**Somerville Public Schools**

**Preschool Expansion Planning Grant - Final Report June 2016**

**I. Executive Summary**

The strategic plan for preschool expansion in Somerville is built upon work that began with the Early Learning Challenge Grant in 2013 and is tailored specifically to the unique needs and context of the city’s early childhood landscape. Somerville has a strong commitment to Universal Kindergarten Readiness per the directive of our mayor, Joe Curtatone, a commitment which led to the Kindergarten Readiness for All initiative. This initiative puts the responsibility for quality early childhood on the community as a whole, and this includes center-based programs and the public schools. As a result Somerville Public Schools (SPS) has worked to establish formal partnerships with Head Start and have three other centers as primary partners (see table below). In addition, there are four other centers who have participated in early childhood alignment work and are committed to expanding opportunities for low income children and families in their centers. Our plan seeks to leverage the existing relationships with providers to establish slots for low income children in each of our partner centers. The strategic plan has four elements at its core: 1) strong partnerships = strong leadership; 2) a vision for curriculum and program quality; 3) an integrated Comprehensive Services Team that supports inclusion, special education, and family engagement needs; and 4) a pipeline for teacher education and professional development to support teacher quality.

Our needs assessments of providers and families indicated that a combination of new classrooms and integrating low-income slots into existing programs will best meet the needs of children in Somerville. Many centers are already serving low-income children but could serve more with a strategic focus on resources, outreach, quality programming, and center support. In addition we will open some new classrooms at two centers, creating a system of shared resources and programming across the city. Because of our strong partnerships, we already have a framework for a leadership team that can guide this work in the city. Somerville’s Preschool Expansion team will be a sub-committee of the Early Education Steering Committee (EESC) - stewards of ECE initiatives in the district and community. The EESC will work closely with the Somerville Early Childhood Advisory Council (leadership and advocacy group for agencies that serve children and families) to garner support. Somerville Public Schools acts as the Lead Educational Agency and works closely with Early Learning Partners to support collaborative professional development and share curricular practices. We are also in the process of developing a comprehensive curriculum building effort across the city supported by instructional coaching and a vision for inquiry-based, personalized learning that builds on the idea that children are capable, independent, and collaborative learners.

Funding per child will be spread across the partnerships. Our plan is based on two new 20 -child classrooms, three classrooms of 10 expansion slots and 10 non-expansion slots (one of which is new), and seven classrooms of 5 expansion slots and 15 non-expansion slots. We developed three budgets (see Appendix), one each for these three configurations (20 expansion slots, 10 expansion slots, and 5 expansion slots). Our goal is to support low income families to be able to work, live, play, and go to school in Somerville. Rising housing costs combined with the high cost of childcare make it difficult for many low income families. Our PEG programming will set eligibility at up to 250% of the federal poverty guidelines in order to serve a range of low income families. We want high quality experiences for all children in all classrooms and our attention to things that can serve the “greater good” are what make this plan equitable and responsive to the needs of the community and the agencies who serve it. This report demonstrates that Somerville is unusually well-positioned to implement PEG work and directly impact not only the 100 children in PEG slots, but the over 120 children in PEG associated classrooms and the over 200 more four-year olds in various care settings in the city whose teachers participate in our professional development efforts. The quality systems we build via our PEG plan will ultimately influence all early childhood programs in the city - both public and center-based.

**Somerville PEG Partners**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Collaborative Partners** | **Director/Administrator** |
| Community Action Agency of Somerville - Head Start | David Gibbs, Executive Director |
| Elizabeth Peabody House | Sheri Rios, Director |
| Somerville YMCA Childcare Center | Cheryl McNulty, Director |
| Open Center for Children | Gale Morano, Director |
| Bigelow Cooperative Preschool | Melinda Weber, Director |
| Community Preschool | Jenn Guptill, Director |
| Pooh and Friends Childcare Center | Flavia da Silva, Director |
| Somerville Childcare Center | Patricia Kennedy, Director |

**II. Leadership Plan**

**Leadership Roles and Responsibilities - The Somerville Context**

As noted in the Executive Summary, Somerville’s Preschool Expansion team will be a sub-committee of the Early Education Steering Committee (stewards of early childhood initiatives in the public schools and community at large that includes city, district, university, agency, and center-based partners). The Somerville Early Childhood Advisory Council (advocacy and networking group for agencies that serve children and families) has members who overlap with the EESC and as such is positioned to support the PEG work when needed.

These committees are the organizational structures Somerville has in place to carry out its Universal Kindergarten Readiness plan. Somerville’s early education agenda in general, and this Preschool Expansion Plan in particular, have the full backing of the Somerville’s Mayor, Superintendent, and School Committee.

*Somerville Department of Early Childhood:* The focus on Universal Kindergarten Readiness grew out of the city’s Early Learning Challenge Grant work and as a part of this initiative the school district created the Director of Early Education position in 2014. The Director of Early Education (Dr. Lisa Kuh) is responsible not only for the preschool programming in the district, but also for developing a cohesive system of early education and care that aligns the district and community contexts. The Director of Early Education works with an Early Childhood Instructional Coach to support best practices across the city and develop a unified plan for quality teaching. This PEG plan includes an additional coach who will become part of this instructional team to ensure that each PEG classroom receives coaching during the first year of the plan and into the future.

*Request for Collaboration Partners:* In 2015 the Somerville Public Schools, in an effort to formalize existing partnerships, created a Request for Collaboration (RFC) that was sent to its primary partners: Head Start, the Elizabeth Peabody House, The YMCA Preschool, and The Open Center for Children. Each director met with the Director of Early Education, completed a letter of inquiry and application, and currently MOUs are being developed to continue to provide curriculum support in the form of materials, professional development, and coaching as well as mental health, resource and referral, director mentoring, and family engagement support. We have had a formal arrangement with CAAS since 2014 with the Healey Head Start Classroom, a Head Start and SPS teacher working together to provide full day programming. This coming year we expand this partnership by adding a Head Start classroom at the Capuano Early Childhood Center. The directors of these centers form our RFC group and are our primary partners in our PEG work. If this initiative is funded then our secondary partners (Community Preschool, Bigelow Cooperative Preschool, Pooh and Friends Childcare Center, and Somerville Childcare Center) would become RFC partners and all would be brought into the consortium formally.

*The Preschool Expansion Team:* The Preschool Expansion Team will assume responsibility for oversight and support of the preschool expansion efforts. The team includes Somerville Public School (SPS) representatives (Director of Early Education, the Director of the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (the city’s CFCE), and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. The team is also comprised of: Directors or designees of the 8 participating community-based programs (RFC partners included); representation from Somerville’s Health and Human Services Department; and the Director of SomerPromise, Somerville’s cradle to career project; and the Somerville Health Agenda. Members of the Early Education Steering Committee and the Early Childhood Advisory Council can will also consult to the Preschool Expansion Team as needed.

*District Responsibilities and Roles:* SPS as the LEA will assume responsibility for grants management. The budget includes funding for a .5 FTE administrative assistant to support grants management and project coordination. The Director of Early Education will oversee the overall project and will in addition take specific responsibility for the Classroom Quality, Teacher Capacity, and Curriculum and Assessment components. She will also coordinate with the SPS Special Education Department, in conjunction with the PEG Comprehensive Services Team (see Family Engagement section below) to oversee the Inclusion component of the project. The Director of the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative will work with the Director of Early Education in overseeing the overall project and will in addition take specific responsibility for the organization and development of the Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement component of the project.

