Illinois State Board of Education 2023 Preschool Development Grant B-5
Planning Grant 90TP0122
Annual Performance Progress Report (APPR)

Section A. Strengthening the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Workforce

Question 1: Describe how PDG B-5 funds were used to aid local or statewide efforts to support ECCE educators and caregivers in earning a credential or degree, including but not limited to:
- Child Development Associate (CDA)
- State certificate; or
- Other 2- or 4-year degree in a field related to ECE (as defined by the state) earned at an accredited institution of higher education.

Include any efforts to make credential or degree attainment more accessible and affordable, such as through:
- Practice-based learning
- Registered apprenticeships
- Grow Your Own initiatives
- Accessible coursework (e.g., online, location, multilingual)
- Stackable credentials
- Articulation agreements
- Other, etc.

Answer 1: *Prior Learning Assessment Project:* Illinois utilized PDG B-5 funds to address the early childhood educator workforce shortage. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are not enough trained teachers to meet the demand for early childhood education programs, particularly in low-income communities.

Illinois faces its own challenges regarding the shortage of early childhood teachers and paraprofessionals, caused by a few factors including low wages, inadequate benefits, and the high cost of obtaining the required credentials and degrees. Recognizing the shortage of early childhood teachers and paraprofessionals can have detrimental effects on the quality of education provided to young children, especially in disadvantaged communities where access to high-quality early childhood education is most crucial, Illinois implemented the Prior Learning Assessment project to address this issue.

In June 2021, a group of 30 early childhood education (ECE) faculty from Illinois community colleges and universities collaborated to create an instrument for assessing the prior learning of the early childhood teacher assistants in Illinois who did not have ECE credentials or college credit. The purpose of the Prior Learning Assessment is to assess the skills that early childhood teacher assistants learned through their previous early childhood work experiences and provide an opportunity for them to earn up to 12 college credits based on their prior knowledge. The goals of the Prior Learning Assessment are:

- Goal 1: Create an accessible, standardized competency-based Prior Learning Assessment instrument to award college credit and the Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential.

- Goal 2: Identify specific changes needed to build a 21st century Prior Learning Assessment system in Illinois that is consistent, clear, and responsive to how early childhood professionals and other adults work and learn across their lifespans.

During the 2021-2022 PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, project faculty recruitment focused on securing representatives of community colleges and universities from around Illinois to ensure demographic diversity of ECE program students was represented as well as that of child populations served by local employers.

A total of 30 faculty members from 23 institutions agreed to work on the project:
- 15 faculty members from community colleges
- 13 faculty members from universities [8 public, 4 private/nonprofit, 1 for-profit]
- 2 faculty members from a graduate-only institution

To initiate the Prior Learning Assessment project, Illinois partnered with the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) to facilitate the Prior Learning Assessment Project. INCCRRA collaborated with the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) to guide faculty in developing content for a virtual-reality based Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) platform and C-BEN contracted with Mursion, a virtual-reality technology company to create and administer the virtual-reality PLA platform.

The assessment consists of a series of simulations that challenge the learner (i.e., 'test taker') to interact with children and/or adults in ways that evidence the learner's Level 2 ECE competencies while problem-solving authentic, everyday workplace situations. In each simulation, the learner interacts with child and adult avatars powered by a Mursion company actor who's been trained to deliver these simulations. At the start of the assessment session, the learner is greeted by a "host" adult human avatar (powered by the same Mursion actor). This host serves as the learner's guide throughout the (average) 90-minute session.

To ensure that equity is embedded in this project, the assessment is readily accessed online through a desktop, laptop, or tablet; no other equipment is necessary. Learners make an appointment to complete the assessment on the website (currently hosted by C-BEN). They can view a presentation about the format of the assessment as well as the expectations of their performance (e.g., a review of the Level 2 ECE Credential competencies). After registering, learners are encouraged to review a tutorial on how they will work through the simulations before they arrive for their assessment appointment. Upon completion, users receive a link to a (non-editable) video captured during their session. They then send the video to their selected institution for competency evaluation and conversion to college credit by a certified faculty assessor. These assessment results inform the campus personnel responsible for determining students' pathways to credentials and degrees.

During the 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant cycle, eight (8) Illinois higher education institutions piloted a statewide system for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). The institutions that participated in the project included: Heartland Community College, Kishwaukee College, McHenry College, College of Lake County, Eastern Illinois University, Western Illinois University, National Louis University and Governors State University. The Prior Learning Assessment Project Team aimed to make progress towards the following goals: 1.) increase statewide access to the ECE Prior Learning Assessment instrument, 2.) enhance institutional capacity for PLA and 3.) expand innovative PLA practices and policies.

Goal 1: Increase Statewide Access to the ECE Prior Learning Assessment Instrument
Faculty from thirty-eight (38) of the sixty-four (64) Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) member institutions collaborated in developing and/or using a virtual reality based Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) instrument for awarding college credit at their institutions. As part of their participation in the project, certain faculty were responsible for evaluating prospective students who took the assessment (i.e., the learners) and converting their assessment scores into course credit at their institutions. Promotional videos and flyers were created both in English and Spanish as part of the marketing strategy for the ECE PLA project, specifically targeting incumbent workers. These materials were designed to effectively communicate the benefits and opportunities offered by the PLA program to individuals who are already working in the field. By providing information in both English and Spanish, the PLA project aimed to ensure inclusivity and accessibility to a diverse range of potential participants.

Goal 2: Enhance Institutional Capacity for Prior Learning Assessment
INCCRRA provided ongoing training to leadership and faculty. Regular scheduled meetings helped institutions to learn from one another and reinforced the sense of community amongst the ECE faculty in Illinois. Topics for discussion included, 1.) how to scale efforts for PLA in Illinois, 2.) interrater reliability and the awarding of PLA on institutional transcripts, 3.) how interrater reliability is achieved in other types of PLA processes, beyond the ECE project, 4) competency to credit hour equivalencies for 12 IL ECE Level 2 Credential competencies, 5.) data collection, scoring, and the process to retake the PLA, 6.) 2023 outcomes of the PDG B-5 PLA project and 7.) recommendations for the next phase of the PLA in Illinois.

