

Commonwealth of Massachusetts



The Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five Strategic Plan: *Laying the Foundation for a More Equitable and Coordinated Mixed Delivery System in Massachusetts*



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1. Executive Summary

The Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5) efforts have been grounded in an intentional inter-agency, inter-program, cross-secretariat collaboration of early childhood education and care programs and services. The Mixed Delivery System for children birth to five includes a wide array of programs and services funded and administered by federal, state, local and community-based organizations. The PDG B-5 work focused on a subset of those programs- only those that are managed at the state level and whose primary purpose is supporting families in the broader developmental health and the optimal cognitive and social emotional development of their children. This “PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System” includes programs and services overseen by the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), as well as four of their respective agencies: At EOE, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Children’s Trust (CT); and, at EOHHS, the Department of Public Health (DPH).

The agencies, programs and services included in the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System for the purposes of the PDG B-5 project are depicted in **Image 1**.

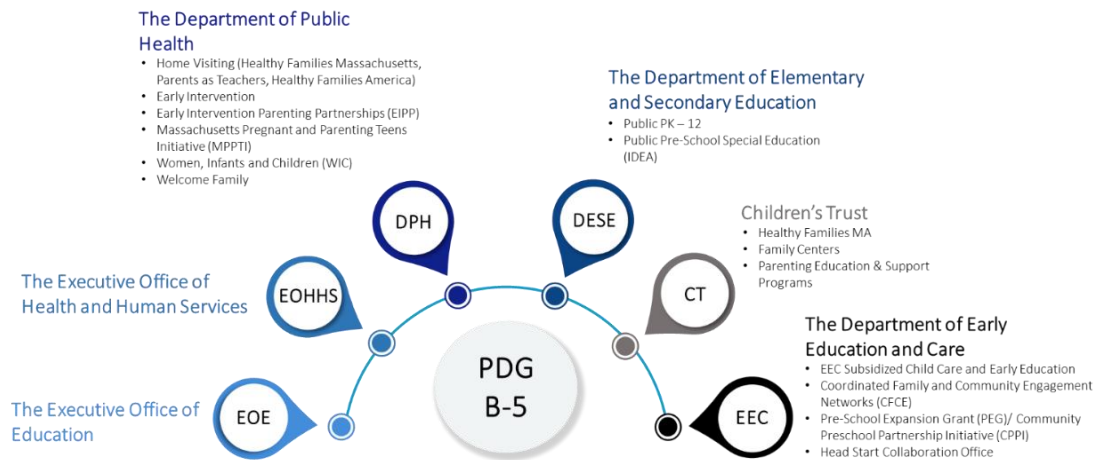


Image 1. Secretariats, agencies and programs in the Massachusetts Mixed Delivery System that are in scope for the PDG B-5 project.

The PDG B-5 work built on long term partnerships across these agencies, driven by a governance model that reflected the leadership and buy-in from the Secretaries, agency heads, and senior leaders at each of the participating A PDG B-5 Operational Steering Committee (PDG B-5 OSC) managed all grant activities through several workstreams specific to key activities. Each workstream included additional staff from the participating agencies, providing additional opportunities for relationship-building and collaboration that is at the heart of system-building. The activities and strategies detailed in this plan are the product of this cross-Secretariat, cross-agency work, and lay the foundation for a data-driven, evidence-based integrated system of early education and care.

Vision

This Strategic Plan represents our efforts to identify and implement state-level strategies that are needed to achieve our vision in which all families of B-5 children have equitable access to a coordinated and

robust system of quality programs and supports that enable the development of their children into lifelong learners and contributing members of their communities. This PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System will increase both quality and efficiency, in our programs, services and systems supporting them.

The vision is guided by these **core principles**:

1. Provide equitable access to services that meet the needs, and are reflective of, the diverse population of families in the Commonwealth
2. Meet families where they are
3. Focus on vulnerable children and families in the greatest need
4. Provide the foundation to help families take the lead in supporting their children’s development

Our logic model (**Image 2**) was derived from these principles and illustrates how inputs – a comprehensive needs assessment, a strategic plan, and a collaborative governance structure – provides a framework for a set of activities. These targeted activities focused on improving communication with families, developing collaborative cross-agency systems, providing cross-agency training, and a mechanism to share data across agencies, generates specific outputs. The outputs will begin to be realized by the end of the grant period when we will be positioned to implement evidence-based recommendations to improve our ability to reach families; program staff will be connected to training and professional development resources; and we will have the initial view into the data analytics through an executed data sharing agreement.

All of these move us towards the long-term outcomes which we will be able to effectively measure in the future. A statewide approach to developmental screening and the analytical questions in the Data Use License Agreement will provide the framework to measure many of the outcomes – such as the number and percentage of children screened and the percentage of children statewide with preventable developmental delays. This Strategic Plan also addresses the approach to tracking key success indicators longitudinally.

