



# **Report on the FY17 Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative**

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## I. Purpose of Report

This report satisfies the requirement set forth in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 General Appropriations Act (GAA), line item 3000-6025, that the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) report to the joint committee on education on the status of the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative planning grants, including but not limited to a needs assessment, program design and anticipated costs. This report covers the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative activities in FY2017.

## II. Overview of the Commonwealth Preschool Expansion Grant

In 2015, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) was awarded a federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) from the U. S. Department of Education to expand high-quality early childhood education to four-year-old children whose families earn under 200 percent (200%) of the federal poverty line. Five high-need communities in Massachusetts -- Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, and Springfield -- are currently being funded through this federal grant to implement full-day, full-year preschool for four-year-olds through public-private partnerships between the local public school district as the lead education agency (LEA) and two or three local licensed early learning providers (ELPs).

In FY16, the state established the **Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Grant (Planning Grant)**. The purpose of the Planning Grant is to support communities in identifying the local infrastructure, funding and supports that would be needed to increase access to high quality preschool programs, in a manner similar to the parameters of the PEG, to children ages 2.9 through kindergarten entry. The Planning Grant aligns with the state's efforts to ensure that children have high quality early education experiences that lead them to greater success in school and life.

Line item 3000-6025 in the FY17 GAA provided \$200,000 for EEC to administer the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative to “*support planning activities in cities, towns, regional school districts or educational collaboratives currently providing pre-kindergarten or preschool opportunities, to expand pre-kindergarten or preschool opportunities on a voluntary basis to children ages 2 years and 9 months to 3 years and 11 months old.*” EEC awarded a \$20,000 grant each to the cities of Boston, Brockton and Salem for the purposes of initiating new or expanding existing strategic planning efforts to develop public/private partnerships that expand children’s access to preschool programs in the community

Strategic plans submitted to EEC by these communities focused on local needs and documented local efforts to simultaneously expand access while also building program quality components similar to Massachusetts’ Preschool Expansion Grant model. Each community engaged their early education stakeholders in the planning process and proposed local governance structures for expanding preschool through a public/private partnership design. Grantees were required to develop plans that considered both expansion with their existing financial resources and with

additional funding and supports. Activities that the grantees proposed with current resources included joint professional development opportunities, aligned curriculum, and developmental screening of children. Activities that the grantees said would be feasible with additional resources included the expansion of prekindergarten seats offering a variety of schedules, coordinated enrollment, family support services, behavioral health consultation, educator coaching, salaries commensurate with public schools that would help to attract and retain highly qualified educators, and pipeline programs with local community colleges.

## **II. Local Community Strategic Plans for Preschool Expansion**

The Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative grants supported collaborations between public school districts, community based early education programs licensed by the Department of Early Education and Care, and other stakeholders for the purpose of designing a comprehensive plan for expanding local preschool opportunities for children ages 2.9 to 5 years old. The grantees were required to consider the following elements of high quality preschool in their strategic planning process:

- Partnerships between the local school district and private early learning providers in all areas of expanded preschool programming;
- Full-day, full-year programming (at least 8 hours/day, 12 months/year);
- Either a Level 4 rating in the Massachusetts Quality Rating and Information System (QRIS), [or National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation and Level 3 QRIS rating of participating EEC-licensed early learning programs within 4 years];
- A maximum class size of 20 and maximum child-teacher ratio of 10:1;
- Curriculum based on the Massachusetts Common Core Standards and EEC Standards and Guidelines;
- Child formative assessment using the Teaching Strategies Gold™ tool;
- At least one educator in each classroom with a bachelor's degree in a relevant field;
- Educator salaries commensurate with those of comparable positions in the local public schools;
- Professional development for all staff, including coaching, group trainings, and other supports for planning and implementation of curriculum, provided in collaboration with the local public school district;
- Family engagement activities, including support for the Kindergarten transition, and information and resources about child development;
- Comprehensive services (including services that address health, mental health, and behavioral needs) for all families;

- Inclusion of students receiving special education services (currently, 6.9% of preschool age students in Massachusetts receive special education services) as well as children requiring other supports (e.g., children without permanent homes, dual language learners (DLLs), refugee or immigrant families, etc.); and
- Effective efforts to build linkages to services for children from birth to age 3 (e.g., early intervention or home visiting services), as well as support for the transition to Kindergarten and connections with public elementary schools (e.g., through communication between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten teachers and sharing of Kindergarten expectations).