The Request for Collaboration (RFC) process that Somerville designed is committed to ensuring that directors are supported throughout their interactions with the LEA to provide the highest quality services. This includes support for administrative practices and the .5 FTE administrative assistant noted above will also support directors in administering PEG programming.

*Community-Based Directors’ Responsibilities and Roles:* Directors who serve the Preschool Expansion children will provide high-quality early learning services in accordance with the project’s model. They will participate in the Preschool Expansion Team monthly meetings, including sharing ideas and feedback in order to improve implementation across all sites on an ongoing basis. The four RFC programs will participate in this as an extension of their ongoing commitment to developing a strong partnership with SPS and each other. A major focus is the development and implementation of a coherent high quality curriculum supporting by instructional coaching. The current secondary partners will also participate in these curriculum efforts in collaboration with SPS Early Education leaders.

*Organizational Strengths and Skills:* SPS has a plan in the Kindergarten Readiness for All Initiative (2015). This plan had its inception in the alignment work of the Early Learning Challenge Grant and in a commitment from the city’s mayor to support Universal Kindergarten Readiness in a mixed-delivery system rather than Universal PreK provided by the public schools. This ensured that the district would work in concert with its community partners. In addition, SPS departments (ELL, SPED, Family Engagement, and Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction) are all represented on the Early Education Steering Committee. SPS is prepared to support centers with in-kind contributions of materials and support. The Director of Early Education has built relationships with centers via professional development and coaching so that our partners are now receptive to further collaboration, including a vision for a forward-thinking, innovative curricular approach (See Curriculum section below.) Somerville Public Schools as the LEA brings an array of in-kind expertise from various departments including Data Analysis, Parent Information Center, IT, ELL, SPED, SFLC, and ECE.

In Somerville the center-based programs have a 20 year history of working collaboratively through EEC funded Community Partnerships for Children and the Somerville CFCE as well as flexibility in program implementation and a commitment to working with diverse populations. They have adapted to ever-changing landscape in Somerville time and time again. Because they are used to providing full day care, work regularly with EEC, are familiar with the subsidy and QRIS systems, they bring a layer of knowledge to the table that can make PEG collaborations robust. In addition, our Head Start programs have much experience providing comprehensive services and use a curriculum called 3C, which is an inquiry and project-based, thematic and emergent curriculum that focuses on learning through play and discovery. Bringing this work to both the standards-based approach in the public schools, and to centers who have not adopted a particular approach, will be powerful and engaging for all involved.

**Communication**

The Preschool Expansion Team will hold monthly team meetings that will follow a “plan, do, review” process. Practices among centers will be shared and the system fine tuned. Centers serving PEG children will engage in quarterly progress reviews to report on their work. In addition site visits among directors, teachers, and SPS team members will ensure that practices are shared. We will set up an email distribution list and use the Somerville Early Childhood website (currently in design) to keep current on curricular approaches and policy shifts. We will also set up a Google docs folder to facilitate the sharing of documents and collaboration.

**Community Stakeholder Participation**

Community Stakeholders at the community, city, and district level will be invited to participate in monthly PEG meetings and will be kept apprised of the development and progress of the PEG work. This includes the School Committee; Director of Health and Human Services, Director of Student Service; representative from our partners at Tufts University, Lesley University, and Bunker Hill Community College; the Child Development program in the Career and Technical Education program at Somerville High School; The Recreation Department; and Community Schools - the afterschool program arm of SPS.

Somerville is also part of two important collaborative initiatives. First, last year our mayor and superintendent convened a Community Cabinet that brought city and district employees together to align our work. Second, Somerville was invited to participate in the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Education Redesign Lab. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/16/02/education-redesign-lab-launches-all-means>

Along with Massachusetts cities Salem and Newton, as well as Providence, RI, Louisville, KY and Oakland, CA, Somerville sent members of our Community Cabinet lead by our mayor and superintendent to the By All Means convening to launch this work at Harvard. Both these initiatives have a shared data system as one of their goals, which would allow community stakeholders across agencies to better communicate and serve families. While the focus is not solely early childhood, both initiatives have an early childhood/cradle to career focus that aligns well with PEG goals and means that we have the support to move forward with PEG work should we receive funding.

**Program Oversight and Quality Improvement**

*Oversight:* The Director of Early Education will oversee the coaches and communicate directly with program directors about curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff development and evaluation, professional development, and quality. The Director of the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative will support mentorship of directors, family engagement, resource and referral, enrollment, and outreach. Together the Director of Early Education and the Director of the SFLC will manage the Comprehensive Services Team (See information on this team below.)

*Data Collection and Shared Data:* The SPS Data Analyst will support the Preschool Expansion Team in identifying data strands and tools already in use. Through the Community Cabinet and By ALL Means Initiatives, the city and district are exploring the use of an integrated data system that would allow us to follow and support families from birth through high school. We would share this data with our community partners, and they will in turn share data with us. District data such as the Kindergarten Entry Skills Inventory, DIBELS, CLASS and ECERS data, new preschool assessments (in process), as well as any subsequent needs assessments will also be shared.

As mentioned above, center directors will participate in a continuous improvement process as part of the Preschool Expansion Team (i.e., will respond to early evidence of change and adjust program implementation accordingly). In this way, the directors and their staffs will participate in overseeing the implementation of the Preschool Expansion project and improving implementation throughout the rollout of the project.

*EEC Role:* The Department of Early Education and Care will provide support for QRIS licensing, networking with other expansion communities, templates and shared resources

*Unanticipated Challenges:* While Somerville has a strong history of collaboration, complex partnerships are always a challenge and require thoughtful planning and communication. Somerville’s existing structures such as committees and initiatives provide a forum for issues that may arise. In addition we anticipate that monthly meetings with directors will be complicated by the fact that they are often overwhelmed with the multiple duties of their jobs and leaving their centers is often difficult. We propose meeting at the various centers on a rotating basis but also will look to provide coverage for directors during meetings. The Directors of Early Education and the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative will provide the infrastructure for problem solving and oversight with the support of the Assistant Superintendent. SomerPromise and Somerville Health Agenda will be partners in supporting these efforts as well. Expanding community representation on the Early Education Steering Committee and fostering strong communication between the EESC and the Preschool Expansion Team will help address communication challenges.

**III. Program Design and Development**

**A. Needs Assessment Results**

As part of the Early Learning Challenge Grant, in 2014 Somerville began the process of conducting a needs assessment of providers in order to learn more about the challenges facing families and those who care for them. We conducted a needs assessment of 39 providers (2015). As part of our PEG planning grant we did a small survey of 83 families at preschool registration (2016), as well as an online survey of over 200 families (2016). The data below addresses the questions posed in the RFR and was selected from these needs assessments which are included in the appendix. Overall the data indicates a need for more full day options and slots overall, especially for those whose incomes necessitate subsidies for childcare.

The data on program quality also validates the need for additional support in moving the needle on quality in Somerville’s early education and care programs. ECERS and CLASS data provide a direction for professional development and a framework for the coaching process.

**Needs of Families**

*Unmet Needs and Program Strengths:* The Family Survey indicated that families have an unmet need for full day childcare. 76% of centers have waitlists and children in Somerville are attending over 50 different programs across the Boston metropolitan area in order to have access to care. In addition, we know anecdotally that families who use the SPS preschool program (which ends at 1:45) piece together very complicated childcare arrangements that pose undo stress and costs for families in need.

