**Preschool Expansion Strategic Plan New Bedford, MA**

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**Submitted by the New Bedford Preschool Expansion Planning Team**

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# Executive Summary

New Bedford’s Preschool Expansion Plan is a direct outgrowth of a strong collaboration that has developed since New Bedford established its Birth—3rd Partnership. Four community-based preschools—the four largest centers in New Bedford—have joined with the New Bedford Public Schools to propose a significant expansion of high-quality preschool slots for low-income three and four year-olds. The Planning Team also includes New Bedford’s Early Literacy Consortium and P.A.C.E Childcare Works, New Bedford’s CFCE grantee.

The Planning Team conducted an extensive needs assessment that drew on a provider survey conducted by the Birth—3rd Partnership, a new family survey, examination of data from a variety of sources including from the CFCE and the local Head Start, and extensive discussion of needs by the district and participating preschool programs. The Planning Team heard a clear message from families and providers, substantiated by the data presented later in this report: New Bedford needs more affordable high-quality preschool slots for low-income children. The needs assessment also indicated significant needs for more support for children who have experienced trauma and children with multiple risk factors and for additional classroom-level supports for teachers, including for child behavior.

Based on this assessment of needs, the Planning Team proposes the following expansion design:

* New Bedford will operate five new expansion classrooms in Year 1 at sites around the city in close proximity to low-income neighborhoods. Each of the four community-based providers will add one expansion classroom for three year-olds in Year 1. The district will enhance one existing preschool classroom for three year-olds by extending its hours each day and throughout the summer.
* In Year 2, the Year 1 children will move up to new expansion four year-old classrooms while the three year-old classrooms will welcome a new set of children, adding up to a total of 10 expansion classrooms.
* Each of these community-based classrooms will be staffed by highly competent lead teachers with BA degrees, another teacher, and a full-time aide. The district classroom will continue to be staffed by a BA teacher and a paraprofessional.
* The lead teachers in the community-based programs will earn a salary comparable to a beginning district teacher, and all the teachers will benefit from extension coaching, professional development, and participation in a professional learning community.
* All of the three year-old classrooms will use the updated 6th edition of *Creative*

*Curriculum with Daily Resources*. All of the four year-old classrooms will use the *OWL* curriculum for literacy and *Building Blocks* for math. Coaching, professional development and the expansion teacher professional learning community will focus on effective implementation of curricula, developmentally-appropriate instructional practice, and the Pyramid model of social-emotional learning.

* The children and families in each classroom will be served by .25 FTE family advocate, modeled on the Head Start approach to family engagement. The family advocate will participate on the comprehensive services team, which will coordinate case management and referrals to health, mental health, vision, dental, and behavior supports.
* The district special education office will expand its itinerant special education teacher model to include all four community-based classrooms. The district special education office will train participating teachers in screening and provide leadership for each classroom’s special education team.
* Program directors and school and district personnel will meet monthly as an extension of Expansion Team meetings to collaborate on quality improvement strategy and implementation.

The Expansion Planning Team has met regularly for frequent planning meetings since February. The program directors, the district Early Childhood lead, the district Manager of Curriculum, Data, and Assessment, and others have all brought significant expertise and experience to the table in developing this plan. This team (or their replacements if positions change) will form the nucleus of an Expansion Team focused on project implementation should our proposal be funded. The Expansion Team will be facilitated by a Preschool Expansion Director, who will also oversee the coach, family advocates, and comprehensive services team as well as the professional development components of the project.

New Bedford’s Preschool Expansion Plan includes two budgets. One details the costs of a community-based preschool classroom with the above-mentioned supports; the other of a district classroom with an extended day and year and the above-mentioned supports. These budgets, and the plans they encapsulate, represent the New Bedford community’s strong commitment to expanding affordable, high-quality preschool for the city’s low-income residents and improving early education and care from Birth through 3rd grade.

# Leadership Plan

*Birth through 3rd Grade Collaboration in New Bedford.* New Bedford’s Birth-3rd Grade Partnership has laid the groundwork for this strategic plan. The Partnership was launched with a Birth-3rd Alignment Partnership grant from the EEC that began during the second part of 2014 and continued through December, 2015. New Bedford embraced the opportunity to improve collaboration between the school district and community-based early childhood organizations and has created a deep and effective partnership. The Partnership has continued to meet and plan activities since the EEC grant ended.

New Bedford’s Birth-3rd Partnership implemented a number of strategies with the EEC grant that inform this Preschool Expansion Plan:

* + Conducted a survey of preschool providers
  + Implemented joint professional development workshop series for district and community-based preschool teachers in both literacy and social-emotional learning
  + Created a school readiness working group that oversees an array of outreach activities and four school readiness events throughout the year in coordination with the CFCE
  + Facilitated extensive collaboration between the school district and New Bedford’s Housing Authority
  + Begun work on a community-wide transition form

If funded, implementation of the Preschool Expansion Plan would draw on this foundation of experience in numerous ways.

*Leadership Roles and Responsibilities*. The Preschool Expansion Team includes the New Bedford Public Schools, P.A.C.E. Childcare Works, the Early Literacy Consortium, and four participating ELPs: Little People’s College, North Star Learning Center, P.A.C.E Head Start, and YMCA Southcoast. The community-based providers and the school district have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (see attached). The New Bedford Youth Alliance, New Bedford Community Connections, the United Way, and the Housing Authority will continue to support the Preschool Expansion project through the Birth-3rd Partnership. The budget for this project includes funding for a Preschool Expansion Director who will, in addition to managing the project components, facilitate monthly meetings and communication among the Expansion Team members.

The community-based programs bring much experience serving diverse populations as well as extensive experience using Teaching Strategies Gold, engaging families, implementing curricula, and training in social-emotional skills and trauma-informed care. In addition, the project will draw on P.A.C.E. Head Start’s family advocacy model and experience providing comprehensive services. The New Bedford Public Schools also has valuable experience through its prekindergarten program, and especially in the *OWL* curriculum that will be used in all the four

year-old Preschool Expansion classrooms. The district will manage funding for the project and provide specific leadership around special education and inclusion.