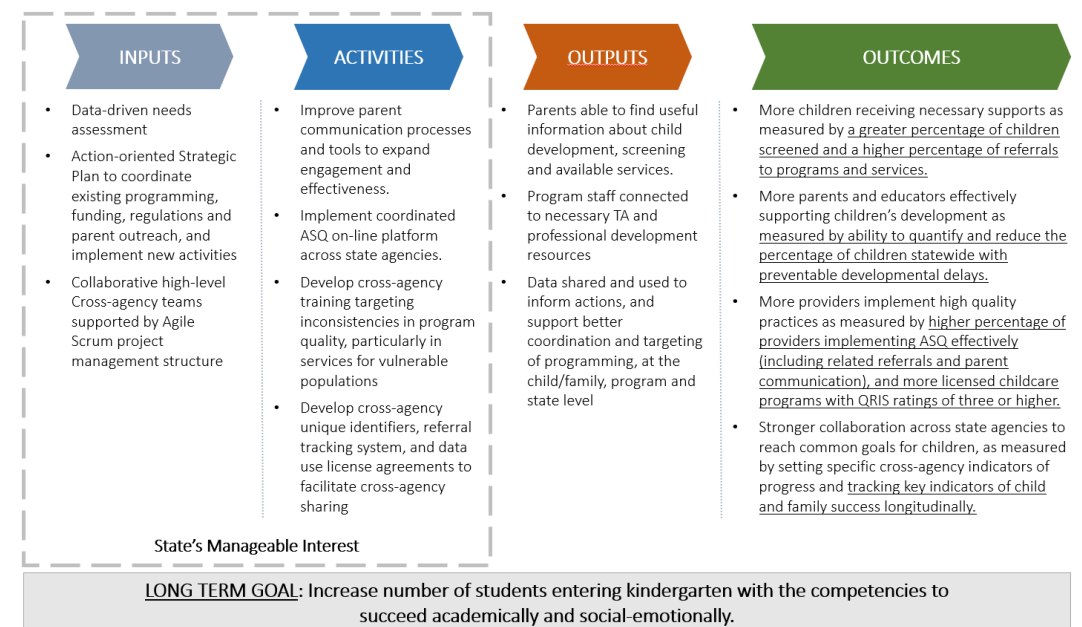


Image 2. PDG B-5 Logic Model

Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process began when the participating agencies developed a response to the initial Federal Opportunity Announcement. The process was built on long-standing partnerships and formal and informal collaborations across State agencies and with a range of stakeholders that focus on issues related to children birth-five, and their families. The planning process and related activities were well underway when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Although the strategic plan does not represent or anticipate the breadth and depth of the pandemic's impact, the goals and activities outlined in the plan will provide key information and supports to bolster COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

As a first step in the strategic planning process, the PDG B-5 Operational Steering Committee contracted with Accenture Consulting to facilitate the work and provide subject matter expertise and analytical support. The process included a series of meetings and half-day "Design Labs" during which the consultants led the members of the OSC through in-depth conversations that built on the findings from the Needs Assessment and drew from stakeholder input, to clarify the Strategic Focus Areas and activities outlined in this plan. Although each State agency and program has its own priorities and mission, this facilitated process generated consensus on key areas that continue to build a foundation for systems building.

The Strategic Focus Areas-- Massachusetts B-5 children and their families; providers and educators in the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System; and system-building, governance, and data sharing- form the basis of this strategic plan. Each of these areas includes specific goals and activities that managed by a dedicated workstream and the OSC.

B-5 Children and their Families

The Parent Knowledge and Choice Team (PKC), chaired by the Director of Early Childhood Services at DPH and co-chaired by the Massachusetts Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project (MECCS) Director and with participation from each of the other PDG B-5 agencies, conducted the activities related to the Strategic Focus Area of engaging all families of B-5 children, particularly those who are not traditionally reached by many of our programs.

Based on the findings from the Needs Assessment regarding the demographics of B-5 children in Massachusetts and access to information related to child development, the team engaged in a series of meetings and effort where they documented current communication practices across our programs, and drafted strategies for user-friendly mechanisms to share information. Out of many discussions and this exercise, the team drafted an RFQ and engaged MORE Advertising to address the activities that are identified in section two of this Plan.

Providers and Educators in the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System

The Best Practices and Professional Development Team (PD), chaired by the Early Learning and Safe and Supportive School Specialist from DESE, and with broad participation from each of the other PDG B-5 agencies, conducted activities related to the Strategic Focus Area of increasing the competency of all providers in conducting developmental screening and engaging families in the process in a meaningful way in order to promote follow-up and support for children and families.