* 38% of nearly 200 respondents used a childcare center; 28% used a grandparent, 18% used a program in the public schools; 14% had children in a center; 11% in an FCC and 7% with family or friends. Fifty-five different programs were cited.
* Most respondents (33%) heard about the program though neighbors and friends, followed by the Internet (16%). Less than 10% identified SFLC, PIC, and the Somerville Hub, Childcare Choices of Boston, social worker, newspaper or healthcare providers. Many commented however that they passed by the program in their neighborhood or saw an advertisement.
* 14% of the respondents said their child was not enrolled in a program.
* By zip code, the largest waitlists are in 02143 (85% of providers), followed by 02144 (73%) and 02145 (61%). Providers in 02145 tended to have smaller numbers of children on the waitlist (one to five). Providers in the 02144 zip code tended to have 6 to 10 children on the waitlist. With regard to interest in expanding, across all providers, about a third were interested, another third were not sure, and a third were not interested.
* The PEG expansion sites operate in all three zip codes, all are licensed family child care centers, and have operated for over ten years. All operate in mornings and afternoons, and summers. Three out of four operate during school breaks. None offer evenings after 6:00, overnight or weekend care.

*High Risk Groups and Targeted Programming:* 76% of providers report a waitlist, with Family Childcare Providers (FCC) having a larger number of infants and toddlers on the waitlist and centers having a larger number of preschoolers. Families who need subsidies are at risk for either not having access to childcare or losing funding should their economic eligibility change. Some case studies we have been analyzing indicate that in many cases it is easier for families to leave children in the care of relatives rather than access childcare. The voucher system is also challenging for families to navigate, and the waitlist is daunting, making use of subsidies a rarity rather than the rule. While centers may offer vouchers, families have difficulty accessing a voucher to use and many centers are dropping voucher slots altogether with the exception of Family Childcare Providers.

* Half of the providers say they offer some kind of financial assistance. Of these 72% offer childcare vouchers; 50% have EEC contracted slots. Half of the four PEG sites offer childcare vouchers; three have contracted EEC slots. The Open Center has one subsidized slot, Elizabeth Peabody House has 11, and YMCA as 12.
* A Spring 2016 Survey of 83 SMILE parent registrants provides the following information on child care needs for these parents: Most need full day care. Of these, the highest percentage (73%) lived in the 02144 zip code, followed closely by 02145 (68%), and 02143 (65%). Many parents (between 46% and 65%) also would like afterschool care. Most of these are from 02143 followed by 02144 (58%) and 02145 (46%). Most parents would like summer care (72% from 02143, 67% from 02144, and 57% form 02145). More parents from 02143 and 02145 are generally satisfied with times offered.

*Child and Family Impact Should PEG Become a Reality:* The Family Survey indicated that families prefer and need full time, full day care. While a majority of respondents said they have the childcare they need, qualitatively families commented that they would like their care to be more conveniently located and more affordable. For example, over three-quarters (76%) said they had enough childcare to meet their needs. 16% said they did not. The remaining 8% respondents were not sure. There were 39% who said they need multiple caregivers to get the childcare they need. When asked for what stands in the way of getting the child care they need, the largest percentage (38%) cited high costs, followed by hours not meeting their needs (17%).

* Number of hours a day children spend in the early childhood setting/programranged from 0 to 12, for an average of 6.8 (N=150). 68% had their children in care for five days; 19% for 3-4. Most respondents (61%) worked full time; 21% worked part time; 16% did not work and only 2% of this respondent pool worked multiple jobs.
* Most, 81%, of the parents said they need a full day program; 38% needed a summer program and 20% needed an afterschool program. Only 4% and 3% respectively said they needed weekend coverage.
* The families were asked about what matters the most to them when choosing their or family child care (N=163). Most important aspects are a cleanliness of program, reputation, and hours meeting their needs.

According to the families, most important aspects of program quality (N=168) are qualified teachers; and that the program would prepare their child for kindergarten. Parents believed that teachers either speaking English to their children or alternatively, speaking in their home language was “moderately important.”

**Educator Needs and Program Quality**

*Current Quality Indicators:* In the Spring 2016, The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) was administered to nine Pre-K Classrooms in Somerville (five Center-based classrooms and four Somerville Public School classrooms) on a full range of classroom quality indicators. In ECERS, seven main “subscales” cover 43 different quality indicators. The seven main quality areas are: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure and Parents and Staff. ECERS is designed to be used with one room or one group at a time, for children 2.5 to 5 years of age. A block of at least three hours is used for observing and rating on a scale of 1 (Inadequate) to 7 (Excellent) and NA (not Applicable). Average ratings across all classrooms range from 4.96 (Good) for Personal Care Routines to 6.81 (Excellent) for Interactions. Due to the small sample size, differences in the scores may not be significant. However, it is worth noting that the Somerville Public School (SPS) Pre-K classrooms score higher in five out of the seven ECERS Subscales. The Center classrooms score higher than the SPS in two Subscales of Personal Care Routines and Parents and Staff.

**Average Ratings by Subscale (Centers, Somerville Public Schools, All Classrooms)**

**Scale: 1 (Inadequate) to 7 (Excellent)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **SPACE AND FURNISHINGS** | **PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES** | **LANGUAGE-REASONING** | **ACTIVITIES** | **INTERACTION** | **PROGRAM STRUCTURE** | **PARENTS AND STAFF** |
| **Centers (5)** | **5.38** | **5.20** | **5.20** | **4.59** | **6.66** | **5.67** | **5.97** |
| **SPS (4)** | **5.59** | **4.67** | **6.13** | **4.59** | **7.00** | **5.75** | **6.13** |
| **Total (9)** | **5.47** | **4.96** | **5.61** | **4.59** | **6.81** | **5.70** | **6.04** |

The overall average rating for Language-Reasoning is 5.6, residing between “Good” and “Excellent”. The SPS classrooms rate higher than the Center classrooms on all items with the exception of “Encouraging children to communicate”. The SPS scores are in the Good to Excellent range on each item. Centers show room for improvement, scoring in the Minimal+ range in two areas: Books and pictures and Using language to development reasoning skills.

**Average Ratings for Language-Reasoning**

**Scale: 1 (Inadequate) to 7 (Excellent)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Books and pictures** | **Encouraging children to communicate** | **Using language to develop reasoning skills** | **Informal use of language** | **LANGUAGE-REASONING** |
|  | **15** | **16** | **17** | **18** |  |
| **Centers (5)** | **4.80** | **6.20** | **3.40** | **6.40** | **5.20** |
| **SPS (4)** | **5.50** | **6.00** | **6.00** | **7.00** | **6.13** |
| **Total (9)** | **5.11** | **6.11** | **4.56** | **6.67** | **5.61** |

**CLASS**

The chart below compares CLASS dimension scores for four Somerville Public Schools preschool classrooms and five center-based programs (all of whom are part of our partnership). The differences between the public schools and centers were small and not statistically significant. However the overall low scores in the areas of Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling indicate some entry points to improving the quality of children’s school experiences.

In addition the Provider Survey gave us a picture of overall strengths and gaps in program quality.