Each participating organization will designate staff to participate in the Preschool Expansion project and serve on the Expansion Team. The current designees have worked closely together in the Birth-3rd Partnership and on the team that has developed this plan. The project will also draw on the support of other community organizations as needed, including Behavior Services (JRI), Early Intervention, the New Bedford Public Library, the New Bedford Youth Alliance, New Bedford Community Connections, and pediatricians and hospitals.

*Communication.* The communication process for New Bedford’s planning team has worked well. In addition to approximately two meetings per month, the planning team worked with facilitators to organize meetings, phone conferences, and email communication. As mentioned, our Expansion Plan includes funding for a Preschool Expansion Director to play this facilitation role. The Expansion Team will meet at least monthly for planning and implementation meetings. Formal Progress Reviews will take place quarterly.

*Program Oversight: Data-Driven Continuous Improvement.* The Preschool Expansion Team and the Expansion Director will be responsible for program oversight. In addition, each preschool program director and the principal of the school in which an Expansion class is located will be responsible for implementation within their respective buildings. The Expansion Team would also like to build the capacity and resources over time to be able to hire someone to oversee monitoring and evaluation. The Expansion Director will be responsible for these activities in the meantime.

Further, a *strategic leadership body* will perform an oversight and governance role for the Preschool Expansion project. This body will include the district superintendent, the executive directors of all of the participating community-based preschool programs, the head of the Housing Authority, and a business leader, among others. This senior leadership body will meet twice a year to review the progress of the implementation of the Expansion project. Review topics will include enrollment, child assessment, leadership opportunities and fiscal reports.

The preschool implementation plan calls for regular progress monitoring and self-assessment of program impact. In measuring impact, the team will keep the needs of children and families in mind and work to ensure that the program meets the diverse needs of all participants: children, families, educators, programs, and other stakeholders.

The planning team is considering the following measures of success to include in program monitoring and evaluation for impact:

* Child’s attendance
* Screenings pre-post results
* Full capacity enrollment of classrooms
* Shared child assessment results between providers and public schools
* Integrated intervention services
* Parent participation
* Teacher and parent surveys
* Decrease in services needed for children entering kindergarten

The team will work with the district to design an appropriate data management system.

The strong foundation of collaboration New Bedford’s planning team has built will help it respond to unanticipated challenges effectively. The grant coordinator will communicate challenges to the group in preparation for the monthly management meetings and quarterly progress review meetings. If necessary, meetings will be extended in advance in order to meet special challenges. If project structures, processes, or plans change, participating staff in the member organizations will be informed punctually.

III. Program Design and Development

### Needs Assessment Results

*Introduction and Sources.* In order to inform and strengthen the program design, preschool planning team members conducted a thorough needs assessment. The team explored the needs of children, families, and the community at-large, as well as the needs of preschool programs and educators.

The team used the appendix questions in the grant RFR provided by EEC to guide this inquiry.1 The team pooled data from a variety of existing sources and also generated new data during the grant period. A list of data sources is provided here:

* U.S. Census: young child population by age; neighborhood analysis of poverty, education levels, adult literacy, home languages spoken.
* U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: unemployment.
* City of New Bedford, Homeless Service Provider Network: 2016 Point-in-Time Homeless Count.
* New Bedford Housing Authority: children living in public housing and their pre-K and Kindergarten enrollment by public school.
* Department of Early Education and Care: preschool enrollment capacity for EEC-licensed programs.
* New Bedford Public Schools: preschool attendance captured at kindergarten entry; preschool program models and enrollment by school; written self-assessment.
* Community-based preschool programs: planning grant early learning providers’ (ELPs) written self-assessments; P.A.C.E. community needs assessment; Birth-Third Partnership survey of community-based early education programs: access, quality, alignment, and best practices.
* Parent survey: experience with preschool access, barriers, demand and likely take-up, views on kindergarten readiness.

*Community Needs.* New Bedford is a vibrant and diverse coastal community with many economic, social and historical assets. However its residents also face an array of socio- economic needs, similar to those of other mid-sized Massachusetts cities. Issues commonly discussed by local leaders and covered in the news media include unemployment, poverty, homelessness, immigration, adult education/literacy, teen parents, substance abuse, and crime. These needs contribute to a complex opportunity gap facing New Bedford’s children and youth relative to their more affluent peers growing up in neighboring suburban communities.

New Bedford’s Census data indicate:

1 Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. (2015). RFR – SRF 160074 Preschool Expansion Planning Grant, PEPG 001.

* Poverty rate is 24%, and child poverty rate is 36%.
* Median household income is $36,813. Within all racial and ethnic groups, median income is lower than state averages for their group.
* Unemployment rate of 7.7% surpasses state average of 4.5%. New Bedford’s unemployment rate reached 16.3% in 2010 at the peak of the Great Recession.2
* Educational attainment is low: 30% of adults have not completed high school, versus 10% statewide.
* 2 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (November, 2015). Retrieved from Google public data.

City-wide averages often mask inequality by neighborhood. For example, in six of New Bedford’s 31 Census tracts the poverty rate is above 40%, whereas five Census tracts have poverty rates of less than 10%. (See appendix for map references).

There is a large and growing homeless population in New Bedford. Data collected in January 2016 counts 469 homeless individuals. This recent count is up 39% from 338 individuals in 2013, and continues a three year rise in homelessness. Though most homeless are counted as one- individual households, there are 170 persons in households with children, 50 total households. According to the data all of these households are sheltered, typically in emergency shelters.

A comprehensive community needs assessment was conducted in 2014 by P.A.C.E. (People Acting in Community Endeavors), a multi-issue community service organization that includes Head Start and Child Care Works, the local child care resource and referral agency. P.A.C.E. conducted a survey with clients, the general public (non-clients), area service providers, staff and board. Respondents represented a cross-section of the New Bedford community, but most were female (70%), non-white (59%), and had incomes below $30,000 (70%). In addition, 21% were unemployed but searching for work.

Respondents were asked what they believe to be the biggest problems in New Bedford. Ranking first was unemployment, followed by substance abuse, crime, affordable housing, and education.

Respondents reported needing more resources across to address a range of specific needs including: finding a job, paying heating bills, teen programming, and homeless services.

The views of community partners and staff supported the needs expressed by community members.

