily basis. Kaymbu has proven to be an effective strategy for family communication and engagement in the current PEG program. Also, the use of the Language Line, with over 100 languages available for translation, will be explored via the LPS subscription for access and use by the expansion partners. Individual parent support and small group parent trainings will be provided to families to strengthen parenting skills, parents’ knowledge of child development, and the implementation of new strategies within the home to support the child’s growth and promote success.
* At each of the expansion sites, teachers will utilize Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) as their formative assessment system to measure children’s developmental growth and progress throughout the year. The data observed, collected, and recorded about children’s progress will serve as the foundation for various reports in the form of individual, classroom and program profiles that can be used for planning instruction, documenting response to interventions, and sharing with parents/families.
* As our model provides for an on-site delivery model for the provision of services for children with disabilities, transportation would be provided by the LPS, as outlined on the IEP, for any child not able to be serviced within the inclusive expansion setting for IEP services. This may occur if a specific disability such as vision, hearing was not able to be served by the traveling Intervention Team. The transportation to/from that service for the child would be provided by the LPS. In discussing transportation of children within the overall program, and knowing that some provision of transportation definitely bolsters access, enrollment, and retention especially for at-risk families, the program will employ transportation as a comprehensive service for families. Transportation services for children with high needs will be determined by established and agreed upon criteria found within a tool, as the one currently used by CTI/Head Start and the current PEG program. This tool identifies and ranks levels of need and subsequent eligibility for transportation, making the designation of need for transportation a consistent and equitable process. It is anticipated that approximately 25% of enrolled children will receive transportation as a comprehensive service. The funds needed for this service is based on a daily cost of $25.00 per child over 261 days.
* The Intervention Team hired by the LPS would also provide screening and assessment for any children suspected of a disability or presenting with potential need for services. By working in collaboration with the ELP staff to support children at-risk or in need of modifications, the ELP staff will develop skill and support in providing modifications for children. Screening opportunities are also available on a monthly basis for children ages 0-5 through the LPS Early Childhood Department. Any referrals made to the LPS Special Education Department for evaluation of expansion site children would be completed by the LPS.

**Objective: Continue to provide strong LPS Early Childhood Department transition services and family resources in close collaboration with the expansion partners.**

**Strategies:**

* Through the collaboration between the LPS and the ELP expansion sites, the sites would have access to the LPS Early Childhood Department and Family Resource Center staff for transition to Kindergarten. Orientation sessions for parents, school tours, and meetings with receiving school staff could be facilitated by the LPS in collaboration with the ELPs. Children within the expansion settings that move up to Kindergarten will have their TSG records transferred over to the receiving teachers.
* Lowell already has a multi-faceted approach within the community that has developed and strengthened overtime to support children and families transitioning into and out of various settings and services. This can serve as a foundation for the new program. As Lowell Public Schools is the lead agent for the CFCE and other grants, these have served to position us well to support these important transitions through personal contact, support and outreach to families via our network of partners. Through our CFCE grant, we have extensive partner collaborations in which to support transitions for children and families via transition meetings and data sharing between programs and families. As children continue on in the LPS after Kindergarten, the District has recently worked on a realignment plan for all special education and newcomer children in order to maintain their participation in programming within one school for the duration of their elementary years, Pre-K-4, to avoid transitions to/from schools in order to maintain consistency, build relationships, and provide continuity.

**Objective: Improve transitions from EI for parents to FCCs and Centers by hiring a Transition Coordinator; identify how to build on Lowell’s strong investment in EI and other outreach campaigns (e.g. Lowell Legacy) to better meet families’ health and mental health needs; and do more screening.**

**Strategies:**

* Hire a Transition Coordinator to provide information/access to additional supports for children and families and to share screening for better outcomes and continuity of care after EI. The Transition Coordinator will identify, with assistance from the PEG Data Subcommittee, the schools/programs/systems where better transitions are needed. The Transition Coordinator will facilitate PEG partners absorbing EI children as a priority and make sure these children continue in their programs. The Transition Coordinator will collaborate with EI and the LPS to facilitate transitions as children move into early elementary school environments. The Transition Coordinator will go with parents to meetings, help them know what resources are available, work with teachers to better integrate the child in the classroom and provide assistance to the family after EI transitions. The Transition Coordinator will provide information/access to additional supports for children and families and share child’s screening for better outcomes and continuity of care after EI.
* Create a unified Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the LPS and agencies for sharing assessment information.
* Offer expansion partners trainings presented by EI Specialists on EI services, age cut-offs, importance of working with EI, transitioning children, working collaboratively with families involved with EI, screening children, and transitions to LPS support for continuation of needed services.