Goal 3: Expand Innovative Prior Learning Assessment Practices and Policies
Dr. Anne O. Brennan served as a consultant for this project. Dr. Brennan was engaged to review PLA processes at each of the institutions and to look for ways to achieve consistency across institutions. She also reviewed how institutions stated they would award credit and verified if and how much credit was awarded. Through this process, it was discovered there is a lack of consistency across institutions regarding prior learning infrastructure and recognition. This lack of consistency creates challenges for the ECE PLA project.

2023 Prior Learning Assessment Project Outcomes
During the 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant, Illinois provided the Prior Learning Assessment to 165 learners, 92% of English learners were female, slightly more than the 89% of female Spanish learners. This year, just over one-third of English learners were Caucasian, with half identifying as Hispanic/Latino or African American/Black. For Spanish learners, nearly 85% identify as Hispanic or Latino. During 2023, there was an increase in those who identify as Caucasian/White as compared to 2022. One reason for this increase is a shift in the institutions sending learners through the PLA process. Western Illinois University and Heartland Community College learners hail from the southern part of the state, which is less diverse than National Louis University, located in the diverse-rich city of Chicago, which had the highest utilization in 2022. These statistics mirror the current early childhood workforce in Illinois.

For English learners, over half of students that completed an enrollment form were age 30+ and 72% were between 20 and 39 years of age. Spanish learners are a slightly older student population than their English counterparts as 78% of students that completed an enrollment form were age 30+, with 41% between 20 and 39 years old. Individuals in the 20-39 age bracket could have between 30-50 years in the labor market before retirement. By engaging these young individuals through prior learning assessment and connecting them to career and credential pathways at participating institutions, Illinois could reap the benefits of a more qualified workforce.

The 2023 data mirrored in large part what was seen in 2022 pilot results. Learners deemed proficient by competency ranged from 37-85% for English learners. The results for Spanish learners revealed a range of 78-97% proficient by competency. The Illinois Prior Learning Assessment competencies related to Human Growth and Development (HGD) and Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW) were the most challenging for a learner to achieve proficiency using the PLA instrument. It is believed that these two competency areas are constructed in a more theoretical and less application-oriented way, making it more difficult for practitioners to demonstrate competence. As Illinois continues to enhance the PLA instrument, it will be important to look at these competencies and the assessment instruments to see if modifications can be made to better balance theory and practice.

It should be noted that there is a correlation between years in the field and proficiency levels. Based on the small sample size in 2023, "years in the field" appears to be a reliable indicator for increased levels of proficiency attainment for English PLA learners.

The interactive assessment technology that was developed by Mursion was used by the Illinois ECE incumbent workforce to demonstrate professional competencies for the Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential that would allow the learner to use prior experience to earn college credit. The project's overall goal was to create a standardized instrument and the necessary processes for learners with extensive knowledge and skills to earn college credits. Funds were used to support learners by offering the assessment free of charge, as well as for consultants to review scenarios and perform assessor reliability reviews. Funds were also used for higher education faculty to score proficiency, participate in monthly meetings, and engage in recruitment efforts of the incumbent workforce. Additionally, PDG B-5 funds were utilized for the national data consultant to perform an analysis on the project and to develop the final report.

Question 2: Describe how you used PDG B-5 funds to support local or statewide efforts to improve ECCE workforce compensation, including pay and benefits. It is recognized that all efforts listed below are not direct examples of workforce compensation but are efforts to support the workforce in other ways, such as improvements to the work environment. If applicable, please include efforts to:
- Develop salary scales or wage ladders,
- Conduct compensation studies,
- Increase pay and benefits,
- Provide access to or navigation support to take up public benefits,
- Provide recruitment or retention incentives,
- Improve workplace conditions,
- Make adjustments other systems or program improvements to improve compensation,
- Other, etc.

Answer 2: *Home Visiting Workforce Needs Assessment:* The goal of the Home Visiting Workforce Needs Assessment Project was to conduct data analysis and hold focus groups to determine how Illinois can best support the home visitors and supervisors in the early childhood education and care workforce and reduce staff turnover. A specific goal of this project was to analyze home visiting salaries and turnover across program models and funding streams. The results of this analysis are included in the forthcoming report, Illinois Staffing and Salary Survey of Home Visiting Programs – Fiscal Year 2023.

Preliminary findings indicate that:
- Turnover rates are high and mirror those in the early care and education workforce; 43% of home visitors and 26% of home visitor supervisors resigned from their position within the two years preceding the survey.

- Nearly 75% of home visiting programs that responded to the survey indicated they had at least one home visitor leave their program in the last two years.
- Nearly two-thirds of program leaders stated filling vacancies is somewhat or very difficult, with the greatest challenge being that applicants do not meet the qualifications required.
- Home Visitors in Illinois have a median hourly wage of $20.73, and Home Visitor Supervisors have a median hourly wage of $27.34/hr.
- As expected, wages vary by the highest level of education attained. A home visitor with a Child Development Associate (CDA) Home Visiting Credential has a median hourly wage of $15.76, while a home visitor with a master's degree in early childhood/child development has a median hourly wage of $30.67.
- Through focus groups with home visitors and supervisors, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) gathered feedback to inform recommendations on how Illinois can best support the home visiting field. These will be included in the final project report which is expected to convey the following:
  - ➢ Focus group participants chose home visiting as a career to support children and their families individually so families can be assessed holistically. This focused support should be highlighted when recruiting new home visitors.
  - ➢ There are multiple recruitment pathways that should be considered, including partnerships with secondary and higher education for pre-collegiate programs and dual enrollment options, as well as pathways to credentialing programs; a "grow your own" model to recruit and train parents that have graduated from a home visiting program; and partnerships between program directors/leaders and college faculty to develop coursework and clinical experiences.
  - ➢ Participants also recommend establishing career levels/pathways and creating a pay scale for home visiting professionals that is differentiated by education, credentials, and experience.