**Table 1. Summary of the Planning Grant Communities**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Award Amount</b>
Boston	\$20,000
Brockton	\$20,000
Salem	\$20,000
Total awards	\$60,000

## **Partnerships and Planning**

All local partnerships included EEC-licensed community-based preschool programs and public schools. Some partnerships included representatives from local municipalities and the city Mayor's office, philanthropic organizations and state or community colleges. The planning process built on existing local collaborations, many with longstanding visions for ways to enhance opportunities for the success of children and families in the community. At the same time, each plan was unique to the needs of the community that created it. An overview of the strategic plans from each of the grantees follows.

### **Boston**

In an effort to support expansion to a mixed delivery system in Boston, Mayor Walsh appointed a small group of advisors to help him build expansion plans based on Boston's Early Childhood Advisory Committee's recommendations. As part of this work, the small group of advisors commissioned Parthenon Education Consulting to help the city of Boston determine the following:

- Number of providers in each neighborhood to determine supply
- Number of teachers
- Number of teachers by degree
- Which curriculum is used by the program
- Which programs met the "quality threshold" as defined by use of curriculum, degreed teacher, NAEYC accredited and/or QRIS level 3.

In addition to the research provided by Parthenon, the group subcontracted with Wellesley Center for Women to conduct a sample of community based providers (CBOs) and parochial schools to determine quality by neighborhood using observational measures such as the CLASS and ECERS. The results of the findings indicated that Boston had much work to do to help programs improve their quality. Boston's findings underscored the need for improvements at both the instructional and director/principal capacities. Based on this data and desire to strengthen the delivery system in Boston, they proposed reaching out to Community Based programs and possibly parochial schools (pending discussions with leadership) to improve programming options. Towards this end, Boston established partnerships with the United Way and the University of Massachusetts Boston's Institute for Early Education Leadership and Innovation (UMB). Boston also indicated a plan to convene the city's providers to describe the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) program and process, and showcase the pathways to quality (curriculum, degreed teachers, NAEYC, and/or QRIS). BPS researched current pathways programs and funding options (e.g., recent reports by New America). BPS staff also talked with community-based providers regarding degree attainment and potential barriers. BPS is partnering with UMB, which has established flexible pathways to early childhood education degree completion, as well as begun the design of a new course on instructional leadership to equip early education program administrators with the knowledge and skills to support high quality teaching, professional development and degree completion of their teachers, and create organizational cultures of learning and excellence.

## **Brockton**

Brockton noted that their Strategic Plan of FY 2016, *Brockton Champions Children*, and their *Sustainability Plan* of FY 2017, were built around the central concept of quality and upon the ideas of community engagement, strengthening families, supporting child development, and facilitating success in school. Their FY2017 Sustainability Plan provided their vision, funding options, and a comprehensive view of preschool expansion in the Brockton community, and identified what, if any funding, was required for implementation.

Brockton's FY17 Sustainability Plan integrated the notion of distributed leadership into their plans, which honored the strong partnership between Brockton Public Schools (BPS) and community Early Learning Programs (ELPs) in Brockton. Three supporting goals anchored the vision of their Sustainability Plan:

1. All children have high quality early childhood learning supports, environments, and/or activities that meet their families' needs.
2. All Families have meaningful community and parenting supports they need to strengthen their role as their child's first teacher.
3. All Early childhood professionals have the knowledge, skills, and supports to work effectively with and on behalf of children and families.

## Salem

The Salem Public Schools (SPS) submitted a preschool expansion plan that built on the school district's recently developed strategic plan. SPS proposed to deliver services, develop curricula, and mentor educators in their preschool expansion plan. The focus of their plan is on children ages 2.9 to kindergarten entry and their families. SPS's goal was to identify the needs of their youngest children, build on strengths within their community, and develop strategies for providing all of Salem's preschoolers, especially those from low-income families, with quality programming.

### *More Seats to Ensure Access for All*

SPS's plan would provide enough new seats to fully eliminate community providers' wait lists, through collaboration between the School District, private early education providers, and community-based organizations. SPS determined that demand for preschool outstrips available supply in their community, and that their system is rife with duplication and confusion for many parents. SPS proposed to streamline information sharing, registration, and enrollment so that families better understand options and the benefits of early education.