*“We asked other service providers if they had seen an increase, decrease or no change in the past year in a variety of areas. A full 80% said they have had an increase in the number of families and individuals seeking services. 75 % believe they have seen a decrease in the number of job opportunities locally. They reported drug abuse increasing (76%), homelessness increasing (86%) and (59%) reported increasing the number of services they offer. Again not surprisingly, providers agreed there is a need for increased ESOL classes, mental health services, job training and homeless services.”3*

*Young Children and School Readiness.* There are 7,805 children under age 6 living in New Bedford. A young child raised in New Bedford is more than twice as likely to live below the poverty line as an average Massachusetts child (38% vs 17%). The public schools enroll a large percentage of English language learners, as well as children with special education needs. Third grade reading proficiency and graduation rates trail state averages. New Bedford Public Schools

is classified as a Level 4 school district by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, making it among the lowest performing in the state.4 However, the district has made

3 P.A.C.E. Inc. (2014). Community Needs Assessment.

4 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2015). 2015 Accountability Data - New

Bedford. Retrieved from: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/accountability/report/district.aspx?linkid=30&orgcode=02010000&orgtypecode=5&](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/accountability/report/district.aspx?linkid=30&amp;orgcode=02010000&amp;orgtypecode=5)

progress in recent years and is home to three Level 1 schools, two of which are Commendation Schools.5

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator of need** | **New Bedford** | **Mass. Average** |
| % of young children (B-5) living below the poverty line | 38.1% | 17.3% |
| % of public school (PK-12) students whose first language is not English | 31.8% | 19.0% |
| % of public school (PK-12) students receiving special education services | 21.1% | 17.2% |
| % of third graders who meet or exceed expectations in reading on PARCC | 41% | 54% |
| % of students graduating high school within four years | 57.9% | 87.3% |

Source: Strategies for Children, compiled using data from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and American Community Survey 2010-2014 5-year average. <http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/FastFacts/NewBedford.html>

Perhaps the most essential indicator for the purposes of this plan is the current preschool enrollment rate. Based on data collected by New Bedford Public Schools at kindergarten registration, at least 25% of kindergarteners did not attend pre-kindergarten. This translates to roughly 300 students, or 600 3- and 4-year-olds at any given time.

Preschool experiences for New Bedford kindergarten students, school year 2015-16

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Current K | 1230 | 100% |
| Attended PK | 827 | 67% |
| **Did not attend PK** | **303** | **25%** |
| unknown | 100 | 8% |

Source: New Bedford Public Schools, Family Welcome Center

In recent years, the New Bedford Housing Authority (NBHA) has collaborated with New Bedford Public Schools to align after school and summer programming. As part of this partnership, the housing authority has begun to track the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten enrollment of the

5 Quadros Bowles, S. (December 9, 2015). New Bedford schools show clear improvement in state rankings. The Standard-Times. Retrieved from: <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/article/20151209/NEWS/151209491>

young child population it serves. During the 2015-16 school year, 287 pre-K and Kindergarten children utilizing NBHA services (public housing and Section 8) attend all 18 district elementary schools. However attendance is not evenly distributed - 61% of these children (174) attend five schools: Gomes (54), Pacheco (45), Renaissance (27), Carney (25), and Brooks (23). Two elementary schools with turnaround plans, Parker and Hayden-McFadden, enroll 8 and 14 children respectively.

In the P.A.C.E. community needs assessment, more than 60% of respondents said that New Bedford needs more child care availability, with a nearly even split between the need for care for infants/toddlers, pre-school aged children and school aged children.6

The planning team recommends that the school district continue to collect and report annually on the preschool experiences of incoming kindergarten students. It also recommends continued data collaboration between NBHA and the school district to identify enrollment patterns, unmet need, and coordination of early learning services for children and families.

*Family Perspectives.* The team surveyed New Bedford parents of young children, conducting survey outreach during a local Week of the Young Child event. The survey was designed to capture parent attitudes towards preschool enrollment, satisfaction with preschool experience, barriers to enrollment, and interest in free, full-day high-quality preschool.

In total, 182 responses were collected from parents and family members. 90% of respondents were New Bedford residents, with the remainder living in surrounding towns. 81% of respondents have had a preschool or child care experience with their child. Parents enroll children for two main reasons – needing child care while they work or attend school, and wanting children to have an early learning experience.

6 P.A.C.E. Inc. (2014). Community Needs Assessment.

The overwhelming majority of respondents, 94%, reported that their children’s preschool experiences met their needs. Demand for preschool is high: 88% of respondents say they would enroll their child in a free, full-day, high-quality preschool in New Bedford, if it were available.

For those who would not enroll their child, three respondents cited transportation concerns, and four indicated that they or a family member stays home with their children.

Respondents who were not currently accessing a preschool program were asked about barriers to enrollment and cited a range of reasons why they were unable to get services. The most common barriers were financial and the short length of program day. Two respondents cited transportation issues and one cited waitlist, lack of available slots.

*“Half day doesn't work for me, I lost one job before because I had to keep leaving to pick up at 11:15. They changed it to afternoon but I still had to drop him off at 11:15 so I lost that job.”*

*“I couldn't leave work in the middle of the day to pick my daughter up from preschool.” “The financial expense made childcare difficult.”*

The survey also asked respondents an open-ended question about the importance of kindergarten readiness. There were 133 unique responses to this question. Responses covered a range of topics from socialization, pre-academic skills, and emotional growth.

Q6: What do you feel is most important in preparing your child for kindergarten?

*“To have my child to know all the basics before starting K.” “Basic social skills, basic education (ABC, 123).”*

*“Writing and listening skills.”*

*“So he can be as prepared as other kids and know his age level.” “To be around kids and learn more.”*

*“Being able to express their feelings to one another without fighting or yelling.” “Preparing independence.”*

*“To learn the structure of the school day, transitioning, better his vocabulary.” “It is very important because it is their starting point to education.”*

*Preschool Programs: Capacity, Needs and Strengths.* Census data reveals an average of 1,301 young children per single year of age residing in New Bedford. This figure can be used to estimate the total number of preschool seats that would be needed to serve a universal take-up rate: 1301, or 2,602 for 3-and 4-year-olds. Since programming would be voluntary, an estimated **enrollment of 85% would require 2,212 slots** for 3- and 4-year-old preschool programming.