1. **Curriculum and Assessment**

**Objective: Align curriculum across the mixed service delivery system and link curricula to the Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines and the K-12 curriculum.**

**Strategies:**

* Align FCC and Center learning goals with regard to curricula, applying the following criteria:

(1) Curriculum implementation will be supported by high quality coaching;

(2) All curricula will maintain a multidisciplinary focus with individualized planning for all children;

(3) All curricula used will align with Early Learning standards; and

(4) All curricula will be aligned with K-12.

* Assess PD or coaching needs around curriculum and offer this through the PD network described above.
* Allocate funds or support to make sure educators are well trained in TSG, Curricula, and MA guidelines and that participating FCCs/Centers are utilizing TSG as intended.

1. **Birth to Grade 3 Alignment**

**Objective: Build and support leadership at all levels to influence policy and practice and to foster buy-in around the need for alignment.**

**Strategies:**

* Introduce the CLASS Scores generated from the Birth to Grade 3 Alignment Grant to principals and look at ways to move CLASS across the delivery system.
* Identify which aspects – from approaches to programs – of previous initiatives will benefit and contribute to the implementation of the expansion initiative. Examine the Birth to Grade 3 Alignment Model of interacting between families and educators; and examine the CFCE consumer orientation and support for children and families transitioning between programs, home and school.

1. **Plan for Costs and Sustainability**

The expansion program will benefit from the groundwork already established within the city of Lowell via its Lowell Legacy initiative. Several city-wide summits have been promoted by the Lowell Legacy via the Lowell Early Childhood Advisory Council, in which the community of Lowell with its key stakeholders has participated in awareness and knowledge building sessions about early childhood research, brain development, and advocacy for early childhood. In Spring 2016, an Early Childhood Symposium was held with local, state, and federal stakeholders present as guests, panel members, and speakers. This symposium served as a joint collaboration with Project LEARN, for which early childhood is one of its focus areas. With access to the local business community and a Board of Directors invested in early childhood, Project LEARN will serve as a strong expansion support for potential funding. Outcomes and progress from the expansion sites will be shared regularly both with the LECAC and Project LEARN over the duration of implementation.

As much as possible, the current PEG program will be a constant source of expertise, best practices, resource sharing, and use of collaborative funds to strengthen the new expansion program. This will be an important partnership to nurture and maintain. Shared resources and staffing will be a priority area of discussion.

Sustainability plans will be two-fold. First, one of the PEG Subcommittees will be assigned to explore funding sources, and create a development plan to achieve targeted financial goals. Second, in this Strategic Plan, sustainability is embedded strategically in key strategies identified above. The PEG Committee will make sure that evaluation measures track each initiative’s potential for sustaining the initiative over time, in terms of costs, implementation, and outcomes. Specific ways that PEG strategies embed sustainability are listed below.

* The Plan accounts for the reality that parents access different types of settings – Centers and FCCs. The FCC partners in particular struggle to maintain capacity. New slots combined with community outreach through PEG will contribute to the expansion partners’ sustainability.
* The Strategic Plan is grounded in the knowledge that outreach and access is best sustained at the neighborhood level. This concept is infused into the Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators, CSS, and Hub Models proposed.
* The Strategic Plan is based on the premise that high quality teaching can be nurtured and developed given real constraints to furthering education among many educators in the field. The Tiered Teacher Qualifications Pilot is a first step in developing a competency based strategy for determining which educators across the mixed service delivery system are qualified for leading expansion efforts, using not only education but also experience and other indicators of quality. This Pilot for FCCs includes qualified staff with Associates degrees or 2 years of college. If the Pilot is successful, then more children could be accommodated in pre-K settings in Years 2 and 3 moving forward.
* A team of Program Administrative Assistants, Teacher Assistants, Coaches, Mentors, Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators, Transition Coordinators and Behavioral Specialists are in the plan to support and sustain the work. Professional development is shared with all educators at the expansion sites, is targeted, and supported by coaching.
* The Strategic Plan uses funding to adequately compensate BA teachers and to develop a more predictable revenue stream for participating FCCs and Centers that is consistent with their operating structure. For the plan to be sustainable, compensation should be equitable throughout the system.
* Through the Hub Model, the comprehensive services for families are more evenly distributed and coordinated throughout the community.