* Summary of overall strengths: Staff are experienced (but not necessarily in education levels), turnover is low, provider self-assessed ratings of knowledge and competency are high, there is access to outdoor play space, and educators appreciate the importance of social emotional domain.
* Summary of overall gaps: Transportation generally is not offered by programs and is seen as an unmet need. Most programs are over capacity, wages are low, there is more potential for staff to work with different age groups and adequately nurture and teach, intentionality of screenings and assessments is unclear, there is a potential need for a common curriculum, more intentionality in PD selection, evaluation of transition process. In addition, under half of teachers working with children have a bachelor’s degree and there is no current pipeline to raise education levels of teachers beyond minimal EEC lead teacher requirements.
* Respondents agreed to strongly agree with the following components of a high quality curriculum: provides activities for children to learn through meaningful everyday experiences, that foster children’s development in many domains, that respect home cultures and linguistic backgrounds that feature different learning formats. Providers also agreed strongly that their curriculum defines learning goals and outcomes for children, is linked to Standards and includes ways to measure children’s progress. However, our coaching interventions indicate that teacher perceptions of quality do not match actual quality practices, as is well documented in the literature on teacher preparation and inservice practices.
* All target sites use Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG), some use thematic curriculum, emergent, Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines and Project Approach. All use a variety of resources (SPS, EEC, SFLC, NAEYC, etc.) to inform curriculum. However there is no systematic implementation of an approach or curriculum across sites.

*Successfully Engaging with Families to Improve Family Outcomes:* The Provider Survey indicated most Somerville providers communicate regularly with families through notes, calls, etc.; that they work with them to make decisions; hold conferences to discuss the children’s learning and development; and provide suggestions to families on how they can support their children at home. While respondents identify a number of different ways in which they engage families, more discussion is warranted around parent engagement. It will be important to look more closely at how programs define family engagement and create a universal definition of parent engagement from which appropriate engagement practices emanate. The Family Survey indicated that families have strong connections with their centers which bodes well for our future partnerships.

* When asked what makes it easy for them to attend activities at their child’s program, most parent respondents frequently cited that they felt welcome in the program; that they saw the teacher at drop off or pick up; and “convenience’. Parents also cited “activities helping their child be successful”; teachers speaking their language frequently (about 40%).
* Most of the parent respondents (86%) said they have the information they need to help their child learn. The vast majority (90%) said they knew who to talk to when they had questions about their child’s learning.
* 81% said they receive support for their child’s learning at home from their child’s program; while 12% were not sure. They most frequently cited receiving information on their child’s development and learning, on the program’s daily activities, and policies and procedures.
* 90% of respondent placed positive social and emotional development as one of the three most important experiences/skills children need to be successful in kindergarten. 81% said the best way to prepare children for kindergarten was to “instill positive attitudes about school and learning. Program were proud of their relationships with parents, program and staff quality, nurturing relationship children, diversity, program longevity, low staff turnover.
* Services most frequently needed (N=92) included: Help with places they can go to play or have fun with their child (50%), help with their child’s speech, language, development (43%), help with health and wellness (35%); financial assistance to participate in afterschool (33%). Still, nearly one-quarter of the respondents needed help with basic needs, including food (23%) and housing (21%).
* The vast majority (98%) of parents said they were not on a waitlist for a voucher. With regard to awareness or use of financial supports, 22% were aware of the child care tax credit, between 5% and 6% said they were aware of income eligible or contracted slots, scholarships, reduced fees, or employer assistance. Very few respondents (about 5% or less) had heard of financial assistance from home visitors, early intervention, friends/family, PIC, Child Care Choices of Boston, SFLC, FCCc, public schools. No one had heard of assistance from doctors, the Somerville Hub, Parenting Journey or 311.
* Families knew best how to access health services, the library, recreational services, and child care. All the other services, including speech and language, SFLC, help with behavior/mental health, transitions, basic needs, early intervention, housing, transportation, special education and home visiting, all resided in the “maybe I know how to access” category.
* Nearly two-thirds had children 3-4 years old and 28% had children 0-2 years old. Regarding parent respondent education levels, 67% had a BA, Masters or Doctorate. For income, slightly less than half (45%) earned more than $100,000 a year. However, nearly as many, 37% reported low-income earnings of $40,000 or less. The remaining 18% resided in the middle, between $40,000 and $100,000.

*Educator Qualifications and Capacity:* The Provider survey revealed that 85% of educators worked in early education and care for ten years or more. On average, they have been in their current role for 5.5 years. While just under half of teachers have a bachelor’s degree, it may not be in education and there is no formal pipeline to achieve higher education degrees or teacher licensure. Finding qualified staff regardless of degree is a challenge.

* Directors are either neutral or show just mild agreement on their ability to find staff who can work with specific age groups and who can adequately nurture and teach children, which points to the need to continue to develop the workforce moving forward. For the target sites, the biggest challenges was lack of resources, lack of money for post BA staff, benefits, finding the right staff who have the right level of education and who will work for a small amount of money.
* More than half reported no staff turnover; while 32% report staff turnover of one to two staff per year. An estimated two-thirds earn the equivalent of $40,000 annually or less. Most staff (55%) receive no health insurance through their program.
* A range of benefits are offered by two-thirds of program respondents, from health and dental insurance to paid vacation, sick time, discounted child care, tuition reimbursement and paid release time. However, wages continue to be low, and wages are reported to be the most important incentive to working in the field, followed by better benefits and more respect for the profession – all of which are linked to each other.
* 63% of the providers offer paid release time for off site PD, 56% offer it for onsite PD. Nearly half are paid to attend staff meetings and to prepare and plan. Diverse PD offerings are made available and utilized, but it is less clear how intentional the selection of PD is, and not having enough time and staff coverage for PD continue to create barriers.
* Staffing issues emerge as a significant challenge with regard to running programs, including difficult in finding qualified staff, turnover, and finding substitutes. Program finances were also frequently mentioned. The expansion sites mentioned not enough time, don’t like training, not useful, relevant, transportation issues, substitute issues, inconvenient time location and difficulty accessing online opportunities.

*Available Resources for Educator Capacity Improvement and Unmet Needs:* While programs use a mix of curricula, approaches, screenings and assessments, it is unclear how intentional and informed usage is. However, because each curriculum is intensive, it is unlikely that a program can use many curricula and implement them with fidelity. Somerville early education leadership could consider developing a common framework that could be used to frame the content and experiences of children in their early care and education settings across Somerville. Create spaces for programs to come together to define the expectations they have for children, strategies for supporting children’s development, and for using data to inform and differentiate instruction.

* More than half conduct developmental screenings. All but one target site (Open Center) do developmental screenings. A combination of ASQ, ESI-P and TSG are used across sites.
* Somerville providers use assessments for transitioning children to kindergarten; identify social services; make decisions about how to best support learning; design activities and learning environments and schedules; identify with individual children’s strengths and needs; and communicate with families. Most providers (69%) use TSG.
* Program respondents reflect confusion regarding the differences between screening and assessment. Ideally assessment tools should be used for continuous improvement. As such, they should be administered at least every three or four months to inform progress and instruction. While staff use assessment results to communicate with families, identify individual child learning needs, and design their programs often, fewer use them to support special needs, identify social services and communicate about transitions.
* A range of transition activities occur, and nearly 8 of 10 providers say they share information about children who are transitioning to kindergarten, although actual structured vehicles for this sharing, such as meetings and visits are less prevalent.

*Indicators of Success for Teachers, Programs, and Community:* Most providers (69%) were accredited with NAEYC, 15% with NAFCC; and 15% with NECPA. Overall, 70% participate in QRIS (relatively more FCCs do than Centers), with most being at Level 1 or 2. QRIS is used “somewhat” to evaluate staff, write job descriptions, and choose PD. Nearly half report receiving little if any support as a result of their participation or to move up in the levels. Two out of four target sites were accredited with NAEYC. All participate in QRIS. Three are at Level 1, the other has sites at Level 2 and 3. The PEG sites said they would like more money for salaries, incentives for staff to complete degrees and a training on the process and a secretary to help them improve their rating.