The Birth-3rd Partnership conducted a capacity analysis in spring 2015 and updated it during the preschool planning process. Analysis shows 10 elementary schools offering district-run preschool, 21 licensed center-based programs serving preschool-age children, and 26 licensed family child care homes. Based on available enrollment and capacity data for public school preschools and center-based programs there is an **estimated preschool capacity of 1,742 slots**. This should be enough current space to enroll all 4-year-olds in New Bedford, however New Bedford would **need 470 more preschool slots** to meet a goal of 85% enrollment for 3- and 4- year-olds. Beyond access and classroom space concerns, New Bedford has pressing needs for affordable, high-quality programming as described below.

The proposed Preschool Expansion model utilizes classrooms at four community-based ELPs and the New Bedford Public Schools. The ELP partners are the four largest programs in the

community and have a consistent track record of adherence to EEC regulations and participation in quality improvement initiatives. Each ELP and the LEA completed a self- assessment based on the RFR prompts for program and workforce quality. Highlights include:

*Program and classroom quality.* All ELPs are NAEYC accredited, and have attained or are working towards a QRIS level 3 rating. Curriculum used includes OWL, TS Gold, and In-house aligned with Massachusetts Frameworks. Assessment tools utilized are CLASS, TS Gold, Ages and Stages, PAS, Strengthening Families, ECCERS, Arnett (caregiver interaction scale), DECA (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment), Battelle, Pre-IPT and Pre-Las for English language proficiency, miscellaneous speech and language, occupational and physical therapy assessments. On CLASS measures, Head Start scored within the top 10% of all Head Starts nationally in a 2014 federal review. Programs conduct regular program and teacher evaluation

– i.e., Little People’s College conducts bi-monthly staff observations by supervisors and curriculum team and biannual in-house program specific evaluations.

*Educator and administrator quality.* ELP educators and administrators possess a range of credentials, qualifications and experience. Most administrators hold BA degrees, some hold AAs, two have MAs, and there is one PhD. Most lead teachers hold BA degrees, some hold AAs, and a small amount are either working towards an AA or are lead teacher qualified. School district preschool teachers are licensed by DESE and have a minimum of BA degrees.

Community-wide, with proper compensation, there is an ample supply of qualified candidates to draw upon for the initial phases of preschool expansion. Recruitment, retention, and advancement of high-quality teachers will be an ongoing long-term goal.

*Professional development resources.* There are many resources for professional development and training that educators utilize. These include: Southeast Education Professionals Partnership (SEEPP), Pyramid Model social-emotional trainings, Strengthening Families, CPR / First Aid, in-service training days with guest presenters.

Programs attempt to target trainings based on educator needs, and cover the cost of trainings and offer paid time off to participate. One program has a mentor program, pairing new teachers with experienced teachers, and on-site teacher trainers.

Many educators are currently enrolled in higher education degree programs, and are supported by the state Early Childhood Educator Scholarship. One program has a partnership with Fisher College and UMass Dartmouth for discounted college fees.

Transportation to trainings is an issue for some early educators that do not have car access.

*Family engagement.* ELPs and LEA practice authentic family engagement using a wide range of techniques, supports, and program offerings. These include: monthly family engagement

activities by topic, hands on learning activities for families to do at home to support children’s development, food offered whenever possible. Parent academies, coffee hours, home visits, newsletters, emails, activity calendar, parent-teacher conferences. Administrators engage daily with families, and family liaison’s offer in-depth support. Bus drivers support home-school connection. Transportation is a barrier for some families to participate in family activities.

Head Start offers families comprehensive services facilitated by family advocates, parent committee and Policy Council leadership opportunities. YMCA offers full-time enrolled children free Y family membership. North Star involves parents in strategies based on the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment program to build resiliency in young children and offset negative effects of trauma and adversity.

Many staff are multilingual, and can supports families in their home language. Little People’s College maintains detailed data on languages spoken by staff, and currently has 13 staff who speak Creole, 64 who speak Portuguese, 41who speak Spanish and 1 is fluent in American Sign Language. New Bedford Public Schools offers translation services for emergencies and IEP meetings.

Public school programs benefit from a district Family Welcome Center which uses a centralized PK-12 registration process.

Public school preschools report unique challenges. Shorter hours are a barrier for working families. Transportation is not offered to all children. Not all schools have family engagement centers. Administrators report cultural barriers (i.e., families believe schools are only for educators, not parents) and reluctance to engage with institutions due to negative prior experiences (i.e., DCF, court).

The Birth-Third Alignment Partnership surveyed community-based preschool programs in 2015. Many of the findings in that survey are similar to the themes in the above responses from the ELPs directly involved in preschool planning. Below are two charts of survey results that are a helpful supplement to the above self-assessments. These charts provide additional detail about family engagement practices and illustrate the range of community partnerships prevalent among community-based preschools.

*Needs not currently being met.* Partners report a variety of specific needs related to access and quality. There are several preschool waitlists throughout the city, documented by Pace Child Care Works (EEC Subsidy waitlist) and New Bedford Public Schools (high demand for peer partner slots). Five public schools in the North End of New Bedford do not offer preschool.

All ELPs report challenges with sustaining a high-quality workforce without higher compensation approaching pay equity with public schools. Programs struggle to offer competitive salaries for degreed teachers and full-time positions due to rising cost of health care benefits. Programs struggle to meet QRIS goals without higher compensation to retain and advance staff.

Other needs include: Better supports for children who have experienced trauma and multiple risk factors; behavior and classrooms supports; more focus on screening, assessment and use of TS Gold; more information sharing regarding children on IEPs and ways to support them.

Further, transience in the community makes it difficult to maintain full enrollment.

*What would reflect success for teachers, programs, and the community?* ELPs and LEA were asked to reflect upon a vision of success for preschool expansion. Common themes were teacher pay equity, increasing children’s access to special education and intervention services, and collaboration between all partners to support early learning and the transition to kindergarten.

*“We will establish stronger partnerships with the public schools, other ELP providers, and community resource agencies by enhancing overall program quality and services for children and families in our community.”*

Other success markers included manageable classroom size, a seamless enrollment process through a mixed delivery system for equivalent programming, and family satisfaction and praise of the program in the community.

*Conclusion.* The portrait of need described above is robust and consistent with the expert views and opinions of the planning team members. To build a high-quality early education system in New Bedford, preschool access must improve and program partners must continue to collaborate for quality improvement. The team is confident that the preschool plan being designed will meet an unmet and growing need in the New Bedford community.