Question 3: What supports did you provide to ECCE educators and caregivers through PDG B-5 funds to improve compensation (pay and benefits) or help them progress in their education, professional development, and career pathway? *Check all that apply. If available, specify how many ECCE caregivers and educators or students received each type of support. It is recognized that data may not be available at the time of submission but may be available in future submissions. Please indicate if this is the case.* (Please see the definition of ECCE caregivers and educators or students studying to become an ECCE provider.)

- ☐ Scholarships (for formal education institutions) #_____
- ☐ Financial bonus/wage supplements tied to education levels #_____
- ☐ Financial bonus/wage supplements NOT tied to education levels #_____
- ☒ Career advisors, mentors, coaches, or consultants # <u>63 coaches supported the Pyramid Model Project.</u>
- ☐ Registered apprenticeships #_____
- ☐ Reimbursement for training #_____
- ☐ Loans #_____
- ☐ Substitutes, leave (paid or unpaid) for professional development #_____
- ☐ Insurance coverage (health and/or dental) #_____
- ☐ Retirement benefits #_____
- ☐ Loan forgiveness #_____
- ☐ Mental health/workplace wellness programs #_____

☒ Other. Describe: <u>PDG B-5 funds covered the cost for students to complete the Prior Learning Assessment.</u>

☐ N/A. Describe: _____

Answer 3: *Prior Learning Assessment Project:* Illinois used 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant funds to offer Prior Learning Assessments (PLA) regarding the Gateways ECE Level 2 Credentials free of charge to ECE incumbent workforce learners at eight participating higher education institutions. This pilot helped to provide access to a statewide, standardized competency-based simulation instrument in both English and Spanish that assessed the incumbent early childhood workforce members' prior learning for college credit. This statewide PLA model provided a much-needed pathway to upskill the early childhood education and care workforce by coordinating PLA among higher education institutions that could lead to the awarding of college credit. A total of 165 ECE incumbent workforce learners participated in the project. Of the 165 participants, 117 learners were administered the Prior Learning Assessment. Ninety-one (91) out of the 117 learners received college credit.

Pyramid Model Implementation Project: The Pyramid Consortium partnered with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to identify and select additional Family Child Care sites to participate in the PDG B-5 project. New sites received professional development including trauma informed care, wellness, Pyramid Model practices (ePyramid Modules Access) and engaged in an assessment process using a battery of program quality and caregiver skills and knowledge assessments that foster changes and improvements. Through the process, the Pyramid Model Implementation Sites engaged in training and monthly professional learning communities. They also engaged in monthly coaching to support the Pyramid Model implementation.

Question 4: How much and what percent of your state's total PDG B-5 funds are dedicated to initiatives supporting the ECCE workforce?

The following PDG B-5 Projects were funded by the 2023 Planning Grant to support the ECCE workforce:

PDG B-5 Projects	Contract	Funding
Home Visitor Workforce Needs Assessment (INCCRRA)	MY23446	$406,000.00
Prior Learning Assessment (INCCRRA)	MY23446	
Linking Gateways Data to the ILDS (INCCRRA)	MY23446	
Linking ECCE Workforce Data (NIU)	MY23449	$375,000.00
ECCE Workforce Portraits (UIC)	MY244406	$200,000.00
Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (Univ. of IL-Champaign)		$175,000.00
Sharing Best Practices for Preventing Suspension and Expulsion (Pyramid Model Consortium)	MY23445	$175,000.00
Pilot Strategies for Inclusive Community-Based Early Childhood Special Education (SASED)	MY23443	$400,000.00
Multi-State Research on Early Intervention (EI) Models (IDHS)	24042	$100,292.00
	Total	**$1,831,292.00**

Question 5: Describe how and to what extent you are using PDG B-5 funds to support ECCE educators and caregivers in traditionally marginalized or underserved communities, and across settings and age groups (Please see definition for marginalized or underserved communities) If available, use data to support your response. If available, please provide the number and percentage of recipients who, in the identified category, received PDG B-5 support).

- Specify the underserved groups, populations, setting types, age groups, or areas you are targeting with PDG B-5 funded supports.

Answer 5: *Home Visiting Workforce Needs Assessment*: The Home Visiting Workforce Needs Assessment Project intentionally focused on home visiting professionals from rural areas of Illinois, those who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and Spanish-speaking home visitors. The recruitment of focus group participants began by identifying areas of the state to host focus groups based on home visitor workforce data from the Gateways to Opportunity Registry. In addition to recruiting home visitors from traditionally underserved communities, PDG B-5 Planning Grant funds were used to reimburse participants for travel mileage and other transportation costs to and from in-person focus group meetings. After the initial round of in-person focus group meetings (at 10 locations throughout the state), the PDG B-5 Project team determined that additional representation was needed to ensure that the voices of those in the communities of focus were fully present. The Project Team developed and recruited an additional nine (9) groups that would meet virtually. These groups included two specifically for rural home visitors, two for BIPOC home visitors, and one that was conducted in Spanish and supported by an interpreter. The remaining groups were focused on home visitor supervisors or were open to any home visitor that wished to participate. Of the 60 individuals that participated in focus group sessions and provided demographic information, 58% identified as BIPOC.

Question 6: Describe how PDG B-5 funds have helped programs to serve more children and families and improve the overall participation of all children in a mixed delivery system.
Ensure your response includes specific mention of:
- Infants and toddlers,
- Vulnerable, underserved, or unserved children and
- Children with, or at risk for, disabilities.

Answer 6: *Pyramid Model Implementation:* The Pyramid Model Consortium facilitated the Pyramid Model Implementation Project during the 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant cycle.

Expanding or revision program quality standards:
As part of this project, the Pyramid Model Consortium (PMC) supported 21 Family Child Care programs who completed the Birth – Five ePyramid Model Modules. During the pilot, they received at least three (3) hours of coaching a month on the practices through a variety of ways. They met individually with their coach, as a local community of practice, and as a state-wide cohort. All programs completed Benchmarks of Quality at the start and finish of the pilot.

Illinois implemented the Pyramid Model in 133 sites across the state and reached over 100,000 children and families. As of December 2023, thirty-two (32) additional sites reached sustainability, successfully integrating the Pyramid Model framework. During the past 6 years, Illinois has developed a network of 35 coaches and trainers across the early childhood mixed delivery system.