The majority of programs appear to be operating at or over capacity. More than three-quarters have a waitlist, with a particular need for infant/toddler care, followed by preschoolers. Nearly all programs continue to provide services to children outside of Somerville. One third of the providers are interested in expansion while a sizeable number are unsure.. With regard to expansion, the target sites identify 1) more diversity; 2) longer/full days; 3) reopen IT program, 2 preK or IT rooms; and 4) add additional site. Designating slots for low income children in Somerville by reducing waitlists for Somerville residents would be an important measure of success and would assure centers of consistent enrollment and keep Somerville’s young children within our quality controlled centers.

More than half of the 83 Spring 2016 SMILE parent registrants requested recreation and financial assistance services. Between 50% and 62% of parents, depending on zip code, said they needed recreation services. Respondents in 02145 and 02143 tend to need more services than 02144. Nearly half of the parents in 02145 said they needed financial assistance, followed by 40% in 02143, compared with only 17% of parents in 02144. Parents in 02143 said they needed health and wellness, housing and speech and language development more frequently than the others. Parents in 02145 said they needed food assistance.

Overall, the various needs assessments indicated:

* Need for high quality full day care.
* Development of high quality curriculum to be shared across sites.
* Need for more instructional coaching in centers.
* Professional development targeting teacher interactions, language modeling, quality of feedback, concept development, engaging activities.
* Expansion of slots within existing Somerville partner programs.
* Identification of space for expansion of new programming.
* Facility improvements to move needle on quality
* Support for meaningful partnerships between parents and program staff and promote school readiness strategies at home
* Expand current efforts to engage hard to reach families.
* Expand programs or services to support child and family well-being via an integrated comprehensive services team.

**Plans for High Quality Preschool Expansion**

The needs assessment results demonstrated the need for additional slots as well as integrating low income children into our existing partner programs that primarily serve middle and upper income children. In addition, an system that gives low income families access to a range of program provides them the efficacy to make choices about their children’s care. The needs assessment showed that there is great interest in heterogeneously mixed student population by income. Because of the growing income disparity in Somerville we have set our income eligibility at 250%. Somerville housing is at a premium and the cost is high. Our low income families who make just above the Head Start income eligibility are those who are most impacted by the lack of access to free high quality full day care. Setting the income eligibility at 250% would allow us to serve a broad range of families and allow them to stay in Somerville. The table below illustrates our plan for expansion of our partner programs. Please see the Plan for Cost and Sustainability at the end of this report for financial details. Please also refer to this table when reviewing the sections that follow. This plan allows us to potentially stage the opening of classrooms in a variety of contexts, affording us flexibility depending upon future funding.

**Somerville Preschool Expansion Slots**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Program** | **Expansion spots\*** | **Non-Expansion spots** | **Total spots** | **% Expansion of Total** |
| New Classrooms (RFC Primary Partners) | CAAS #1 | 20 | 0 | 20 | 100% |
| CAAS #2 | 20 | 0 | 20 | 100% |
| Elizabeth Peabody #1 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 50% |
| Existing Classrooms (RFC Primary Partners) | Elizabeth Peabody #2 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 50% |
| Elizabeth Peabody #3 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 50% |
| Open Center | 5 | 15 | 20 | 25% |
| YMCA | 5 | 15 | 20 | 25% |
| Existing Classrooms (Other Programs) | Bigelow | 5 | 15 | 20 | 25% |
| Community Preschool | 5 | 15 | 20 | 25% |
| Pooh and Friends | 5 | 15 | 20 | 25% |
| Somerville Childcare Center | 5 | 15 | 20 | 25% |
|  | TOTAL | 100 | 120 | 220 | 45% |

# **B. Teacher Capacity and Classroom Quality**

## *Context in Somerville:* Somerville continues to build a professional development system that supports high quality learning environments and teacher-child interactions. For the past two years professional development offerings from the Early Education Department in SPS have been open to center-based programs with at least a third of participants representing the community. This supports early childhood educators in promoting each child’s cognitive, physical, social and emotional development through a system that addresses the whole child and the whole teacher. The Provider Survey and CLASS and ECERS data in the Needs Assessment section above informed this plan for capacity and quality improvement.

**Somerville’s Staffing Pipeline and Pathway:**

*Teacher Preparation in Somerville:* Somerville is a dense city close to numerous institutes of higher education with Early Childhood Teacher Preparation programs. We have formal partnerships with Tufts University, Lesley University, and are in the process of developing a relationship with Bunker Hill Community College. These partnerships serve to actively develop pathways for teacher preparation, certification, and inservice professional development. A high-quality professional learning system provides educators with coherent, interrelated and continuous professional learning activities and mechanisms that are aligned with each other and with developmentally appropriate child development practices. As PEG bridges the wage gap between public and center-based programs we anticipate an increase in BA credentialed applicants for future early childhood positions, and through our partnerships with teacher preparation programs can grow our own workforce.

*Tufts University:* The STELLAR program, based in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development, places Tufts master’s level students in PreK-2nd grade classrooms in Somerville Public Schools. Students receive stipends for their internships.

*Lesley University:* The Elementary Education Urban Initiative, the Early Childhood Internship Program, both masters level programs, and early practicum placement for undergraduates in early childhood and special education students offer students reduced tuition for courses taken within SPS.

*Bunker Hill Community College:* SPS hosts several practicum students each year and many teachers in our centers received Associates degrees from BHCC. It is also a common next step for high school students. We are working with Lesley and Bunker Hill to strengthen their articulation agreement so that paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, center-based teachers, and high school students can achieve bachelor’s degrees, and potentially going on for master’s level work.

*Somerville High School Career and Technical Education Program:* The Child Development Program at Somerville High School graduates approximately 10-14 seniors each year. During their sophomore, junior, and senior years students have practicum experiences in local centers and public school classrooms - all within our partnership programs.

Somerville is committed to working closely with all of these programs to create learning opportunities for early childhood educators via multiple entry points. In this way we can support the long term professional development goals of our teachers no matter where they are in their educational trajectory.

**The Directors Quality Working Group**

The Leadership section above outlines the role of center directors in PEG work. The directors will meet monthly with the Director of Early Education and the Director of the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative to support organizational capacity related to quality in centers. This group will act as a professional learning community around the dimensions of QRIS, developing plans to move up the QRIS scale. Currently four of our eight partners are NAEYC accredited (Elizabeth Peabody House, YMCA, Bigelow Cooperative Preschool, Somerville Childcare Center). While our PEG plan does not require NAEYC accreditation, we look to NAEYC as a standard of excellence and build plans for teacher observation and evaluation, classroom quality, and ongoing professional development in concert with NAEYC policies and resources.

**Extending Somerville’s Professional Development and Coaching Model**

Somerville’s current coaching model will need to be expanded to continue to support program quality. We will increase the coaching staff by one FTE and this person will be supervised by the Director of Early Education and mentored by the current Instructional Coach for Early Childhood. Coaching provides a high level of individualized and sustained supports to teachers. Through this sustained support—and activities such as joint planning, observation, feedback, and reflection—coaches can guide teachers to critically reflect upon their teaching practice and how it affects child outcomes. Coaching enhances teacher acquisition and application of knowledge and also leads to improved outcomes for young children. In addition, professional development will be expanded to better meet the needs of our partners in center-based programs. See appendix for coaching documents.