Based on the finding from the Needs Assessment regarding professional development and the lack of defined competencies, the team engaged in a series of meetings and workshops to identify and develop a set of agreed upon set of core competencies for providers when conducting developmental screening.

Subsequent to the development of the competencies, the team developed and issued an RFQ and engaged the Judge Baker Children’s Center (JBCC) to address the activities that are identified in section three of this Plan.

System Building, Governance, and Data Sharing

The PDG B-5 strategic planning process was a system-building opportunity in itself, emblematic of this third Strategic Focus Area. Regular, facilitated cross-agency discussions focused on how to strengthen and connect programs across the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System toward common goals. This process built on cross-agency and cross-Secretariat relationships that pre-dated the PDG B-5 work and provided an opportunity to plan for how to sustain this collaborative governance after the end of the grant.

The process of developing the PDG B-5 Data Use License Agreement (PDG B-5 DULA) provided an opportunity to clarify shared goals and the legal authority necessary to build and sustain a MA Early Childhood Integrated Data System (MA ECIDS). The MA ECIDS pulls together data that already exists within each of the four participating PDG B-5 agencies. The data is then matched, deidentified, and analyzed based on the needs of each of the participating agencies to understand more about the children and families they serve. These data analytics will provide the first look at unduplicated counts of children receiving services and provide insights about the depth and breadth of PDG B-5 program participation.

Program participation is just one aspect of understanding PDG B-5 services and their impact on young children. Developmental screening provides a key set of additional data to help providers engage with families about their children’s needs, and to ensure that children who may have developmental delays receive referrals for diagnostic assessments and related services. As the Needs Assessment details, there is wide variation in how developmental screening is conducted across the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System. While many of the programs in the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System include developmental screening as an integral part of their services, there is no coordinated system for connecting and tracking the rich dataset that results from those screenings, making it challenging to share information across providers, and to understand if screening led to needed referrals and services. Identifying ways that we can take a statewide approach to developmental screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire was also a key part of our strategic planning process, and is another element of system-building, governance and data sharing.

Stakeholder Involvement

The PDG B-5 activities built upon longstanding interagency collaborative partnerships. Within each area of focus – families, providers, and system-building – we engaged stakeholders in the strategic planning process and used their input to inform this strategic plan. Throughout the PDG B-5 process, including the development of this Strategic Plan, PDG B-5 OSC participants worked with the Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers, a privately funded collaboration of 45 partner organizations and 20 family engagement specialists. In addition, PDG B-5 OSC members engaged regularly in a wide range of meetings, groups, and forums related to B-5 children and families, provider, and educators. As part of these regular meetings and conversations, our cross-agency, cross-Secretariat team shared the progress of our PDG B-5 work and gathered input to inform our next steps.

Content

This Strategic Plan covers each of these strategic focus areas: B-5 children and their families; providers and educators; and system building, governance, and data sharing in sections two, three and four.

Each of these sections includes the same subsections: relevant stakeholders; a description of the strategic area of focus; identified goals; activities; and, the next steps to be taken in that area to move Massachusetts closer to realizing our goals. The stakeholder groups are identified by the Federally required category (parents/ family members or guardians; childcare providers across settings and across the state; other early childhood service providers; and system building entities).

Section five takes a deeper dive into our strategies related to system building including the role of data in the development and measurement of statewide success indicators. It also details our strategic initiatives to support children and families through transitions and strategies to increase the overall participation in early education programs.

The Plan concludes with a summary of the Plan, identifying next steps, challenges, and the need for sustainability.

2. B-5 Children and their Families

Strategic Area of Focus

Empower families by understanding their diverse needs, providing them with easy access to critical information about their children’s development, and providing timely and appropriate services through a comprehensive early childhood system.

Goals

- Families can access consistent and culturally responsive information they need about child development milestones and program quality and are able to seamlessly navigate the mixed delivery system of state programs and services for the support they need
- Providers and policymakers can gather feedback from families about their children and the system in order to meet the express needs and expectations of a diverse range of families and children in the state

Activities

- Leverage existing partnerships such as the Family Engagement Framework Regional Coalition and the Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers (MPIT) to conduct family and community outreach to better understand service and program needs, expectations, awareness of developmental milestones and supports, and how families think about and use information about quality
- Compile information on existing family engagement and outreach efforts by providers and resources related to child development
- Analyze existing state efforts to engage families in sharing information about developmental milestones and related services and supports
- Conduct a landscape analysis of a) existing state agency websites that provide information about state services and programs for children ages birth – five and their families; and b) websites (run by public and private organizations) that provide information about child development and developmental milestones