### *Quality and Stability*

SPS acknowledged currently, the experience and skill level of Salem's early education providers spans a range, and that the salaries that they earn mandate second jobs. Many of the city's early education providers have high turnover rates, impacting the consistency of staff that preschoolers need. SPS' plan aspires to hire educators with bachelor's degrees and compensate them accordingly. Additionally, their plan provides for the hiring of new positions and the restructuring of old positions to ensure the successful implementation of administrative and quality components of preschool expansion.

### *Inclusive Opportunities*

Inclusion and supporting students with emerging and identified special needs is a practice that Salem's preschool community embraced in collaboration with our community partners in the health and mental health field. Throughout Salem's early childhood programs, a variety of inclusive practices are implemented. Students have access to supports ranging from co-taught classrooms to ancillary staff providing push in support. The inclusive model allows general educators and special educators to create partnerships that foster environments where differentiated instruction and multi-sensory methodologies are routinely embedded into teaching practices. The profile of students in inclusive settings varies between disability category and level of need. Within-district resources and necessary consultative services, SPS indicated that they are able to provide the instruction necessary to help students with disabilities close the gap between their skill abilities and their grade level expectations, and that special education supports and services should not be viewed as a separate model, but instead as a part of the continuum of

supports, services and interventions created to ensure that the general education environment is responsive to the diverse learning needs of all students.

### *Harnessing the Power of the Community*

SPS acknowledged that many students show up to school hungry, in poor health, and lacking supports away from the classroom. Salem's Preschool Expansion Strategic Planning Team—and Salem Public School's Strategic Planning Workgroup before them—worked to develop a plan that meets the needs of Salem's youngest residents and their families, especially low- and middle-income families.

### **Needs Assessment Process**

The three communities used administrative data, surveys, and/or focus groups to evaluate the needs of families and community-based programs in their local systems. Two of the three communities were particularly interested in the planning process because of the large numbers of children they see attending kindergarten without any prior early education experience. The third was concerned about supporting strong levels of quality across the system to incorporate community-based program into an aligned universal prekindergarten system. All three were motivated by a desire to build an integrated early education system that included the diversity of local providers. These plans propose a variety of approaches to meet families' needs, allow for prekindergarten expansion beyond the physical space limitations of the public schools and integrate trusted partners in the community.

## **III. Proposed Models and Costs**

Each grantee was asked to provide program plans for two scenarios: continued work without any additional funding; and additional funding requiring a local match. Across all three communities, ongoing planning and collaboration activities could be continued at current funding levels, but any expansion of seats and extensive integration and alignment work would require additional funding.

### **Boston**

Boston is one of the five cities that is participating in Massachusetts' Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) program and they are actively working to secure additional funding to sustain those classrooms when the PEG grant period ends in 2019. Boston is working to make prekindergarten universally-accessible in the city; however expansion beyond the PEG classrooms is dependent on funding. With current funding levels, Boston will continue to offer the prekindergarten programming within Boston Public Schools and ongoing collaboration with the local EEC-licensed providers which supports the classrooms currently being funded by PEG. Boston identified a need to support educator degree attainment and much of their planning work focused on identifying the costs for this program.



## Brockton

Brockton proposed one option for expanding preschool that would not require funding, as it involved their ongoing work on preschool expansion and fulfilling the vision of high quality early childhood in their community. Some major activities involved in this plan will be supported through in-kind funds. Other elements of this plan included:

- Brockton's Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) Council – Efforts are continuing on enhancing Brockton's community work. Their CFCE Council is positioned to develop working groups based on needs that arise.
- Brockton's Birth-Grade Three efforts – BPS staff meet regularly with the CFCE Coordinator to integrate alignment efforts within and across programs.
- Joint Professional Development – Brockton identified a need for community-based early educators to access professional development opportunities offered by BPS. EEC's Educator and Provider Support (EPS) network provides professional development to many early education programs in Brockton.

Brockton proposed a second option for expanding preschool that would need to be funded with additional state funds and accompanying matching private funds. This plan includes having two classrooms in a public school building, placements in family child care programs, and a classroom in a center based program and is outlined below. Some groups would be mixed age grouping, others preschool age only.