Given New Bedford’s child poverty rate and the well-documented needs of the public school district, preschool expansion would fill a clear need in the community. Parents are demanding preschool and highly likely to enroll children in a free, full-day, high-quality program. The clear need and interest in high-quality preschool has informed New Bedford’s early education community in recent efforts to expand preschool access and quality, improve children’s transitions to kindergarten, and work towards alignment and cohesion of curriculum and services across public school and community-based programs.

### New Bedford’s Preschool Expansion Design

As summarized in the Executive Summary, New Bedford will operate five new expansion classrooms in Year 1 at sites around the city in close proximity to low-income neighborhoods. Each of the four community-based providers will add one expansion classroom for three year- olds in Year 1. The district will enhance one existing preschool classroom for three year-olds by extending its hours each day and throughout the summer. In Year 2, the Year 1 children will move up to new expansion four year-old classrooms while the three year-old classrooms will welcome a new set of children, adding up to a total of 10 expansion classrooms.

Children whose families earn under 250% of the federal poverty line will be eligible for these Expansion classrooms. The Expansion Team and the Birth-3rd Partnership will conduct extensive outreach to families throughout the city as part of their recruitment efforts. The Expansion Plan budget includes significant funds to support these outreach efforts.

The planning team has identified five preliminary locations for new preschool sites. This map shows the proximity of these program sites to the areas of the city with the highest levels of poverty. There are high-needs children and families living throughout New Bedford. However, the six census tracts highlighted in orange have poverty rates above 40%. All program sites are located in or near these census tracts with the exception of the Little People’s College site at the north- most location. This area also includes significant pockets of poverty, and Little People’s College provides transportation.

The following sections outline the supports that New Bedford will implement in order to achieve high levels of quality throughout these expansion slots while deepening collaboration around best practices in order to improve quality throughout the city’s preschool system.

### Teacher Capacity and Classroom Quality

The member organizations of New Bedford’s Preschool Expansion Team have developed a plan that includes quality improvement, teacher recruitment and retention, and teacher professional learning components. In working together to achieve high levels of quality across the five new preschool classrooms, the Preschool Expansion team intends to build capacity around quality improvement and teacher professional learning that can be applied to each program’s other preschool classrooms as well.

*Quality Improvement.* New Bedford’s new Preschool Expansion classrooms will meet Massachusetts program quality standards, including, at a minimum, the elements outlined in the Massachusetts Quality Rating and Information System (QRIS) and/or accreditation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). All four community-based programs are NAEYC-accredited. Three programs are working toward level 4 on the quality rating scale; one is working on level 3. As part of the NAEYC accreditation process, each of the programs and age levels is required to provide documentation that demonstrates how they meet the quality standards. These templates help guide our teachers and administrators in this process. The tools our programs use to measure gains are the Classroom Assessment Scoring System- (CLASS) screening tool, the Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment (TSG), the Arnett, the Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS), Program Administration Scale (PAS), Strengthening Families, and the Battelle Developmental Inventory. The CLASS will be issued by the curriculum coach who will be trained in this model and will administered CLASS observations for formative purposes. While each of these programs is actively pursuing enhancements toward upward mobility on the quality rating scales throughout their entire systems, the Preschool Expansion opportunity will accelerate these quality improvement efforts. Quality improvement will be addressed at the monthly director meetings. The coach and family advocate will focus on implementing the strategies that are developed at these meetings.

*Staffing.* All preschool expansion classrooms will have a bachelor-degreed teacher who is Lead Teacher-certified through EEC with a preference to those who hold a degree in Early Education. The Lead teacher will receive a wage that is comparable to that of a New Bedford Public School Early Childhood Educator. Educators will be required to make a three year commitment (if funding is available) and to sign a contract. This arrangement, including the higher compensation, addresses the existing challenge of high turnover of degreed teachers in existing early education programs. Based on their experience and their assessment of the New Bedford labor market, center directors think that they will be able to recruit highly capable teachers for the new preschool classrooms and fill open teacher positions in their programs. In addition to the lead teacher, the PEG classroom will be further supported by a paraprofessional pursuing higher education degrees through the PEG professional development plan and who will be a part of the matriculation and expansion plans for future PEG classrooms. Additionally, these classrooms of twenty will have a low teacher: child ratio of 1:7 for 8 hours each day, to include a lead teacher, a teacher and a part time aide. This group will be considered a “team.” These favorable classroom rations will allow for more individual instruction, and the team arrangement will reduce feelings of isolation, making it possible to facilitate a higher level of cooperation and giving staff an opportunity to learn and practice techniques together.

*Professional Learning*. Educators in the PEG classroom will receive significant coaching and professional development investments in the Social Emotional Standards and in learning and administering the project’s curricula. Additional training will be ongoing through CEU/PDP trainings in relevant subjects to support professional development and to apply to the (Individual Professional Development Plan) IPDP. All staff will maintain First Aid and CPR certification. By building teacher capacity for success, we improve our schools and therefore our communities.

The Preschool Expansion classroom curricula for four year-olds will align with the New Bedford Public School department by including a social-emotional component and using the Pre-K *OWL* curriculum and supplementing math with *Building Blocks*. Moreover, all programs will be using the same assessment and screening tools, and all classrooms will adopt a social-emotional curriculum to teach the children the skills needed to manage emotions and engage in successful peer interactions. A Professional Learning Community (PLC) will be formed collaborate on implementation of curricula, developmentally-appropriate practices, and social-emotional learning. The PLC will also help to matriculate assistant teachers into the lead teacher role.

One of the goals of the PLC will be to develop a cadre of master prekindergarten teachers. Participation is not limited to existing Expansion classroom teachers but will be extended to others who may be interested in becoming a lead teacher in upcoming Expansion classrooms. Because of these efforts, in cases of transiency, the student’s consistency with curriculum and assessment will be seamless.

The Expansion Director and the project’s instructional coach will manage and facilitate these professional learning supports.