- Conduct formative research—including engagement of Massachusetts families and trusted messengers, especially those who are low-income, under served, and are from diverse racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds—in order to develop recommendations for communication, optimal information sharing mechanisms, and content design
- Gather feedback directly from parents that specifically addresses how to improve transitions within the mixed delivery system and from the mixed delivery system programs to elementary school
- Develop a set of recommendations to improve communication strategies specific to key audiences, e.g. parents, communities, providers, etc. as well as a plan for measuring the impact of those strategies and ensure recommendations reflect the preferred communication methods of families, with a focus on those who are currently underserved by our systems and most likely to experience health and supports and then determine a set of recommended improvements

Relevant Stakeholders

Throughout this process, we have made a concerted effort to engage families – both directly through our research, and by working in concert with entities such as the Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers and the Family Engagement Coalition. In addition, we have worked with family-focused groups to support the research and used these channels to recruit people for focus groups and stakeholder interviews.

Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers (MPIT). The Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers (MPIT) is a system-building entity that represents a unique collaboration between early childhood professionals inside and outside of government, at the state and local level, spanning early education and health. The Partnership collects input and perspectives of families, practitioners, and other community stakeholders across Massachusetts, to inform state plans for early childhood. The Partnership also participates in the Pritzker Children's Initiative prenatal-to-age three grantee learning network, learning best practices and policy ideas that can be applied here in Massachusetts.

Largely driven by the needs of the PDG B-5, during the fall and winter of 2019–2020, MPIT surveyed families of young children (birth–age 5) across the state as phase one of their work. The goal was to learn about families’ experiences with early childhood programs and services. What works, what doesn’t, what are the barriers to participation, and what would families like to see more of in their communities. The results from this survey were incorporated into the PDG B-5 Needs Assessment.

MPIT is currently working on phase two which will coincide with the B-5 efforts that will continue after the grant is concluded.

Family Engagement Framework Coalition (“the Coalition”). The Coalition is a system-building entity as well as a group of stakeholders representing families and early education and care providers. The Coalition was convened by DESE as part of a technical assistance opportunity through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to build a Prenatal through Post-Secondary family engagement framework.. The approach included a cross-secretariat collaboration in order to build a framework that could be used in the education, health, and human services sectors, recognizing that student success is a responsibility of families, schools, and community partners.

In Massachusetts, the Coalition includes more than 500 members who come together from varied roles and sectors including all of the PDG B-5 partner agencies in addition to many more government and community based entities who serve and represent a broad constituency from prenatal through young adulthood. Members of the PDG B-5 OSC and workstreams are active members of the Coalition

Through shared passion and commitment, the Coalition published their flagship document - *Strengthening Partnerships: A Framework for Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement in Massachusetts*. The work of the Coalition has informed the direction of the research of the PKC team as it has highlighted the gaps and identified some of the hypotheses to be explored. The Coalition is currently working on implementing the Framework with providers and families across the State.

There is significant overlap of participation of PDG B-5 OSC and workstream members on both the MPIT steering committee and the Family Engagement Coalition leadership. Efforts have been intentionally aligned through the development of this Strategic Plan.

PDG B-5 activities were presented to both groups during the Fall, 2020 and there is a commitment to a continued partnership with both MPIT and the Coalition that includes:

1. Collaborating on standardizing, streamlining, and enhancing the communication with families informed by our research to best communicate with families about developmental milestones, focusing on reaching all families & increasing equity
2. Making training available to providers to increase competencies related to developmental screening
3. Sharing data dashboards and visualizations resulting from the PDG B-5 DULA, providing statewide insight about birth-five children across the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System
4. Participating in the transition to a Statewide system for developmental screening using ASQ

Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project (EIPLP) is a stakeholder group of parents of children who are receiving or have received EI services. It is led by DPH and one of their staff was interviewed as a family engagement leader as part of the PKC research. EIPLP also helped recruit families to participate in focus groups related to family engagement and outreach.

Next Steps

The activities identified above have been significantly completed during this grant period and will be detailed in the Project Performance Evaluation, as required by the Federal grant. The next step towards our goals of supporting B-5 children and their families, is to implement the recommendations developed through the work of the PDG B-5 team, informed by key stakeholders, and grounded by research done by MORE Advertising in order to improve family engagement and communication about child development across PDG B-5 participating agencies.

3. Providers and Educators

Strategic Area of Focus

Give providers access to the training and tools they need to do developmental screening, inform families about child development, and make referrals for necessary services.

Goals

- Educators and providers across the mixed delivery system will be equipped with core competencies to engage with families in a culturally responsive way to use the developmental screening process, share actionable information across programs and make appropriate referrals for additional services.
- Educators and providers will be able to access and share developmental screening information across programs to track a child's progress and share actionable insights with families.