Developing a Common Process to Identify English Language Learners: The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning leads the Developing a Common Process to Identify English Language Learners Project and has partnered with Early Childhood Professional Learning (ECPL) to develop resources and provide training that builds the capacity of community-based early childhood providers and the workforce to conduct an enrollment interview with families that includes the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Home Language Survey to determine if a child has exposure to one or more languages in the home and if the child needs a direct language screener or assessment. ECPL has developed a training and support system that prepares early childhood providers to facilitate the Pre-IPT, the English proficiency screener used in public schools, within the first 30 days of enrollment to children identified as having exposure to multiple languages at home to determine the need for bilingual programming.

During the 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant, this equity initiative sought to determine the number of English Learners in Preschool for All (PFA) community-based programs across Illinois. The project was designed for students to be screened by trained on-site screeners. Programs had the option to have a team member from their organization be trained to conduct the screenings on site or PDG B-5 funds could be used for a traveling consultant to conduct screenings on behalf of the program. This project is, at its core, an equity initiative. According to Illinois School Code, Preschool for All (PFA) programs operated by public school districts are required to screen, identify, and serve English Learners. However, PFA programs operated by community–based organizations (CBOs) do not have these requirements. This project focused on determining the number of English Learners in PFA CBO programs across the state by screening children using the two-step ISBE screening process through the ISBE Home Language Survey and, when indicated, the English Pre-IPT.

ECPL also used PDG B-5 funds to provide incentives to programs that participated in this project by providing information regarding free webinars designed for teachers of newly identified English Learners (ELs). An ECPL trained consultant worked with non-school district staff to complete a Home Language Survey for children enrolled in a PFA program, ensured on-site staff had proper training to administer the Pre-IPT and gathered data. Programs that agreed to participate in the project also received the Pre-IPT screening board and pieces and they will be able to keep this screening tool after project ends.

NOTE: Illinois is not required to respond to APPR Questions 7-9 as these questions are for states who received PDG B-5 renewal grants only. In 2023, Illinois received the PDG B-5 Planning Grant.

Section C Improving ECCE Program Quality

Question 10: What approaches have you used with PDG B-5 funds to improve program quality? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Extending the duration of existing slots to support full-day/full-year. # Slots_____ (if available)
- ☐ Improving class size and/or adult/child ratios.
- ☐ Expanding or revising program quality standards.
- ☐ Monitoring, or continuous quality improvement efforts.
- ☒ Developmental, social-emotional, health, and behavioral health supports.
- ☒ Inclusion of children with or at risk of disabilities.
- ☒ Implementing culturally and/or linguistically responsive practices for children, families, and/or providers.

☒ Addressing suspension, expulsion, and other exclusionary practices.

☒ Trauma-informed approaches for ECCE programs.

☐ Support transitions across early childhood programs and into the early elementary grades.

☐ Efforts to improve health and safety.

☐ Other comprehensive services. Describe: _____

☐ Other quality improvement efforts. Describe: _____

Answer 10: *Pyramid Model Implementation:* The Pyramid Model Consortium used PDG B-5 Planning Grant funds to implement the following approaches to improve program quality: 1.) developmental, social-emotional, health, and behavioral health supports, 2.) inclusion of children with or at risk of disabilities, 3.) implementing culturally and/or linguistically responsive practices for children, families, and/or providers, 4.) addressing suspension, expulsion, and other exclusionary practices and 5.) trauma-informed approaches for ECCE programs.

Developmental, social-emotional, health, and behavioral health supports:
Through coaching sessions and completing the Birth – Five modules, participants were able to gain a better understanding of the social-emotional development of children and the supports they need to address challenging behaviors. In addition, they were given The Pyramid Model Preschool Classroom Kit so they could begin teaching the children appropriate social-emotional skills.
The Illinois Pyramid Model Implementation Project increased growth in the areas of professional development, data collection, strategic coaching support, exhibiting Pyramid Model key practices in classrooms, and meeting more program-wide implementation benchmarks.

Implementing culturally and/or linguistically responsive practices for children, families, and/or providers:
Participants completed the Culturally Responsive Practices to Reduce Implicit Bias, Disproportionality, Suspension & Expulsion ePyramid Model Module. Equity is at the core of the Pyramid Model work. As highlighted by the work of the Children's Equity Project: (a) addressing the harsh discipline of children (including suspension and expulsion), (b) supporting children with disabilities to be served in more integrated services, and (c) addressing the needs of dual language learners are critical components of both the Pyramid Model and addressing issues of equity in early childhood. The data collected by the Pyramid Model implementation sites on the Behavior Incident Report collects key information related to each of these areas. Implementation Sites are becoming comfortable collecting data from the Behavior Incident Reports and learning to enter them into the Pyramid Implementation Data System. (PIDS). This builds on the previous work of the PDG B-5 work.

Illinois has served as a Pyramid Model trailblazer nationally, being the first state to create an Implementation Guide and firmly stating our commitment to equity work through our Equity Brief, published earlier this year. As Illinois works towards the creation of a unified early childhood agency.

The role of a Coordinator of the IL Pyramid Model State Leadership Team ensured that the planning of this work cuts across the cross-sector representation of early childhood services, including Center Child Care, Family Child Care, Head Start, PFA/PFAE, Early Intervention and other relevant settings and builds on existing work.

Addressing suspension, expulsion, and other exclusionary practices:

By participating in the professional development courses through ePyramid, participants were able to understand the relationships between challenging behaviors and the social-emotional development of children. Through the addition of coaching, they were able to look at the meaning of behaviors and use the appropriate strategies to reduce these behaviors.

Programs that implemented the Pyramid Model to fidelity reported:
- Improved social and emotional development of children
- Internal capacity to intervene effectively to support children with persistent, challenging behavior
- Enhancement of partnerships with families
- Reduction and/or elimination of expulsions and suspensions
- Reduced staff attrition, increase staff job satisfaction

Trauma-informed approaches for ECCE programs:

Participants completed the Trauma-Informed Care & the Pyramid Model ePyramid Modules. In partnership with their local Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant participated in facilitated sessions to better understand the impact of trauma on children and families and how trauma-informed care principles strengthen their ability to meet the needs of the children and families they serve.