*Somerville Coaching Model:* This highly successful model uses a professional conferencing cycle that first emphasizes relationship building and goal setting, and then focuses on implementation of an action plan with clear roles, and provision of feedback and reflection. Formal rating scales are used to frame goal setting and action planning. The educator plays a pivotal role in selecting goals and action planning. The Somerville model operates in 10-week intensive cycles. We have found that longer cycles resulted in coaching fatigue and became less goal focused. We use a modified version of the ELLCO to have the coach identify goals and for teachers to rate themselves and set personal goals. Coaching focuses on strong literacy practices as well as creating engaging environments for young children. One coach can visit 5 classrooms per cycle, thus the need for an additional coach. Teachers are visited once a week, have an hour-long debrief once a week, and receive a documentation report each week linked to goals and making teacher learning visible via photos and videos linked to goals. Maintenance is provided to coaching participants between coaching. In some cases teachers may receive more than one cycle per year. Coaching is delivered to both individual teachers and to teams of teachers. Our current data indicate primary areas of learning related to writing and writing centers, promoting independent learning experiences, and making environments more child-centered and accessible to children.

*Somerville Professional Development Model:* Three years ago Somerville Public Schools began offering joint professional development to SPS teachers and teachers in centers (free of charge). Our professional development is often linked to our coaching goals and serves as maintenance for coaching participants. In addition we provide workshops on environmental design, Reggio Emilia and Montessori Education, Montessori Phonetic Approaches, Story Telling Story Acting, Anti-Bias Education, Music for Transitions, Play-Based Curriculum, Literature-Based Curriculum, Documentation and Assessment, Creating a Trauma Sensitive Classroom, Science topics such as Forces and Motion, Properties of Liquids, and Seasonal Life Sciences. We are responsive to topics that teachers want, when they want them - and this means we have provided professional development in the evenings and on Saturdays so that providers can join. Professional development that brings together public school and center-based teachers is an important vehicle for the consolidation of practices.

**Compensation**

The research in early childhood education shows the compensation of professionals is closely linked to quality. Studies show that increases in compensation tied to educational achievements lead to increase in quality.As part of our PEG plan all teachers will get a compensation increase. Increases will vary by need. We will review existing union scales currently in effect in the city’s school district, hospitals, and in Head Start and community programs, as well as the scales currently implemented in other relevant states. The development of a PEG or citywide salary scale for licensed child care and early learning professionals and programs is a worthy goal. The salary scale would not be required, but rather would include recommendations for adequate compensation. An initial step scale that all partner centers can build from, as well as a financial campaign to access monies to bump existing salaries to scale, are efforts we are examining. Finally, Somerville is currently exploring the Shared Resources model successfully being used in New Hampshire in conjunction with support from United Way and hopes to develop this model more fully, creating a system that would pass savings along to centers, directors, teachers, and families.

**Facilities and Locations**

Our needs assessment investigated needs by the three zip codes in Somerville. Most programs are centrally located. CAAS Head Start has multiple sites across the zip codes. Elizabeth Peabody House is in the highest need area and is currently renovating to allow for expansion. The remaining programs are centrally located in high need areas in the central and eastern parts of the city with the exception of Open Center on the west side of Somerville. Somervillehub.org shows the distribution of centers in the city.

**Transportation**

Somerville is a small city (four miles) with public transportation, primarily bus service but also served by the T. Transportation costs are prohibitive and at this time are beyond the scope of our plan as indicated by cost benefit analysis from the district. We will site classrooms in high needs neighborhoods and also site classrooms within a geographic range to accommodate those in all parts of the city.

**C. Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement**

*Somerville Context:* The needs assessment indicated the need for a Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement plan that builds upon and integrates existing services, expands current positions, and creates new platforms for resource and referral. The basis for this work is that families are key partners in children’s developmental trajectories and as such must be fully engaged in the services and experiences their children need and are exposed to. The cornerstone of our plan is to develop a Comprehensive Services Team that can service expansion sites well through the components outlined below. Key to this team are a Family Liaison, a Child Development Specialist, and a Mental Health Consultant. In addition we envision developing a Family Liaison Engagement team via the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative. This team would visit centers with their Family Engagement Toolkit to determine entry points and develop a plan for engagement activities tailored to each center.

*Comprehensive Services Team*: The team is comprised of the Child Development Specialist, Family Liaison, the Instructional Coach, and is overseen by the Directors of Early Education and Somerville Family Learning Collaborative. The team will meet at least every 6 weeks. Participating center administrators will be invited. In addition to assessing ongoing resource and referral activities and PEG progress, the group will use case studies to review issues across centers. To meet the growing number of families experiencing trauma, SPS plans to request another FTE Child Development Specialist with a specialty in trauma and social emotional development through the district budget process to also serve non-PEG children.

*Family and Community Liaisons:* Somerville Public Schools has Family Liaisons at each school. The PEG model will embed the liaisons in programs in a way that is similar to the Head Start family advocate model. The liaisons will meet regularly to discuss the needs of the centers and families.

*Engaging Diverse Families in School-Family Partnerships:*  The Somerville PEG plan seeks to improve accessibility of the early learning system for culturally and linguistically diverse families and educators. Children thrive in the care of educators who can consistently deliver developmental, individually, linguistically, and culturally appropriate practice. To increase access to this high-quality instruction and care, more educators need access to resources to help them consistently improve their knowledge and skills. Outreach to new families (including recruitment) will be developed in concert with the Parent Information Center, Somerville Family Learning Collaborative of the Somerville Public Schools, and utilizing the recruitment and outreach strategies of PEG partners. SPS is adopting InfoSnap, an online registration system, and following the model in Lawrence, families will be able to register for PEG programming via a pilot of InfoSnap, steering families directly to relevant programming.

*Communicating with Families*: Communication with families requires a multi-pronged strategy. Somerville’s PEG sites will pilot home visits based on the existing Parent Child Home Program and Head Start family advocate models. Also provided are a combination of workshops, face to face communication opportunities, community events, and updates to the Somerville Early Childhood Hub. The Somerville Family Learning Collaborative will spearhead training of center-based providers in family communication strategies which include:

* Translating essential materials into families’ home languages and providing interpretation at parent conferences and parent meetings
* Creating clear, continuous channels of two-way communication between staff and families by scheduling regular conference sessions, communicating with families at drop-off and pickup,
* Facilitating children’s learning at home by giving families information and resources about topics the children are investigating during the day.
* Conducting home visits during which teachers can learn from families about children’s home environments, interests, and preferred learning styles.
* Providing family resources and referrals. Provide information about preventive health and family services. Offer childcare, transportation, and refreshments to make it easier for families to participate in center activities and events.
* Incorporating activities into the curriculum that teach about the cultural practices and traditions of all children in the classroom

*Parent Education:* The Somerville model of parent education is built on hybrid of the Parent Child Home Program, the SFLC family and community liaisons, and the Head Start family advocate role, with the PEG Family Liaison being the cultural bridge between home and school. However, teachers will also play an important role in this bridge, with the classroom teacher and liaisons doing an initial home visit together for PEG families and the Family Liaison conducting subsequent visits. Eventually this home visiting pilot will expand to all children in the district and community. The focus of visits is family support, resource and referral, guidance around schooling, transition to kindergarten and future education opportunities for children. Both home visits and subsequent parent workshop topics may include:

* Developmental expectations
* Ages and Stages: What to Expect
* Understanding play and learning
* Supporting curriculum at home and at school
* Transition to kindergarten
* Positive parenting
* Children’s temperament
* Health and nutrition 95210
* Raising bi-cultural/bi-lingual children
* Getting support when in crisis

*Supporting Comprehensive Services*: Coordinating the referral process for families is a multi-tiered effort. Referrals for resources may come from anyone on the Comprehensive Services Team (directors, liaisons, child development specialist, coaches, etc.) who will have knowledge of resources for screenings, programming, medical care, and other support services. Family engagement support has close ties to the inclusion referral process outlined in more detail in the following section.