Activities

- Conduct landscape analysis of the current screening and training infrastructures, training delivery mechanisms, practices, platforms and online trainings offered throughout the Commonwealth.
- Identify trainings which are aligned to core competencies to assess the gaps in professional development content areas, as well as the ability to provide access across agencies.
- Conduct outreach to providers to assess current screening practices, and understand challenges and barriers to consistent screening, including access to training and professional development within the Massachusetts ECCE mixed delivery system, in order to inform development of, and access to, meaningful training and professional development opportunities, and improve the process of developmental screening overall.
- Develop a framework for coordinated professional development based on Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and grounded in the PDG established set of core competencies
- Based on landscape analysis of currently existing trainings and screening practices, create online trainings and hard copy companion materials, developed to improve competency in administering developmental screenings, and in using results to inform effective referrals across the mixed delivery system
- Develop a set of recommendations to ensure sustainability of professional development efforts

Relevant Stakeholders

Providers and educators are key PDG B-5 stakeholders and are represented by a variety of entities in Massachusetts.

[The Board of Early Education and Care](#) serves as the State Advisory Council for Massachusetts and sets policy and regulations related to early education and care programs and services in the Commonwealth. It is the primary stakeholder group of Early Education and Care Providers and other Early Childhood Service Providers and fundamentally, is also a system building entity. The Secretaries of the Executive Offices of Education and Health and Human Services serve as ex-officio Board members and serve as co-chairs of the Executive Steering Committee of the PDG B-5.

The final PDG briefing document as well as the Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan will be shared with the Board as part of the January 2021 Board meeting. The products from our efforts including insight about communication with families and trainings focused on competencies in developmental screening will be shared regularly with the Board in future meetings. The Board will also have access to the early childhood data dashboards resulting from the PDG B-5 DULA and the data analytics funded through the PDG B-5 grant work, and these data can be used to inform the Board's work in the future.

[The Early Education and Care Workforce Council](#) was established through the Massachusetts FY19 Budget process to make recommendations on improving and enhancing professional development and higher

education opportunities necessary for the growth and stability of a high-quality early education and care workforce in Massachusetts. Early education and care providers are the primary stakeholders of this group. The Council includes members who are appointed by the State legislature and includes representation from EEC, the Massachusetts community colleges executive office, the president of a community college or a designee, the Massachusetts Head Start Association, Inc., the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children, Inc., the Massachusetts Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, Inc., Strategies for Children, Inc., the Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs, Inc., the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Inc., the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the Alliance for Business Leadership, Inc., a representative of SEIU Local 509 and a representative of a family child care provider chosen by the commissioner of early education and care. All additional appointees shall have a special expertise or interest in early childhood education and workforce training and professional development and shall include a mix of representatives of the early childhood community, the civic, labor and business communities, academics, teachers, social service providers and health care providers.

Members of the Council participate in PDG B-5 activities, including the development of trainings and of a statewide approach to the ASQ. The council is in a strong position to provide guidance on the implementation of the online training modules developed through the PDG B-5 activities. These trainings can help increase the competencies of providers and educators as they conduct developmental screenings.

The Massachusetts Head Start State Collaboration Office (MA HSSCO) is located within the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and are an important early education and care providers stakeholder category. The MA HSSCO is supported by an advisory group that meets four times a year and includes Head Start staff, as well as representatives from state agencies, organizations that work with low-income families.

The MA HSSCO has three regional priority areas: early childhood mental health, children and families experiencing homelessness, and addressing the opioid epidemic. Goals for the MA HSSCO also include the following Office of Head Start Federal goals:

1. Partnering with Massachusetts' childcare systems, emphasizing the Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership Initiative
2. Working with Massachusetts' efforts to collect data regarding early childhood programs and child outcomes
3. Supporting the expansion and access of high-quality workforce and career development opportunities for staff
4. Collaborating with the Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
5. Working with Massachusetts' school systems to ensure continuity between Head Start and Kindergarten.

These goals have informed the PDG B-5 work as the Director of the HSSCO is a member of the PDG B-5 Operational Steering Committee, who ensured that the work of the PDG B-5 was integrated into the planning of the HSSCO. Specifically, there was a presentation at the December 11, 2019 HSSCO Advisory meeting and covered the following topics:

- Early Childhood System Building

- Massachusetts PDG B-5
- Initial Grant and Renewal Grant Overview
- Project Sustainability

Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative (MHVI) is part of the federally funded Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV Program), and therefore falls into the stakeholder category of Other Childhood Service Provider. Members of the state team and local home visiting vendors (along with other DPH HV Programs) were involved in interviews related to research for the development of training. MHVI also participated in helping outreach to families for research with MORE and are participating in the integrated data project work.

The state MHVI team along with the other HV programs at DPH are very much aware of the PDG, having been provided presentations/updates as part of the Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition regular convenings. Their feedback has impacted the work of the PDG as the director of the Home Visiting Program at DPH participates in several PDG B-5 workstreams.

Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Policy Workgroup is led by the Department of Mental Health and includes four of the six PDG B-5 participating agencies- EOHHS, DPH, EEC, and DESE. In addition, the Workgroup includes the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Transitional Assistance, Department of Housing and Community Development, area physicians, the Massachusetts Association for Infant Mental Health and the Boston Public Health Commission. As a stakeholder group representing Other Early Childhood Service Providers, the workgroup was provided with updates related to the PDG B-5 activities and plans for further collaboration and understanding of the intersection of child development and mental health.

Next Steps

The activities identified above have been significantly completed during this grant period and will be detailed in the Project Performance Evaluation as required. The next steps towards achieving the PDG B-5 Strategic Plan goals for Providers and Educators in the B-5 Mixed Delivery System would be to host, promote and track use of developmental screening training modules and Facilitator's Guide and explore how to establish standard expectations and processes for developmental screening across the Mixed Delivery System.

4. System Building, Governance, and Data Sharing

Strategic Area of Focus

Build a strong, equitable, data-driven, goal-oriented early childhood delivery system through meaningful and collaborative governance.

Goals

- Massachusetts will have a sustainable collaborative early childhood governance mechanism that deepens the connections between existing programs across our mixed delivery system and facilitates effective decision-making to achieve our goals.

- Data will be accessible across the mixed delivery system to understand inequities, enhance programs and services, and better coordinate and align cross-program activities to improve mixed delivery system and improve outcomes for children and families.

Activities

- Determine the lead fiscal agencies and staff to manage cross-agency PDG B-5 contracts, in coordination with the PDG B-5 OSC, ESC, or a future governance structure.
- Engage relevant stakeholders—government entities, nonprofit organizations, and networks at the federal, state, and local levels—to determine options for governance that would best meet the goals identified throughout this Strategic Plan for B-5 children and families.
- Make a governance recommendation to the PDG B-5 Executive Steering Committee including a process to formalize and implement that recommendation.
- Establish and use virtual collaboration spaces (such as Microsoft Teams), to operationalize the Mixed Delivery System and the collaborative governance structure.
- Aggregate, de-duplicate, de-identify and analyze data related to Birth-5 program participation; and develop dashboards and reports from the Early Childhood Integrated Data System, resulting from the PDG B-5 Data Use License Agreement.
- Share analytical reports and secure access to dashboards from the Birth-5 integrated data system with all participating agencies and provide training on how to use the dashboards and analytical tools to inform policy.
- Review federal and state data reporting requirements (e.g. CCDBG, IDEA Part B and C, SIMS, CCFA, PDS, Head Start, etc.) to understand existing reporting methodologies and expectations, and consider establishing statewide cross-agency metrics building on those requirements.
- Prioritize next steps on how we might develop metrics or other opportunities to assess our progress in meeting currently immeasurable PDG B-5 Success Indicators (e.g. needs and expectations of families, and family awareness of developmental milestones), and then conduct research on best practices in other states, and at the local or program level, to inform our approach.
- Engage the vendor, stakeholders, and users of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) through the process of implementing a statewide system for developmental screening which would be available to all B-5 programs and services across the State and would connect data across current instances.
- Develop training and support to ensure the successful implementation of the new statewide ASQ license for providers already using ASQ, including how to share data securely across programs, and how to collect data appropriately.
- Identify and prioritize next steps.

Relevant Stakeholders

Although all of the stakeholder entities are part of building a more coordinated B-5 Mixed Delivery System, several of the entities identified in previous sections, including the Board of Early Education and Care, the Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers, and the Family Engagement Coalition were

identified as System building Entities. In addition, as described below, several entities are identified as specific to System Building

The Massachusetts Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project (MECCS) builds partnerships across city, state and federal agencies, private organizations, businesses and individuals, with the common goal to create a seamless system of care for children from birth until they enter kindergarten. Partners include representation across early childhood education; physical, mental and public health; social services; local government; and families or other caregivers. Collaborations in Chelsea and Springfield participate in the nationally led Collaborative Innovation and Improvement Network (CoIIN). MECCS collaborations are developing two-generation approaches to improving young children's developmental skills; and are strengthening provider use of data to enhance program delivery and address service gaps.

MECCS trains parents to serve as a developmental health resource and peer support for families with young children and to facilitate parent advisory groups to ensure the parent voice is well represented across MECCS activities. In one community the parent leader role has expanded into a broader vision of a Family Navigator who collaborates with providers across the system of care to increase awareness of early childhood programs and resources.