Other Quality Improvement Efforts

The Implementation Pyramid Process Coaches developed a manual to support the Six Phases of Implementation for coaches to use as they support implementation sites towards sustainability.

Developing a Common Process to Identify English Language Learners: This portion of the PDG funds were designed to provide PFA CBO programs with free support, training and materials to assist them in screening and identifying potential ELs during the fall of 2023. While programs were strongly encouraged to participate, it was not a requirement.
- 8 PFA CBO programs participated. Some programs had all of their sites participate. Other programs selected only certain sites to participate.
- Only 1 CBO program chose to have a PDG-funded traveling consultant screen their children. The remaining 7 programs chose to have an on-site staff member complete the Pre-IPT online training and screen their children on-site.
- 18 educators became certified English Pre-IPT test examiners/screeners
- 564 children received an ISBE Home Language Survey (HLS)
- 72 children needed to be screened with the English Pre-IPT
- 56 children actually screened with Pre-IPT
- 25 children met the qualifications for English learner services per current ISBE guidelines,
- 12 different home languages were reported on the ISBE HLS

Upon completion of the two-step screening process, ECPL surveyed the five programs with children who had a language other than English (LOTE) on their ISBE HLS.

Survey results were as follows:
- All programs found the ISBE HLS to be at least "somewhat helpful."
- All programs found the Pre-IPT English screener to be at least "somewhat useful."
- All programs preferred the online Pre-IPT to the paper Pre-IPT.
- All programs found their ECPL consultant to be "very helpful."
- All programs found the Pre-IPT staff to be at least "somewhat helpful."

➤ 4 out of 5 PFA programs intend to continue screening children using the ISBE HLS and, when indicated, the English Pre-IPT. The PFA program that said no, cited their reason as "don't have the Pre-IPT on site."

Pilot Strategies for Inclusive Community-Based Early Childhood Special Education: The Illinois State Board of Education contracted with the School Association for Special Education in DuPage (SASED) to lead the work that supports the advancement of Inclusion in community-based early childhood settings. SASED has subcontracted with Early CHOICES to facilitate this project. The 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant funds were used to build upon the previous work that was conducted under the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant in which the Public Consulting Group recommended four service model options for preschool community-based Inclusive settings which included:

- Option A: The Local Education Agency (LEA) provides early childhood special education services to all children attending a program and residing within their district.
- Option B: Districts collaborate and agree to provide services for children who reside out-of-district and enrolled in community-based organizations.
- Option C: Itinerant services provided within a regional co-op to children who reside out-of-district and are enrolled in community-based organizations.
- Option D: State Systems Transformation: Funding mechanisms for itinerant service delivery.

During 2023, Early CHOICES awarded stipends in the amount of $25,000 to three Community Inclusion Teams (CIT). Each CIT consists of one LEA and one community-based organization that serves the same geographic area as the LEA. The CIT's met each month for 90 minutes to develop implementation plans. Using the Community Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion, the CIT's developed action plans to guide and support inclusive early childhood education and care environments.

This project aims to build the capacity of communities to equitably serve preschool children with disabilities in inclusive learning environments using an itinerant model and building collaboration between local school districts and community-based organizations such as Head Start, childcare and other high quality preschool programs. PDG funds were used to support the implementation planning. Each community applied to be part of this effort with at least one Local Education Agency (LEA), and at least one Community Based Organization (CBO) that serve the same geographic area to create a Community Inclusion Teams (CITs) to develop plans to serve children with disabilities in community-based settings such as childcare or Head Start. There are three communities with CITs that vary based on geography within the state, composition of members and the approach they are taking to provide services. Collinsville CIT is one district partnering with a high-quality childcare. The Quad cities area has four LEAs and several community partners all within the Moline and Rock Island area. Peoria County is working with all LEAs within the county which is 19 LEAs that include several who are part of a special education cooperative and many community-based organizations.

CITs are required to convene a team with members from the lead agency and partner agencies to address how the itinerant model will be delivered in the community-based organization. Each CIT has a facilitator to convene meetings, communicate with Early CHOICES and all the partners on the CIT. The CITs are developing agreements to implement the model based on the community's needs and creating a plan for implementation to ensure quality services are delivered to all children and families beginning by Fall 2024. Each CIT is using the Community Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion to create action plans to guide and support the availability of high-quality inclusive early care and education environments throughout the

community. By the end of the project, they will develop a written scale up and sustainability plan for the community implementation including partner agencies supporting with management of the initiative.

Early CHOICES provides professional development and technical assistance to support the teams. This includes sharing resources related to inclusion, meeting with the facilitators to plan meetings, and provide a community of practice for the facilitators.

Section D. Engaging Families & Increasing Family Voice and Choice in Systems and Programs Decisions

Question 11: How have you used PDG B-5 funds to maximize family and parental choice, knowledge of ECCE programs, or engagement as leaders in programs within the state's mixed delivery system, including helping parents overcome barriers to participate in ECCE programs? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Coordinating application, eligibility, and enrollment of families in ECCE and other programs and services across a range of programs to help meet family needs.
- ☐ Compensating parents through stipends, gift cards or other supports for participation in the development or updating of your statewide Needs Assessment and/or Strategic Plan.
- ☐ Increasing parents' awareness of the availability and quality of early childhood programs in the mixed delivery system.
- ☒ Compensating parents and caregivers for participating in state/local-level advisory or policy development or implementation bodies.
- ☐ Offering language services, transportation, child care, and/or other supports to minimize barriers to meaningful engagement of families as leaders in policy and program decisions.
- ☐ Targeting family outreach and engagement strategies historically underserved communities.
- ☐ Any other strategies? Please describe: _____

Question 12: Describe how you have engaged family representatives as leaders in state-level early childhood initiatives, indicating which groups family representatives are engaged in and their role.
- Specifically address how you have engaged new and diverse family representatives in these efforts (e.g., racial-, cultural-, and geographic-diversity), and any successes realized in using their voices.
- How many family representatives have you engaged as leaders in state-level early childhood initiatives? #16-The Family Advisory Committee consists of 16 members who represent the 7 regions across the State of Illinois

Answer 12: *Assess and Align Capacity of Intermediary Structures:* Wendy McCullough, LLC serves as the facilitator for the Assess and Align Capacity of Intermediary Structures Project. This purpose of this project is to map the array of intermediary early childhood structures and supports for parent navigation across the early childhood education and care service continuum for children ages B-5. Wendy McCullough worked closely with the co-chairs of the Integration and Alignment Committee (IAC) of the Illinois Early Learning Council and engaged representatives drawn from the IAC, the B-5 Action Councils and their family councils, the Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (CCR&R), the Local Interagency Councils for Early Intervention, All Our Kids (AOK) Networks, Regional Offices of Education, Star NET Professional Development Regions, local community collaborations and the Family Advisory Committee of the Illinois Early Learning Council. During 2023, Wendy McCullough completed the mapping of Illinois' intermediary

structures and developed recommendations for better articulating and coordinating the functions of the regional intermediary structures.