*Quality and Comprehensive Services.* A great number of the children in New Bedford’s gateway community fall into the high-needs category. Many have experienced considerable trauma and deprivation and exhibit challenging behaviors, amongst a myriad of other significant risk factors. As discussed below in the comprehensive services section, Expansion classroom quality will be further supported by specialists in several areas: a Speech and Language Pathologist, Family Support Specialist, Behavior Specialist, Family Engagement Specialist, a Nurse, a Special Education Teacher and a Curriculum Coach. This comprehensive team, led by the Expansion Director, will meet regularly to discuss and plan for individual children’s progress. By strengthening teachers’ classroom management skills and promoting children’s social emotional development, we will enhance the common goals and outcomes for the children and families served.

*Facilities, Location, and Transportation*. The participating programs are geographically housed throughout the city of New Bedford. Each program has identified a suitable space to accommodate new students coming in through the Expansion program and is located throughout the city, but specifically in close proximity to low income neighborhoods. Because of this programs are able to adhere to EEC’s transportation regulation for short ride times.

Schools are within walking distance for some or within very short car rides for those who do not need transportation. The issue of transiency will be addressed by making every effort to provide the students slots in participating programs throughout the city. Because of the way the city is laid out and the fact that all programs currently provide or have access to transportation services, access to transportation is not a challenge. Each family in the Expansion classroom will have access to a Family Advocate. This person assists families in receiving access to services around health and nutrition, family training and education, referrals to community supports, mental health supports, and any other services the family may need in order to achieve parenting and family goals.

New Bedford’s School Readiness Working Group will develop a city-wide transition form to fill the continuum gap that occurs when a child moves from the preschool environment into the

public school environment. This release form will be signed by the parent/guardian at registration.

### Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement

As indicated earlier in this plan, New Bedford is a city whose residents face an array of socio- economic needs that have a widespread effect on their children’s ability to learn. Many New Bedford families struggle with the effects of poverty and the impact that has on their efforts to support the development of their children. Supportive services are needed for everything from assistance with homelessness and unemployment to immigration and residency issues.

Educational opportunities for parents such as ESOL and literacy education along with parenting information are needs for the adults in many families. Those coupled with the impact of the rising opioid and substance abuse problem and along with safety and crime issues have created a situation that requires complex supportive service needs. These needs have created a gap in school success for children living in families facing these issues and are the reason for the need to have a comprehensive system in place to support them.

Comprehensive services for all the classrooms will be designed to work in conjunction with services that are taking place in the public schools through the Family Centers located there, and a strong connection will be made between the community-based programs providing PreK services and NBPS programming. That will include the use of family advocate services available to all families. To further strengthen the connection, family advocates will be the conduit to facilitate school to home communication for families to connect them with the activities that happen throughout the community. As indicated in more detail below, there will be a variety of opportunities available to families to participate in activities geared to parents as well as parent child interactions. These activities will be sponsored by all the participating partners and will be established by the group and mapped out so all families participating in the programs have access to the opportunities. The partnership will draw on the feedback of the families to develop the workshops and create these opportunities. There will also be a focus on the importance of the development of the social-emotional health of children, and the Expansion Team will provide opportunities for parents as well as staff to learn how to support their children in that way.

There will be a variety of options to provide access to services for children with developmental concerns. This will include helping families with issues such as homelessness and unemployment and ensuring they are meeting their basic needs. Family Advocates will work with families to develop plans to map out their goals and help identify the best way to meet those goals. The plan will identify the types of comprehensive services that programs will provide, the referral process for these services and the providers of such services.

Comprehensive services will be available to all families and will be designed to support all children and families to meet their individual needs. Comprehensive services will cover a wide range and will be managed by Family Advocates. The services will include:

* Health screening
* Hearing screening
* Vision screening
* Dental Screening
* Developmental screenings
* Mental health screening and referral
* Speech evaluations
* Special Ed Referrals

There are several service providers in the city offering these types of services. Family Advocates will provide the direct referrals to these providers to families. The Expansion project will provide an opportunity to deepen the relationship between these providers and the Birth-3rd Partnership.

The Planning Team has identified a number of providers for these purposes. They are: New Bedford Child and Family Services, Justice Resource Institute, Kennedy Donovan Center, I.H. Schwartz Center, Immigrant’s Assistance Center, Catholic Social Services, The Women’s Center, YWCA, P.A.C.E., Inc., NBPS Adult Education Program, Harbor House, Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, NB Housing Authority, NB Public Library.

Additional aspects of services offered will focus on strengthening the family-school connection. Opportunities will be offered to families to participate in workshops, adult education, and community cafes to connect them to the community within the school setting and beyond.

Additionally, there will be opportunities for families to receive information through the outreach efforts of the Partnership about the other community activities taking place to further promote their children’s development and school success. Adult education opportunities will be available in through NBPS in a variety of locations, in a variety of levels as well as ESOL opportunities.

To address the culturally diverse population in the city, programs will make every effort to hire staff that culturally and linguistically matches the families they are serving. When programs are unable to meet the need, they will engage the partners to assist with translation and recruitment of such staff. There will be specific outreach for this purpose as staffing begins to ramp up. This will play an important part in outreach to hard-to-reach families as well.

Utilizing the networks created through the relationships built with existing families, staff will outreach through a variety of methods in order to engage families, such as: meeting with them in community rooms at local housing; having available opportunities for families to participate in events on site during hours that would be convenient to them; providing home visits

throughout the year; send home written materials in home languages; utilize social media as a means of communication (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.); utilize technology such as text alerts to notify parents of opportunities in the program; and posting information where families tend to spend time such as local laundromats and variety stores and the NB Public Library Branches.

The partnership plans to hire the equivalent of one family advocate to provide ongoing comprehensive support to the families in the programs being served through the expansion. As the partnership is able to add additional classrooms, support will increase by adding Family Advocates as needed. In the initial phase, splitting the FTE across programs, a family advocate will be based at each provider to offer services to families. They will be responsible for developing the referrals and identifying the most appropriate actions to take. They will also offer additional advocacy services for families with a higher level of need. These services will include setting goals for the families and identifying areas where families need assistance to connect with the programs and services that will help them meet those goals.

A common referral form will be developed by the partners that identify the many different agencies working with programs to support families. When needs are identified, family advocates will utilize this in an effort to streamline the process for families needing assistance, utilizing the comprehensive service team to help guide the process moving forward. The family advocate will work as a navigator to help connect them to whatever identified service they need, and assist them with transitions where appropriate.