At the state level, MECCS is creating a sustainable platform for families to provide input and feedback into MDPH early childhood programming

The Director of the Massachusetts MECCS program is a member of the PDG B-5 OSC and other individuals play leadership roles in both groups, so like other entities with cross-over participation, there is general influence from one group to another, with a dedicated PDG B-5 presentation in December 2020. Additionally, DPH had engaged a vendor to support the development of a comprehensive plan to sustain the collective impact activities initiated at the state and community levels, including projections on the potential impact of COVID 19 on MECCS activities. The PDG B-5 was able to amend this contract to include an analysis and option analysis with recommendations regarding developmental screening and the ASQ.

The Massachusetts Young Children's Council is an interagency group focusing on the mental health needs of children. Representatives from DESE, DPH, CT and EEC are part of this group, which meets 3-4 times per year. Through these convenings and shared goals, the Council was engaged in the PDG B-5 strategic planning process and will continue to be meaningfully impacted by the work.

Next Steps

The activities in this section are varied and cover a range of tasks, including those related to the management of the PDG B-5 grant, several related to data and metrics, two related to the ASQ, and significantly a recommendation regarding governance and sustainability. Some of these activities have been completed and will be detailed in the Project Performance Evaluation as required but the data and systems-building activities are active and ongoing.

Our next steps will be to:

- Share access to Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) data analytics and encourage agency staff to use it to inform policymaking and share key findings with relevant stakeholders.

- Explore expanding access to the ECIDS data analytics with local/community level programs and policymakers.
- Continue transition to statewide implementation of ASQ.
- Recommend and then implement a governance structure to sustain a coordinated B-5 Mixed Delivery System

5. Data, Success Indicators, and Transitions

A driving force of the PDG B-5 project is the fact that Massachusetts does not currently have any statewide data on B-5 outcomes prior to third grade MCAS scores. As stated in our Needs Assessment findings, although there are school related data points, such as chronic absenteeism, that provide critical information related to B-5 outcomes, as well as data for specific programs in the B-5 Mixed Delivery System, these are not connected or analyzed statewide to inform early childhood policy.

The Massachusetts Early Childhood Integrated Data System

In order to measure success, we need to be able to aggregate, de-duplicate, de-identify and analyze data related to program participation, education, health, and family stability. The PDG B-5 Data Use License Agreement (PDG B-5 DULA) provides the ability to process existing data that is collected at the agency/program level and is the mechanism by which we will create the Massachusetts Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). The ECIDS will provide valuable insights to inform and improve the administration and impact of programs serving young children and their families. The OSC members worked with the worked with the legal and technical partners in their respective agencies to reach consensus on a comprehensive data sharing agreement.

For the first time, Massachusetts will have insight into the depth and breadth of how children are interacting with programs that are part of the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System. The Executive Office of Technology, Services and Security plays a central role in receiving and processing the data to produce unduplicated, deidentified, longitudinal information about children participating in the programs that are part of the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System.

We will be able to answer key policy questions starting with identifying the real number of children reached through these programs, and what percentage of all B-5 children in Massachusetts this represents. We will gain insight into the distribution of children participating in specific combinations of programs in the State, and the relationship between our programs and elementary school outcomes. The analysis will include a demographic breakdown and will illustrate the geographic distribution of both families and services.

The opportunity to analyze available data across agencies and programs in the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System for the first time will allow us to assess progress in meeting the needs of vulnerable families, highlight where inequities exist, and inform where and how to improve availability, quality and equity within the system.

Success Indicators

The PDG B-5 DULA was developed as part of the strategic planning process that also included the development of the PDG B-5 Logic Model and identifying how we might measure success across the B-5 Mixed Delivery System. The PDG B-5 team developed a set of possible “Success Indicators” and the PDG

B-5 DULA provides a mechanism to begin making several of these Success Indicators available to track at the state level, including measuring key outcomes related to families, young children, and providers across our Mixed Delivery System.

Statewide measures allow a systems-level response to target resources, and tailor programs, in ways that increase the number of students entering kindergarten with the competencies to succeed academically and social-emotionally. These do not substitute for the guidelines or parameters used by individual programs to define their target populations or to measure progress.

We are currently able to measure three of the Success Indicators identified by the PDG B-5 team as reflective of progress toward PDG B-5 common goals: the percentage of providers using ASQ, the percentage of children from economically disadvantaged families who meet or exceed expectations for English Language Arts in the third grade MCAS scores, and the percentage of chronic absenteeism of public school students. The PDG B-5 DULA and the MA ECIDS will enable us to analyze an additional six indicators, including an unduplicated count of which children are enrolled in the PDG B-5 programs, and the number of developmental screenings and related referrals that those children received.

While the remaining Success Indicators are not currently measurable, they reflect the PDG B-5 team's discussion during the strategic planning process about the need to recognize and measure more than just child-level indicators of success, because progress on child-level indicators is influenced by many other aspects of how the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System operates. As use of the data analytics from the ECIDS grows, and as we implement the Statewide approach to the ASQ, we will gain a deeper understanding of our current data and understand how best to prioritize our resources to support greater progress.