Family representatives participated throughout the Early Learning Council (ELC)-Integration and Alignment Committee's (IAC) process to develop recommendations to align regional intermediary functions to better help families access ECEC supports. First, focus groups were held with the ELC-Family Advisory Committee (FAC) and Birth to Five Illinois (B-5 IL) Regional Family and Community Engagement Specialists (FACE), who represented their regions' B-5 IL Family Councils (12 participants total). These focus groups helped the IAC better understand how families experience regional supports and gather their ideas for what the IAC could recommend to better support them. Focus group participants and the full FAC were also encouraged to attend the IAC meetings to contribute to forming recommendations. Finally, preliminary IAC recommendations were presented to the full FAC for validation and to share the outcome of a process that they contributed to. As both the FAC and B-5 Family Councils are constructed to represent the geographic and racial diversity of IL, this provided an opportunity to access diverse family perspectives more easily in this work.

Section E. PDG B-5 Program Implementation and Systems Coordination

Question 13: Discuss how you used PDG B-5 funds to support the development or enhancement of your state B-5 early childhood care and education (ECCE) system. Please see the definition of ECCE System.

- Note any significant barriers and challenges.

Answer 13: *Assess and Align Capacity of Intermediary Structures:* Illinois has several regional intermediary structures that support the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system by helping communities access and utilize State-funded programs to meet local needs. They provide similar services but are governed by different programs and State agencies, which has led to fragmentation, silos, and misalignment that makes it difficult for families and communities to access supports. PDG B-5 funds were used to hire an independent consultant to facilitate the Early Learning Council-Integration & Alignment Committee's (IAC) process to review the functions of ECEC regional intermediaries and provide directional recommendations to increase efficacies, efficiencies, and alignments of regional supports in order to provide families a more simplified and seamless experience to connect to services.

By design, the IAC consists of diverse stakeholders across the ECEC system – service providers, philanthropic leaders, State leaders, school district leaders, regional intermediary directors, etc. – and are open to the public. While this construct enables a State-public partnership inclusive of diverse perspectives to form recommendations, it was challenging to align and maintain such vast stakeholders and interests on a management scope and single problem of practice. To address this, we ground all discussions on the impact goals determined by the IAC and the feedback from the field that was collected via a number of focus groups at the start of this work.

Developing a Common Process to Identify English Language Learners: ECPL anticipated screening an estimated 7,500 children across the state using the two-step ISBE screening process. However, obtaining contact information for the programs from ISBE took longer than expected. Once ECPL was able to contact the CBOs, they learned that some were already screening children for English Learner services and other programs were not interested in participating.

2023 data on the identification of English Learners in community-based sites, including:

- 73 Preschool for All (PFA) community-based organizations (CBOs) were contacted by email and phone, representing nearly 10,000 PFA slots
- 65 PFA CBO programs did not participate

The top three reasons were:

- PFA CBO programs did not respond to outreach efforts nor expressed interest.
- PFA CBO programs attended the kickoff webinar or expressed interest but did not provide a reason for not participating in the project
- PFA CBO programs already use some type of screening process for English Learner status

Reason for not participating	Number of PFA programs	Approximate number of PFA slots
Did not meet criteria to participate (e.g. Special Education Coop serving public schools, CBO no longer had PFA program, etc.)	6	1830
Already use some type of screening process for English learner status (or believe that they do)	8	2670
Attended kickoff or expressed interest but gave no reason for not participating	15	810
Do not believe that they have any English Learners	5	140
Never responded nor expressed interest	29	3330
Too much additional burden on the staff/center	2	120
Total	65	8,900

Note: This list above does not include CBO programs operating PFA programs in the City of Chicago. Preliminary data seem to indicate that most Chicago CBOs are already screening for English Learners. However, more information is needed, which ECPL anticipates gathering during the 2024 PDG B-5 No Cost Extension period.

Pilot Strategies for Inclusive Community-Based Early Childhood Special Education: Early CHOICES used Indicator 6 data from the Community Indicators High Quality Inclusion Report to help the communities determine where they are serving children with disabilities. One issue is that the data only reveal if a child

has enrolled in a regular early childhood program but not where that program is located, if it is school based, Head Start or childcare.

Other challenges that were encountered include LEA boundary issues where a child is enrolled in a community program outside of the boundaries of the LEA. This can pose a challenge for the LEA to get staff to the community setting. Creating an itinerant model is also challenging because LEAs are already facing workforce shortage issues so asking them to reconfigure the way they use staff with increased travel time is a barrier. A mindset issue around embedding the supports into the routines and instruction in the program also is a barrier related to this work. As implementation is executed, a shift in the way the teams view the special education services is anticipated as the service model delivery will be more consultative rather than direct instruction and will not require as many additional service providers.

Collaboration across systems takes time due to learning about each other's service parameters, philosophies, and strengths. The timeline that was initially envisioned was ambitious and building the CITs took longer than expected. One of the most persistent barriers to inclusion has always been attitudes and beliefs. Each CIT had challenges related to this mindset issue which has required extra time and dialogue to support a universal understanding of inclusion. Efforts to support a shared understanding of each other's programs within the CITs have included visiting each other's programs, hearing from families why they chose one program over another and looking at policies and procedures related to instruction and standards.