**D. Inclusion, Behavioral, and Mental Health Supports**

*Somerville Inclusion Context:* The Somerville Public Schools Special Education Department is the central source of special services in the city for children who have IEPs. The referral process can occur in multiple ways via: pediatricians, early intervention caseworkers, Early Head Start, teachers in center-based programs and Head Start, parents, and other professionals who interact with or observe children. Our goal is to create a more seamless referral process and at the same time provide consultation to centers who have children who may not be on an IEP but still require support in a variety of areas. Children with social emotional issues often need the support of professionals, and their teachers need guidance, to help them be successful in school.

Various screenings and services are offered throughout the year to families. The Somerville Family Learning Collaborative offers the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to families and the Special Education Department offers screenings using the ESI tool. There is a speech and language therapist who provides services at the Somerville Childcare Center and YMCA. There is also walk-in speech and language at the Capuano Early Childhood Center, the Brown School, and at Head Start.

*Providers of Inclusive Special Education Services:* Centers rely upon the district to provide supports for children once an education plan is in place via the IEP process. However many families forego services because it is difficult to get to a public school for the services due to work schedules or transportation issues. A system of itinerant supports that bring services directly to centers for speech, OT, PT, behavioral and social emotional services and interventions would increase the number of children receiving important supports. A few centers use Enable Inc. free consultations as well.

*Building Capacity to Serve Expansion Sites:* The Child Development Specialist who will serve on the Comprehensive Services Team (see description above) will provide services proactively, build capacity to serve sites, and respond to families and children in crisis. In addition, the Child Development Specialist will offer therapy for groups and referrals for individuals with greater needs. In addition we will contract with the Riverside Community Care’s Early Years Project to provide enhanced mental health services.

*Special Education Team:* This team will be led by the Special Education Department Head for the Capuano Early Childhood Center. In addition the Child Development Specialist will collaborate to support the identification of children who would benefit from screening and subsequent services. Once a child has been deemed in need of services and receives an IEP, the SPS SPED department is responsible for delivering those services. Prior to receiving an IEP, the Special Education Team can make recommendations for ancillary services to support children, parents, and teachers.

The priority of the Early Education Team is early identification. We will expand offerings of ASQ and ASQ SE, as well as DECA at various times and locations throughout the year. The team will also convene around case management to support families and make referrals to various consultants including: school nurses, pediatricians, OT and PTs, speech pathologists, and behavioral specialists.

*Staffing Requirements:* This plan necessitates a Child Development Specialist (referred to in Comprehensive Services section, a .5 OT, .5 PT, and 1 speech therapist to provide itinerant support.

*Communication with Families:* The Comprehensive Services and Special Education Teams maintain ongoing communication with the Director of Early Education and the Director of the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative. They will determine plans for referrals on case-by-case basis. Center directors will guide the communication with families, supported by the teacher and the team.

*Transportation*: Somerville is a small city (four miles) with public transportation, primarily bus service but also served by the T. Transportation costs are prohibitive and at this time are beyond the scope of our plan as indicated by cost benefit analysis from the district. We will site classrooms in high needs neighborhoods and also site classrooms within a geographic range to accommodate those in all parts of the city. However, it is still a challenge for working families to take the time to bring their child to central locations to receive services hence the need for itinerant specialists who can travel to centers to provide children with the services they need.

*Screening and Assessment Roles and Responsibilities”* The required Child Find efforts are conducted by the SPED department and efforts to reach more children will be increased. Preschool screening is currently given 3 times per year for 3-4 year-olds and the ESI-K for rising kindergartners was moved up to April for children in SPS and Head Start. We anticipate scheduling this screening in June in future years. Flyers in all languages are distributed to all public schools, centers, FCC, local organizations, doctor offices. As part of the PEG plan, the Child Development Specialist could also support screening in the partner centers. Screening results are referred to SPED team, starting the process of assessment and evaluation.

*Transition to Kindergarten:* This section applies to children with special needs and children in regular education programs. The transition to kindergarten is overseen by the Director of Early Education and the district’s School Readiness and Transition Specialist. They work closely with centers regarding transition to kindergarten. SPS hosts Teacher Talks in late May when teachers from centers and SPS preschools meet with SPS kindergarten teachers to discuss children. There is a Transition Day in early June when children visit their kindergarten classrooms. There is also a city-wide Transition Form that preschool teachers fill out and return to the school for the receiving kindergarten teacher. Family Liaisons from each school are also in contact with families to support the transition. There is a Welcome to Kindergarten presentation for parents in late May to support the transition and give information about summer readiness ideas including a multi-lingual Social Story about going to a new school *Goodbye Old School, Hello School*. Finally there is a Summer Explore Kindergarten Transition Program targeting rising kindergartners who have never been to school, are ELL, income eligible via Head Start, or are recommended by preschool teachers as needing a summer learning gap bridge. There is also a summer program for children with special needs who are in the Early Childhood Intervention Program. Both programs take place at the Capuano Early Childhood Center.

**E. Curriculum and Assessment**

The Somerville plan for Assessment and Curriculum builds on the strong foundation of existing professional development and coaching offered by Somerville Public Schools and includes Head Start and Center-Based programs. This is fully described in the above section on Teacher Capacity and Classroom Quality. Coaching will be offered to all PEG teachers in 10 week cycles supported by maintenance, PLCS, and professional development. The Director of Early Education will hire and supervise coaches and plan professional development in concert with coaches, teachers, directors, and district curriculum coordinators.

*Assessment Context:* In 2014 Somerville Public Schools chose “option C” as part of MKEA and was approved to develop their own Kindergarten Entry Skills Inventory (KESI) used in the first month of kindergarten. This inventory is informed by Teaching Strategies Gold, the Guidelines for Early Learning Experiences, the Massachusetts Social Emotional and Approaches to Play and Learning standards, and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. In addition, SPS is currently developing a preschool assessment tool to be used both formatively and summatively to assess children’s growth and learning. This tool will be ready in November 2016 and we will encourage our partners to use this assessment tool. Some of our partners use Teaching Strategies Gold with mixed fidelity and user satisfaction. Currently Head Start is the most adherent user of TSG. The new SPS assessment tools are also aligned with our district report cards and rubrics, which will also be available to our partners. The Inclusion section above outlines other screening tools such as Ages and Stages Questionnaire and the district’s Child Find process using the ESI.

*Other Forms of Assessment:* While the district does not use Teaching Strategies Gold, the Department of Early Education embraces observation and documentation of children’s learning as valid forms of assessment. We will provide professional development on documenting student learning, looking at student work and data, and develop understandings of the distinction between formative and assessment data, and between screening tools and ongoing assessment. Use of student portfolios, that can be easily shared with families, will be promoted. Indeed many of our partners (YMCA in particular) already use portfolios with children and families. In addition, Marina Seevak of the Beautiful Stuff Project, has provided professional development to some teachers on documentation and we will extend this work into the PEG partnerships as well as drawing upon our colleagues at Wheelock College (Stephanie Cox-Suarez), Lesley University (Ben Mardell and Yvonne Lui-Constant), and Harvard Project Zero (Mo Rivard and Mara Krechevsky).