There will be an Expansion Director for the Expansion project that will act in oversite to the program and provide support and supervision to the Family Advocates. The Director will convene and facilitate the meetings which will be designed to provide opportunities for the Family Advocates to work together to problem solve issues as they come up. These meetings will occur biweekly.

Funding will be necessary to hire the equivalent of one and a quarter family advocate to support all programs. These positions will be based in those programs and will work with existing FAs to develop processes and protocols for the engagement of families. Additionally, resources will be necessary to provide parenting activities in programs or across the partnership to help increase the level of engagement that parents have with their children’s learning. There may also need to be additional resources allocated to programs to contract for additional support services.

### Inclusion

The New Bedford Preschool Expansion Team is committed to servicing all children of varying abilities in the most natural and least restrictive environment, providing collaborative services to children with minimal disruptions and transitions. P.A.C.E. Head Start and the New Bedford Public School department currently have a partnership that provides the children with disabilities enrolled in P.A.C.E. with an inclusive service model. The Expansion providers and the

LEA intend to expand upon this model to best meet the needs of the children enrolled. This model is committed to providing 80% of the Special Education Services in the Expansion classroom. All children that have suspected special education needs or already have an IEP in place may enroll in the services provided within the Expansion classroom. Preschool Expansion classroom teachers will have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education or a related field and will have sound knowledge of child development. All Itinerant Special Education teachers, SLP’s and OT’s will be employed through NBPS and will meet the LEA’s criteria for qualifications. The district Director of Special Education Needs Services will supervise and support these staff.

The itinerant Special education teacher, OT, SLP and other resource staff will come into classrooms to provide services with students in the group setting. This natural and least restrictive environment is optimal for learning new skills alongside peer students. By providing services within the group setting, children that may not have identified needs benefit from exposure to the services that the other children are receiving. This also provides classroom teachers with the opportunity to learn from the Special Education Team. The Expansion classroom teachers will then be able to carry out these techniques in their instruction. Pull-out groups for services will occur only as needed per the written IEP requirements.

All children that attend preschool services in the Preschool Expansion Classroom will be screened during registration or within the first few weeks of the start of the school year using the Battelle Developmental Inventory. The screeners will be the Preschool Expansion Classroom teachers, or New Bedford Itinerant Special Educators whom have been trained by the New Bedford School District in the administration of the tool with this age group. Classroom teachers will use this screening to determine baseline data for planning curriculum for the classroom as well as strategies to individualize learning needs for each child. This data will be collected and monitored as it is useful in reporting on the trends within the classroom and to determine growth and learning in the assessed areas. Teachers will share with families any information or concerns they may have. This screening may provide information that a particular child is in need of further testing through the New Bedford Public Schools or may benefit from referrals to other agencies that can support the child’s needs. The Teaching Strategies Gold Online Assessment System will be utilized by the Preschool Expansion teachers to assess each child along a continuum. Information gathered on development of skills and growth within this system will be shared with families and the Special Education team quarterly.

The New Bedford Public Schools will coordinate and will communicate with families regarding the IEP process for children if a referral is received. NBPS will also continue to coordinate IEP team meetings. It is extremely important for families to recognize their importance in their child’s learning. We recognize that each child’s first teacher is their parent or guardian. When programs partner with families, everyone reaps the benefit. Therefore parents will agree to attend meetings to discuss their child’s learning and progress and to ensure good attendance in

the program. Parents will need to attend all IEP team meetings and reviews to ensure that all areas of learning are being met within the IEP and testing can be completed as needed. A formal agreement will be signed during registration that highlights these areas. The classroom teachers and the Special Education teaching team will have an open system for communicating with families. Families may be called at times for updates and they will also receive communication in writing and in person. Families will be invited to attend trainings and informational sessions to educate them on Special Education Rights and how to advocate for their child’s special education needs within the school system. These sessions are an opportunity for families to meet with educators and collaborate with other parents. Families are welcomed into the classrooms by the teaching teams.

The area of social-emotional skills development is an area of need within our community. This will be a primary area of focus for teaching and learning within the PEG classroom. A social emotional curriculum unit will be adopted by all classrooms for teaching children the skills needed to: get along with peers, get their personal needs met, and manage their emotions as appropriate to their learning ability. By utilizing a method for intentionally teaching these skills in small groups and paired with appropriate literature to enhance learning, children will make connections with their teachers and their peers. The Preschool Expansion classrooms will utilize the CSEFEL pyramid model for documenting and implementing behavioral management strategies. All curriculum objectives will coincide with the state’s “Social and Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play” and will guide teaching practice. The teaching staff will have a sound knowledge of these interventions and strategies through varied professional development opportunities.

The Preschool Expansion Special Education team will include the Preschool Expansion teachers, families, the center director, Special Education staff and the district. This team may determine that a more intensive placement would be beneficial to a child that is enrolled in the Preschool Expansion classroom. The team will then transition that child to the more appropriate services with minimal disruption. Children that require transportation as determined by the IEP will be provided with that service as needed. Children that receive special education services within the Preschool Expansion classroom will participate in a transition meeting at the end of services prior to entering Kindergarten. During this meeting the Preschool Expansion Team will discuss each child’s progress, suggest activities to strengthen skills at home and to ensure that the child will have all that is required in order to start their year in a New Bedford kindergarten classroom. The purpose of this meeting is to provide a seamless continuity of services for the child.

### Curriculum and Assessment

The teachers of New Bedford’s Preschool Expansion classrooms will collaborate on implementing common curricula to meet the needs of their children with the benefit of

extensive professional development and coaching. Currently the community-based providers use older versions of *Creative Curriculum*. The new expansion classrooms for three year-olds will all use the newly revised 6th edition of *Creative Curriculum*, which includes more structure around daily activities as well as new resources for each content area. Preschool expansion will create an opportunity for the participating teachers in the community-based and district classrooms to use a common curriculum, ideally expanding its use throughout the community over time, with the professional learning and coaching supports detailed below.

In Year 2 of the Expansion project, the teachers of all of the new four year-old classrooms will begin common implementation of the *OWL* curriculum for literacy and *Building Blocks* for math. The New Bedford Public Schools has evaluated the OWL curriculum and has found it to be aligned with the state Preschool Standards as well as with the district’s K-5 literacy curriculum, *Reading Street*. Most district preschool classrooms are using the OWL already, and the district is working on purchasing the curriculum for its remaining classrooms. The four community-based programs are eager to use the OWL curriculum and work together and with the district on effective implementation.