Question 14: How have PDG B-5 funds helped you improve the coordination and delivery of early care and education services across program models and funding streams in the state's mixed delivery system? Please see the definitions for Mixed Delivery System.

- Include in your response any efforts to develop and implement coordinated application, eligibility, and enrollment systems across multiple ECCE programs in the mixed delivery system, as well as other efforts to engage and coordinate across programs.

- If available, use data to support your response.

- If available, provide the amount of PDG B-5 funds dedicated to developing and implementing coordinated application, eligibility, and enrollment systems.

Answer 14: *Assess and Align Capacity of Intermediary Structures:* Regional intermediaries play an important role in the coordination and delivery of ECEC services by helping families and communities within their region understand and access the various State-funded programs available to meet their needs. By hiring an independent facilitator via PDG B-5 funds, the Early Learning Council-Integration & Alignment Committee was able to engage the field, clarify the issues, and develop recommendations to increase coordination and alignment across programs and regional supports within a single planning cycle (January – December 2023).

Their recommendations include:

1. Begin to align ECEC governance and systems by:

   a. Aligning the service area boundaries for all regional intermediary structures to simplify navigation and consolidate partnerships.

b. Unifying intake and application forms and processes to enable system points of entry to provide state-wide coordinated intake, eligibility determination, and referrals across ECEC programs.

2. Enable regional intermediaries to provide integrated intake & referral services by:

    a. Expanding system point of entry's scope and capabilities to provide integrated intake, referral, and a "warm hand off" across ECEC programs.

    b. Developing a state-wide integrated intake & referral data system to streamline referrals between regional intermediaries & providers.

    c. Streamlining and consolidating regional intermediary support for referrals to community resources to increase efficiency in providing this service.

3. Enable shared community development by:

    a. Merging regional intermediary councils and meetings to create one planning/reporting table per region for ECEC, with a single, shared ECEC agenda that all regional intermediaries support.

    b. Unifying needs assessments and parent surveys into one per region, reducing the cadence of needs assessments, and creating universal access to this input to shift resources from diagnosing to driving change.

If approved, the State will begin implementation planning for these recommendations and continue to engage the Early Learning Council as key stakeholders and partners in the work.

Linking ECCE Workforce Dataset Project and Expanded Use of ECPDS and CECIDS by Local Communities Project: Northern Illinois University leads Illinois' early childhood education care in the development of the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS). The ILDS collects program participation data across eight state agencies and uses direct and predictive matching techniques to generate unique identifiers that can be used in inter-agency analytics and to develop an unduplicated count of ECCE participation. The Early Childhood Participation Dataset (ECPDS) of the ILDS, built through the previous PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, connects data for children ages birth to kindergarten participating in the following programs: Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), IDEA Part B, Section 619, IDEA Part C (Early Intervention), Home Visiting (MIECHV, Parents Too Soon, and Healthy Families Illinois), State Pre-K (Early Childhood Block Grant-Preschool for All for children B-5), 80% of Early/Head Start programs statewide, and Public Primary Education K-12. The larger ILDS also incorporates data from the Illinois' higher education system and employment security system.

The ILDS and the Early Childhood Participation Dataset (ECPDS) are intended to provide data to assist in improving Illinois' early childhood education and care mixed delivery system. The dataset is an amalgamation of data combined from the many available early childhood programs across Illinois agencies and organizations serving children ages birth to five and their families. Its goal is to provide safe and secure access to the combined data within a single platform to assist in providing a more comprehensive understanding of the programs young children participate in and the connections between those programs. For example, how many children participating in the Child Care Assistance

Program (CCAP) eventually enter the Pre-school for All (PFA) program? Using this data, agencies will be able to better target their processes for applications and enrollment.

ECPDS data can also be combined with other state datasets. The state is currently processing a data request by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to combine ECPDS data with Child in Care data. This will allow DCFS to better understand the early childhood services children in foster care (a priority population in Illinois) are receiving and use that data to better target their application and enrollment processes.

PDG B-5 funding has assisted in developing the ECPDS, which is nearing initial completion. Data from the Child Care Assistance Program, Pre-school for All, Early Intervention, and the Prevention Initiative have been integrated and the ECPDS team continues to work on integrating Head Start and Home Visiting data. The ILDS team is currently working with agencies to finalize legal agreement language and processes so data from the ECPDS can begin to be accessed to fulfill data requests. Lastly, the ECPDS teams are working on a front-end user interface to provide better information across the system that will inform both state agencies and local communities as they focus on improving the accessibility of their programs.

Question 15: How have PDG B-5 funds helped improve and expand use of your state's integrated data system, including connecting ECCE program and K-12 data?
- Include in your response any progress related to ECIDS, State Longitudinal Data Systems, and distinct (unduplicated) counts of children and families served across the mixed delivery system.
- Specify whether PDG B-5 funds are being used to integrate data among key programs in the mixed delivery system and provide the allocated amount of PDG B-5 funds invested in data systems development.

Answer 15: *Linking ECCE Workforce Dataset Project and Expanded Use of ECPDS and CECIDS by Local Communities Project:* Over the past three years, the PDG B-5 Grant funding support have afforded the State of Illinois and the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS) team the opportunity to continue the build of the ILDS in the most systematic and comprehensive way possible. With the grant's support, the ILDS team could take the time needed to continue laying the ILDS foundation by:

- Further deepening stakeholder relationships and trust within agencies, partnering organizations, research and analytical bodies, and local and regional communities.
- Building out the governance of the ILDS via its standing committees, steering committees and ad hoc working teams.
- Developing a Target Operating Model, which includes pillars and key responsibilities under each pillar that was reviewed by ILDS' Managing Committee and approved by ILDS' Executive Committee (EC).
- Taking a leading role in cross-agency teams focused on creating a single unified data request form and a systematic, repeatable process to move from requesting data to fulfilling the request.
- Gaining consensus from the ILDS agencies and joint approval from the ILDS EC on key areas needed for the ILDS such as its technology, architecture, direction, and prioritized research needs to support educational equity and racial justice in Illinois.
- Providing a forum for conversation and debate about what and how to prioritize questions to be researched and analyzed within Illinois' educational space. These led to the need for and approval

by the ILDS Executive Committee to establish standing datasets such as the Early Childhood Participation Dataset (ECPDS) and the Early Childhood Educator Workforce Dataset.