**CURRICULUM**

*Curriculum Context:* Currently too many of our children arrive at kindergarten not ready to learni. Moreover, many of our children are not getting high quality preschool experience of any kind. Having a consistent, coherent, high quality, developmentally appropriate approach that all teachers in all programs can adapt and follow will support consistent, high quality learning experiences for all children. The goal is to align early learning guidelines and standards and curricular priorities across early childhood settings. Somerville Public Schools has funding through the Taly Foundation and will be convening a team of SPS, Head Start, and center-based program staff to develop a common curricular framework that can be used across the city. Below are key components of the curriculum.

*Mathematical Thinking:* Somerville Public Schools uses the Building Blocks math curriculum. Last year a team of SPS teachers worked with the Director of Early Education to develop a pacing guide to promote fidelity, engagement, and extensions of the program, and to highlight important learning trajectories in early math. Our partners have expressed interest in using it as mathematics is generally an underdeveloped curriculum area in centers. Our 2014-15 Early Learning Challenge Grant afforded us the purchase of four sets of Building Blocks teacher guides and materials for our RFC partners in anticipation of a formalized relationship. Professional development is being planned and will be open to all centers.

*Balanced Literacy:* Somerville Public Schools adheres to a balanced literacy approach. This approach integrates various modalities of literacy instruction aimed to guide students towards proficient and lifelong reading. The balanced literacy approach is characterized by explicit skill instruction, use of authentic and relevant literature and related thematic foci, and the integration of best practices in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In Somerville we began to adopt Story Telling/Story Acting last year. Based on Vivian Paley’s work, we sent a team to Lesley University to Ben Mardell’s class for a train the trainer workshop. This team tried STSA in their own classrooms and then co-facilitated a four part training (90 minutes each) in Somerville for over 30 teachers from SPS and centers. SPS also uses Handwriting Without Tears and Alpha Chants for handwriting and phonemic awareness. We will be reviewing these in the coming year’s curriculum review, as well as building on the focus of fine motor skills, writing centers and related materials, journal drawing and writing, labeling, and early invented spelling. We have purchased materials in 2014-15 in anticipation of future partnerships.

*Intentional Teaching - Integrating Montessori and Reggio Emilia Approaches:* Teachers in Somerville - both in public schools and centers - have expressed an interest in learning more about the Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches. The Director of Early Education has expertise in both and is building a series of workshops on these approaches. Both the documentation and environment professional development sessions have already given teachers a brief introduction to these important, historically relevant philosophies and practices. We believe these approaches are best suited to provide guidance in particular areas.

*Montessori-inspired best practices related to:*

* accessible materials and child-directed learning, carefully structured lessons, didactic materials, grace and courtesy, independence and self-regulation, environmental design

*Reggio-inspired best practices related to:*

* Project Approach and Project-Based Learning, artistic expression, inquiry-based learning, thematic, emergent curriculum, environmental design, play-based learning

*Anti-Bias Education:* Somerville is committed to providing culturally-responsive curriculum linked to the diverse make-up of the Somerville community. This past year, a nationally known expert in anti-bias education, Debbie LeeKeenan (now at Lesley, formerly at Tufts) presented sessions on Persona Dolls and Anti-bias Education. Debbie LeeKeenan is a frequent collaborator and will work with Somerville to continue helping teachers to understand how bias impacts curriculum and how to develop family’s funds of knowledge as a basis for teaching and learning.

*Scientific Inquiry:* The Early Learning Challenge Grant funded the first professional development that brought together SPS and center-based teachers in the form of a Summer Science Institute co-sponsored by Tufts two years ago. We built on this work engaging teachers in workshops related to seasonal life sciences, properties of liquids, and forces and motion. The science curriculum will have units in these areas as well as light and shadow, and other teacher developed unit. Most important will be the focus on the cycle of inquiry, development of hypotheses, and children’s questions and discoveries as the foundation for any topic of interest. In addition the integration of science into all other areas of study will be developed.

*Health and Wellness:* Somerville spent the last two years, in conjunction with Bruce Johnson of Tufts, exploring the role of mindfulness in early childhood education. This was initially brought in to help teachers address the stress associated with teaching. Teachers participated in weekly groups to learn mindfulness practices and many teachers are also using mindfulness practices such as silence, mindful eating, and yoga with children to develop self-regulation and self-calming strategies.

Somerville has well known initiative called Shape Up Somerville. This past year a group of representatives from multiple agencies called Shape Up Under Five was convened by researchers at Tufts University. This group is developing an agenda to bring awareness to obesity and other health and wellness issues in the city. They have adopted the 95210 initiative which advocates for 9 hours of sleep a night, 5 fruits and vegetables a day, less than 2 hours of screen time, at least 1 hour of physical activity, and 0 sugary drinks. Curriculum units related to each of these components will be developed and implemented. The SFLC has already offered pop-up workshops on 95210 at local schools and venues. We also envision units of study related to nutrition and food in concert with the Farm to School initiative in Somerville and developing units on cooking and different foods. The Vetri Foundation has a model currently used in Philadelphia schools that promotes a “dining” approach to cafeteria experiences with children learning how to set tables, serve each other, and help prepare meals.

*Social Emotional Learning & Approaches to Play and Learning:* Second Step, a nationally recognized social emotional curriculum is being adopted across the entire SPS district. Trainings will be offered this fall and our partners will receive Second Step preschool kits provided by the district and access to training.

**F. Birth to Grade 3 Alignment**

The Early Learning Challenge Grant, referenced many times in this report, afforded Somerville many opportunities to align practices in public schools and center-based programs. Much of the collaborative professional development as well as coaching was provided through this grant. There is also a group called the Kindergarten Readiness Group that partners SPS K and PreK teachers with center-based teachers in a professional learning community to discuss the importance of play, readiness skills, and best practices.

The Somerville Family Learning Collaborative, through its offerings of playgroups for new families, Parent Home Child Program, workshops for parents, connections with Early Head Start and Early Intervention, as well as Cambridge Health Alliance, continues to be a model of alignment, especially from birth through school age. This work is part of the fabric of Somerville and is the foundation for center support.

**IV. Plan for Cost and Sustainability**

Costs

As suggested in this final report, Somerville’s Preschool Expansion Plan is based on the following configuration of expansion slots: two new 20 -child classrooms, three classrooms of 10 expansion slots and 10 non-expansion slots (one of which is new), and seven classrooms of 5 expansion slots and 15 non-expansion slots. We include three budgets (see Appendix), one each for these three configurations (20 expansion slots, 10 expansion slots, and 5 expansion slots).

* 2 classrooms with 20 expansion children @ $18,260.75 per child
* 3 classrooms with 10 expansion children @ $18,540.75 per child
* 6 classrooms with 5 expansion children @ $19,249.50 per child

These budgets are predicated on a staffing model which includes a lead teacher with a BA, another teacher, an aide, an extended day teacher, and an extended day aide. It includes funding for substitutes (including for sick and vacation leave), two .5 FTE family liaisons, 1 FTE instructional coach, 1 full-time child development specialist, and support to cover the time for program directors, comprehensive services, a grant coordinator, and administrative costs.

These budgets reflect significant cost savings accrued from sharing staff such as family liaisons, coaches, and child development specialists across programs. The City of Somerville and the Somerville Public Schools will continue their substantial investment towards Somerville’s Universal Kindergarten Readiness approach via the Kindergarten Readiness for All initiative through the positions of the city-wide Early Education Director, a community-wide early childhood instructional coach, and the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative. In addition Somerville Public School will plan for the gradual shift of PEG costs to the local budget. Our Department of Grants and Communication is currently developing a plan for philanthropic support of early childhood initiatives to sustain this work over time. Our hope is that these investments by the city and the school department grow over time in conjunction with other resources.