**Estimated Costs for Lowell PEG Year 1**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **ITEM** | **BUDGET NARRATIVE** | **ANNUAL YEAR 1 COST** |
| PEG Coordinator (with background in Social Work/Master’s Level) | Hired by the LPS: $95,000 plus benefits (approximately $12,000) for a total of $107,000 | **$107,000** |
| Additional teacher salaries for Lowell Day, Little Sprouts, Head Start and Acre, Bethel, Clarendon, CTI FCC | Estimated 7 additional educators (one per each of 7 expansion partner settings with BA teachers) X $12,500 salary differential between LPS BA and PEG educator = $87,500.  Also benefits of 7 educators x $12,000 = $84,000 | **$171,500** |
| Pilot a tiered qualifications Model in Year 1 with 40 children served in FCC settings with educators who have an Associate’s degree. Costs for mentoring support for coursework selection/career navigation | Average stipend of $2,000 yearly to advance course work for 3 teachers with AAs participating in Pilot. | **$6,000** |
| Transportation | To contract with a vendor: $25 daily rate x 261 school days x 44 children = $287, 100. 44 children is based on estimate of 25% of all children who would qualify for transportation as a comprehensive service.  Another tier of an estimated 23 families x $35 month in bus passes x 12 months | **$287,100**  **$9,660** |
| 4 Family Recruiters/Resource Navigators to work in Lowell’s neighborhoods to manage the recruitment process, slot allocation, engage/recruit families, and provide information on family services. | Hired by the ELPS via sub-grantee award: $35,000 x 4 staff = $140,000 plus $12,000 in benefits x 4 =$60,000 = $200,000 | **$200,000** |
| 7 Program Administrative Assistants for participating programs and systems so that the Directors can better support teachers and manage various aspects of the PEG initiative. | Hired by the ELPs via sub-grantee award: $33,000 x 7 Program Assistants (one per expansion partner) = $231,000 plus benefits of 7 x $12,000 = $84,000 for a total of $315,000 | **$315,000** |
| Funding for quality improvements in 9 program settings. Two of these 9 settings will be part of the FCC Pilot of AA educators. | $5,000 x 9 program settings = $45,000 | **$45,000** |
| 9 Teacher Assistants. Two of these 9 educators will part of the FCC Pilot of AA teachers. | Hired by the ELPS via sub-grantee award: $31,200 x 9 = $280,800 plus benefits x 9 x $12,000 = $108,000 in benefits. | **$388,800** |
| 2 coaches with BAs available for each site for a half to one day weekly to ensure proper training, implementation and familiarity with preschool guidelines. Coaches will model, co-teach, observe discuss, and plan. | Hired by the ELPS via sub-grantee award: $60,000 x 2 = $120,000 plus benefits x $12,000 x 2 = $24,000 for a total of $144,000. | **$144,000** |
| 1 full time CLASS administrator will work 3 to 4 hours a week with teams in 9 classrooms. | $65,000 salary + $12,000 in benefits | **$77,000** |
| PD providers who will rotate to each expansion program or system, and be available to all teachers in systems. | 5 training days x 4.5 programs = 22 training days = $18,700 | **$18,700** |
| For CSS Model: 1 Behavioral Specialist and 3 Paraprofessionals  For Intervention Team: Part-time team of 3 staff for Intervention and Special Education Service Delivery (hourly rate of $30 per hour for 18 hours per week each) | Hired by the LPS for CSS Team:  1 Behavioral Specialist at $88,000 and 3 paras at $38,000 each = $202,000 plus benefits for 4 staff = $12,000 x 4 = $48,000 for a total of $250,000  Hired by the LPS for Intervention Team:  3 part-time staff for 48 weeks = $77, 760 (no benefits due to part-time work) | **$250,000**  **$77,760** |
| Transition Coordinator for EI | Stipends for two EI program(s) on a part-time basis = $3,000 per agency (South Bay and Anne Sullivan Center)= $6,000 | **$6,000** |
| Host Informational Parent Meetings/Cafés throughout the City to reach and educate parents. | Stipends for community groups/Incentives = 10 x $600 = $6000 | **$6,000** |
| Kaymbu Software License: $240 per classroom/home | $240 x 10 = $2,400 | **$2,400** |
| **GRAND TOTAL LOWELL PEG YEAR 1 COSTS** |  | **$2,111,920.00** |
| **COSTS PER CHILD IN YEAR 1 (136 CHILDREN SERVED)** |  | **$15,528.82** |

Note: The first year budget above does not include the costs of Two Mobile Classrooms proposed for Year 2 for 40 extra children.