The grants also enabled the state to move the ILDS from concept to reality. Over the past three years the state has grown from completing intra-agency research requests manually to having an IT system that can ingest, clean and house multiple agencies' data in integrated datasets, while also providing a safe and secure space for requested data to be analyzed and collaboratively shared among stakeholders.

The first two years were focused on further developing stakeholder relationships, trust, and governance of the ILDS. Building stakeholder relationships meant continuing to include them in the governance and oversight of the ILDS via periodic standing meetings for groups that included specific steering committees. Years 3 and 4 have been spent developing the overall technical architecture and beginning to bring in data from across the ILDS agencies and their disparate divisions' data systems.

Included in the achievements to date are:

- Re-establishing a governance model for both the ILDS and ECPDS
- Developing a centralized platform
- Developing processes for collecting data from agencies
- Developing processes for bringing data together and managing it within a centralized platform
- Designing a process for developing data products
- Defining and piloting a data request process
- Implementing a user management process
- Initiating and continuing ongoing discussions regarding data definitions and agency data design
- Completing the initial design and beginning the implementation of front-end reporting

Last year, the ILDS team, in collaboration with the state, began working with East St. Louis, a representative local community that has been under-represented in the past, to better understand their perspectives on early childhood in their geography and its data needs. This small project expanded to include regional reporting and all local communities as one of ILDS' key focus points during this grant period. As a result, ILDS benchmarked and involved the Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System (CECIDS) team in meetings and brainstorming sessions. Learning more about the CECIDS approach, system, and methodology was especially helpful as the ILDS team, in collaboration with CECIDS, the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), and the Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) began working to ensure the system's front-end design would be user-centric not just for agencies, researchers and analysts, but also for local community members.

A contractor funded by an additional grant to provide the initial ECPDS front-end design mockups, conducted interviews and focus groups. This resulted in participation from over 100 individuals from local and regional Birth to five councils, state agencies, and researchers. Their combined input and feedback were invaluable in informing the ILDS' design of its User Interface for the ECPDS. After internally determining a priority road map for the front-end design, the first set of deliverables are currently being built.

The other focus of the PDG B5 grant this year has been the development of ILDS' Early Childhood Educator Workforce Dataset. In addition to laying the groundwork, the ILDS team in collaboration with ISBE and IDHS' Gateway Registry Data from INCCRRA, co-developed a charter that is currently under review. A draft

data request, listing the needed data elements for the dataset, is also currently in discussion with the involved agencies. Approval of both documents will lead to developing the required Data Access and Use Agreement (DAUA) with the involved agencies before any data can be shared and joined to create the initial Early Childhood Educator Workforce Dataset within the ILDS.

Concurrently, the ILDS team has worked these past three years with the ILDS agencies to assist them in processes tangential to the ILDS. This has included:

- Working with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to establish a staging database.
- Working with IDHS to establish a Head Start dataset.
- Working with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to implement legal and technical processes for data curation.
- Working with DCFS, ISBE, and IDHS on cross-agency data sharing.
- Identifying issues with existing data matching processes and facilitating ongoing discussions to resolve these issues.
- Working with the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to define what data to share and explore options of how best to share it while remaining in alignment with each organization's specific security policies.
- Working with the Department of Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Illinois Department of Employment Securities (IDES) to determine appropriate data sharing and data staging approaches for each of these organizations.

Looking toward the upcoming year, the ILDS team is hopeful about continuing its relationship with PDG B-5. PDG B-5 funding support will maintain ILDS' momentum, helping propel the ILDS toward completing its initial build and roll out to early childhood stakeholders. With the PDG B-5 grant's ongoing assistance, ILDS will have the opportunity to inform those working on making a difference in Illinois' early childhood educational equity landscape. It will also provide the ILDS team further opportunities to continue sharing its learnings with other states interested in using longitudinal data for research and analysis.

Question 16: Describe how PDG B-5 funds were used to improve the coordination and referral of programs across the state B-5 ECCE system serving:

- Children ages 0-5

- Children and their families and caregivers from traditionally underserved or marginalized groups, and/or

- Those living in traditionally underserved communities or parts of the system.

Answer 16: *Linking ECCE Workforce Dataset Project and Expanded Use of ECPDS and CECIDS by Local Communities Project:* The Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS), as currently designed, will not provide operational information in the specific coordination of referring specific children (or their families) across programs and services. The ILDS will provide longitudinal data that will assist in answering specific questions/requested research about populations of children from birth to five of every race and ethnicity through each stage of growth and in various groupings and geographies across Illinois communities.

Among the goals for the ILDS is that it provides a safe and secure space for researchers, analysts, agencies, educators, and legislators to collaborate on questions and research that will best assist them in determining what and where teachers, support and funding are necessary to increase the educational success potential of vulnerable children and their families.

The information gained from such research are projected to:

- Provide a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the historic and current early childhood landscape across Illinois, especially across communities that have been consistently underserved and/or marginalized.
- Assist in identifying possible program and service deserts that need immediate attention to ensure the most vulnerable children in Illinois (aka, underserved and marginalized communities) receive the care and support needed to be kinder-ready when entering kindergarten.
- Continue to increase in value and importance as data and data sources continue to be added to the ILDS to better assist the state work toward equitably aligning early childhood educational and community care resources for all children.

In conclusion, Illinois would like to thank the Administration for Children and Families and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the 2023 PDG B-5 Planning Grant Award. These funds have been instrumental in helping Illinois to enhance its early childhood education and care system. Illinois has strengthened its family and community engagement by establishing the Family Advisory Committee in 2021 and is in the process of reimagining this body to expand the number of families that participate in early childhood decision-making. Additionally, the use of these funds contributed to the development of an innovative, ground-breaking Prior Learning Assessment that will support Illinois' early childhood teacher assistant workforce in earning up to 12 college credits based on their prior knowledge. Illinois appreciates the PDG B-5 funding award and will continue to explore ways to scale up the work that has been completed through this grant.