Both the district and the community-based preschools see a need to strengthen early math learning. Following Boston’s successful experience, the Planning Team decided to use the *Building Blocks* curriculum for math. The Planning Team, drawing on the experience of the Birth-3rd Partnership, would like to gradually expand use of both of these curricula throughout the preschool classrooms in New Bedford.

The four community-based programs all use *Teaching Strategies Gold* (*TSG*) currently for three and four year-olds and will continue its use in the new expansion classrooms. The district has not yet used *TSG* but will investigate using it as a pilot in the new expansion classrooms.

The Expansion Plan budget includes professional development on the new *Creative Curriculum*, the *OWL* curriculum, *Building Blocks*, and the Pyramid Model of social-emotional learning (CSEFEL). Both the district and the Birth-3rd Partnership have been sponsoring Pyramid Model professional development with the aim of seeding the approach throughout the city. Further, the project’s instructional coach will focus on effective implementation of these curricula and the integration of social-emotional skill development. The coach will also facilitate a cross-site Professional Learning Community on these topics for the participating teachers.

The Preschool Expansion Director and the Expansion Team will hire the instructional coach. The Expansion Director will supervise the coach (and help coordinate the work of the family advocates and the comprehensive services team).

The Expansion Team would like to be able to assign all expansion children SASID numbers when this becomes possible, and it would like to be able to share *TSG* information electronically as that option becomes available. In the meantime, the Expansion Team will develop a plan to share TSG information with kindergarten teachers (with parental consent) in the most efficient manner possible. Further, the limited size of the Expansion project in the first years may allow

for experimentation with face-to-face meetings between preschool and kindergarten teachers, perhaps at a spring or summer gathering designed for this purpose.

### Birth to Grade 3 Alignment

New Bedford has worked for approximately two years in intentional development of a birth through grade three alignment strategy. Participating in the EEC Alignment grant provided the opportunity to develop a structure that supported participation from all sectors of the system working with families of young children including the public school, early childhood community, and the many service providers who work with families of young children. This structure has developed into the current Partnership which is addressing several areas of the system to strengthen the work.

The initial work focused on ways that the educators in the community could come together to address concerns around literacy development and achievement. With the number of children scoring less than proficient at the grade-three benchmark, this has become a critical need.

Another identified need focused around developing children’s social emotional health and well- being. These identified need developed into two major professional development opportunities where both public school and private and non-profit early childhood programs participate together. In addition, an opportunity for families to participate was made available for training in social emotional development. The positive response and the great outcomes from that have set the stage for ongoing professional development opportunities to continue in efforts to align curriculum with programs from birth through elementary school.

These efforts have also helped to develop another subgroup that has focused on School Readiness. This group focuses on supporting and sponsoring four major activities throughout the year that promote the importance of literacy and other activities that create an environment that sets the stage for school success. This ongoing group has made the commitment to continue this work to further strengthen the infrastructure in the community. With their ongoing work, the group hopes to increase awareness and make these activities popular annual events.

The activities that will take place in the New Bedford PreK expansion are designed to work with and complement the other activities taking place through grant funding from EEC and DESE. The ground was set through the work of the Birth through Grade Three Alignment grant. The New Bedford Public Schools is the lead agent for the Full Day Kindergarten, Early Childhood Special Education Entitlement Grant (fund code 262) and Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments Grant (Fund Code 391) P.A.C.E., Inc. Child Care Works is the lead for the CFCE grant is a sub-grantee for the Educator and Provider Support grant. Justice Resource Institute acts as lead for the Early Childhood Mental Health grant. The Kennedy Donovan Center is the lead agency for the MIECHV Home Visiting grant offering Parents as Teachers and Healthy Families programs. The work in the community for many years has focused on ensuring that the existing programs are working together to complement and promote the activities they all

offer. Most programs that have been mentioned sit on the CFCE and each other’s Advisory Boards. Recent efforts have strengthened this work. By coming together on a regular basis to work on some specific projects that allow for enhanced collaboration, the infrastructure has been further developed to support increasing the leveraging of activities and resources to maximize the audience and participation in an effort to reach as many families as possible.

One of the strengths of the New Bedford community is the level of relationship that has been established among the community of public and nonprofit. Born from the longevity of the staff participating, many of the individuals working in the sector have worked collaboratively for years. This has set the stage for a motivation to be open to working closely in different ways to bring the plan of creating a coordinated preschool system to fruition in the city. This level of relationship is demonstrated in several long standing initiatives that take place on an annual basis. The CFCE works with the Full Day K grant to sponsor the ‘Smooth Sailing into Kindergarten’ initiative. This initiative is designed to provide information to families in the year prior to the transition and register as many children in the spring prior to entering kindergarten. The Brain Building/Family Fun Day is sponsored by the CFCE with representatives from all the early childhood education programs, public school, and agencies that serve families with young children including the Infant Toddler Home Visiting programs and the ECMH programs. The EPS grant, administered through PACE, Inc. CCW, sponsors ongoing professional development to all providers. All of these activities are occurring in a much more collaborative way, through the

intentional work of the Birth-3rd Partnership.

# Costs

This plan proposes adding five expansion classrooms of 20 students each in Year 1 and an additional five in Year 2. Eight of these 10 classrooms are in community-based programs; two are existing district classrooms extended to an eight hour day, five days a week, and 12 months a year.

The community-based programs will staff these classrooms with three adults. The district will continue its current staffing model of a lead teacher and a paraprofessional.

This plan includes numerous provisions for ensuring high-quality, including coaching, curricula, assessments, professional learning, family advocates, a comprehensive services team, and a special education team. Most of these supports are shared. They will be more effective as a result of the collaboration across the five sites, and their costs will be lower due to the shared nature of many of them (e.g., the coaching and professional development).

All five organizations hosting expansion classrooms are making significant in-kind contributions of space, equipment, and overhead.

The district superintendent, Dr. Pia Durkin, and the center program directors and their Executive Directors are committed to expanding affordable, high-quality preschool in New Bedford. The will continue planning and advocating to maximize all available resources to this end.