The Success Indicators will support an increase in overall participation in early education programs. The Success Indicators are informed by all of the other activities identified in this Strategic Plan. By focusing on these key metrics, we will implement an approach of continuous quality improvement and increase the overall participation in early education programs.

[Transition from B-5 Programs to Elementary School](#)

Some of the most important insights we hope to gain through the ECIDS relate to how, when, or if children transition among and between the programs and services included in the PDG B-5 Mixed Delivery System. The PDG B-5 DULA includes specific permission to analyze information related to transitions, including how many children received an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) in elementary school after having participated in one or more of the other services in the PDG B-5 scope. This information can be further analyzed by demographics, and by how many families accepted or did not accept the IEP or IFSP. Understanding this data will help the PDG B-5 agencies identify patterns in transitions among programs and into elementary school. By examining the data related to these transitions we can identify activities to improve transitions and target resources more effectively.

But the quantitative data may not tell the whole story. In addition to creating the ECIDS, the PDG B-5 team also recognized the need to gather more qualitative information. To address this, the PDG B-5 Parent Knowledge and Choice workstream convened a cross-agency panel of subject-matter experts – individuals across Early Intervention, Early Education and Care, and public preschool special education– to

advise on the scope of our work focused on the transition from Early Intervention and early childhood education programs to Special Education Pre-School within our public education system. Specifically, the group strongly recommended that the PDG B-5 work focus on two groups of families whose children were leaving Early Intervention-- those whose children were evaluated for Early Childhood Special Education and were deemed eligible, and those who were not deemed eligible.

These two areas of focus groups will inform and support the work that the agencies and programs have been doing to smooth transitions out of EI. Some of what we hope to learn includes: Are community teams using shared resources with families? Do families get a sense that the different local agencies involved (Local Education Agencies, EI, ECE programs, CFCE, home visiting) are acting as partners? Do families understand the eligibility process? Are they getting good guidance on that from the agencies and are they working together to help them understand the process? Are families going into the process anticipating conflict?

The focus on data provides an opportunity to understand how we are doing in reaching all of our goals that are identified in this Plan. Combined with a focus on empowering families and supporting providers, we will be able to identify what measures we can take to provide a coordinated network of programs and services.

6 Conclusion and Next Steps

This PDG B-5 Strategic Plan reflects the work of the PDG B-5 OSC and relevant stakeholders and builds on years of collaboration across early childhood agencies in Massachusetts. By focusing the grant work on strengthening the connections among and between those agencies, we have laid a strong foundation for a more equitable and coordinated B-5 Mixed Delivery System in Massachusetts. Our plan focused on aligning specific goals and activities around three strategic focus areas:

- Empower families by understanding their diverse needs, providing them with easy access to critical information about their children's development, and providing timely and appropriate services through a comprehensive early childhood system.
- Give providers access to the training and tools they need to do developmental screening, inform families about child development, and make referrals for necessary services.
- Build a strong, equitable, data-driven, goal-oriented early childhood delivery system through meaningful and collaborative governance.

To empower families, we identified a range of activities that will inform our decisions about how to communicate most effectively about developmental milestones and make it easier for families to access information. We look forward to implementing the recommendations that emerge from these activities.

To make progress in the area of empowering families, we identified and met with families and stakeholders to conduct research and develop key recommendations for improving and aligning communication about child development milestones and access to B-5 services.

To help providers engage with those families through early childhood developmental screening, we developed training modules grounded in specific core competencies. And to give families, providers, and state policymakers more actionable information to drive decisions, we reached consensus on a complex data sharing agreement, developed an early childhood integrated data system, and began planning and implementation of a statewide approach to developmental screening.

As Federally required, we will be developing a final Project Performance Evaluation to document our progress on each of the activities identified in this Plan. After the PDG B-5 grant concludes, we need to continue focusing on these key efforts and other related B-5 system-building work. To that end, the PDG Operational Steering Committee is recommending that the participating agencies participate in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to codify the ongoing commitment to the cross-Secretariat, cross-agency approach to coordinating state-funded programs serving children birth to five through a B-5 Mixed Delivery System. The MOU would articulate a continuation of an “Operational Steering Committee” to foster ongoing communication and coordination across senior staff members in each agency.

As we complete more of the activities outlined in the PDG B-5 Strategic Plan and begin using data from the early childhood integrated data system to track progress towards common goals, we will strengthen our ability to continuously improve and align services and programs for children birth to five and their families. And we will always stay focused on the vision of providing all families of B-5 children with equitable access to a coordinated and robust system of quality programs and supports that enable the development of their children into lifelong learners and contributing members of their communities.