- 1 full day, full year Head Start inclusive preschool classroom to be located in a BPS building that would be scheduled from 8:00 AM-6:00 PM (20 students)
- 1 full day, school year inclusive preschool classroom in a BPS building that would be scheduled from 8:00 AM -3:00 PM (20 students)
- 1 full day, full year inclusive preschool classroom to be located at Brockton Day Nursery that would be scheduled from 8:00 AM -6:00 PM (20 students)
- Purchase of 6 “slots” in community family child care homes. The family child care homes typically operate from 6:30 AM -6:00 PM full year. These slots would be strategically located throughout the city to ensure that transportation would not be an issue. (6 students)

## Salem

### **Scenario One - No additional resources are available**

In this plan, Salem would enhance and expand preschool but there would be limited resources for professional development and marketing. However, as they move into years two and three, the plan would need to be adjusted.

Year One: The first year of plan implementation will focus on establishing the governance and leadership structure to ensure stability and success moving forward.

#### *Create subcommittee:*

Under the umbrella of the Salem Public Schools' Collaborative, Salem will establish a subcommittee comprised of Salem Public School staff and leadership from community providers. Salem will work to ensure that 80% of the 13 community providers are represented. This subcommittee will meet quarterly.

#### *Restructure staffing*

SPS will restructure the existing program manager position for the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) program, evolving it into a Coordinator of Early Learning Programs role for the city. The individual in this position will work to maximize the community's resources and point them toward a common purpose—helping all children have the best chance to be ready for school. S/he will also be responsible for weaving together early learning programs in the City to provide families with the opportunity to prepare their children to enter school ready to succeed. By braiding and blending resources, Salem will create stronger, more equitable environments for young children and families.

#### *Shared Professional Development opportunities*

With the support of the subcommittee and the leadership of the Coordinator of Early Learning (COL), Salem will establish a year-long calendar that lists all professional development opportunities. The COL will work with community partners and sub-committee to identify necessary trainings and work to secure training space and trainers.

#### *Collect more data*

The Salem team recently began the work to gain a comprehensive understanding of preschool needs in their community. Over the first year, this team will continue to collect meaningful data that will further shape Salem's strategy. The plan for additional needs assessment data collection will include:

- Detailed survey from all provider leaders
- Survey of frontline staff
- Survey parents
- Focus group of subset of parents

### *Implement DRIVE Initiative*

Through Salem's partnership with United Way they propose implementing the Drive Initiative. The Drive Initiative supports universal child development screening for young children aims to achieve two goals: 1. Support Children & Families: Build community capacity to screen children early for potential developmental delays, and use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) as an opportunity for family engagement, education, and referral to services. This will help families take an active approach to gaining more knowledge about their child's development and advocating for the resources necessary to support their children's school readiness. 2. Drive Policy & Systems Change: Create a universal screening system in order to gain a better understanding of the developmental progress of young children to inform funding and policy decisions.

### **Scenario Two - Additional resources are available**

Year Two : If resources become available, Salem would be able to move forward with their plan in years two and three. Salem could bring on additional resources, such as coaching, transportation, and hiring Bachelor degree teachers whose salaries are commensurate with teachers in the Salem Public School system.

#### *Open One New Classroom for Twenty 4-year-olds*

Class will have a maximum of 20 students and a minimum of one teacher with a Bachelor's Degree and one paraprofessional. Every effort will be made to ensure that at least one staff person is fluent in Spanish to communicate with our Spanish speaking families. Educators would be paid salaries commensurate with Salem Public School teachers in similar roles.

#### *Transportation*

In order to ensure access for all families, Salem will work with community providers to establish shared transportation resources. Salem Public School will dedicate staffing within the SPS Transportation Department to ensure safety of the vehicles and compliance of all regulations. This role will oversee and manage the EEC regulations, staffing, documentation, and relationship with the transportation company and the early learning centers.

Year Three: Open a second classroom for twenty 4-year-olds

## **IV. Conclusions**

In reviewing the FY17 planning grants, communities have clearly expressed the need for expansion of access to prekindergarten seats, noting large numbers of children entering kindergarten without any prior early education experiences and detailing the cost and logistical barriers to families to accessing these programs. The planning grants have provided a much desired catalyst for communities to build local collaborations in support of the expansion and alignment of early education opportunities. The strategic plans that have resulted provide powerful road maps for the multitude of ways a community might build a mixed delivery system across public and private programs to coordinate prekindergarten access. At the same time, it is clear that while some alignment can be developed within current funding levels, the full implementation of these plans to expand access require additional funds.