



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

January 9, 2017

Ms. Elizabeth Kelley
Acting Assistant Superintendent
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Kelley:

On August 18, 2016, the project officer from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) (the Department) conducted a desk monitoring review of the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) implementation of its approved Preschool Development Grant (PDG). This monitoring aims to continue the collaborative relationship that began at the grant award and development of the scope of work. It provides the Department with a deeper understanding of each State's overall performance; the successes, challenges, and strategies for the implementation of its plans for its PDG Development grant; and the fiscal management of the grant funds. It also helps us tailor technical assistance to each State's specific needs.

The desk monitoring included discussions related to all projects in the approved scope of work, including grants management, high-quality preschool programs, early learning standards, comprehensive services, workforce development, and sustainability.

Enclosed is a summary report based upon this review. The report includes highlights of MSDE's implementation of PDG and a snapshot of Maryland's progress under each PDG key area. This report will be posted on the PDG website. The report includes "next steps" to ensure that the MSDE continues to implement their PDG consistent with its approved application, scope of work, and timelines identified in its project plans.

We want to thank you and your staff for your preparation and cooperation during the desk monitoring review, and for your efforts in providing high quality preschool opportunities through the Preschool Development Grant. We hope you will continue to communicate any needs or concerns to your ED project officer(s).

We look forward to continuing our work with you and supporting Maryland's technical assistance needs to ensure successful implementation of PDG. Thank you for your commitment to Maryland's youngest children.

Sincerely,

Libby Doggett
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office Early Learning
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education

Enclosure

PDG Desk Monitoring Report

| Monitoring Information | |
|---|---|
| State Lead Agency | Maryland State Education Department |
| State Participating Agency(s) | Maryland State Education Department |
| Grant Period | January 1, 2015-December 31, 2015 |
| Current Year of Grant | January 1, 2016-December 31, 2016 |
| PDG Monitoring Period | May 2016 – September 30, 2016 |
| PDG Monitoring Activity (Desk or Onsite) | Desk |
| Monitoring Review Date(s) | August 18, 2016 |
| State Participants/Project Leads | Tracy Jost, MSDE Donna Pennewill, MSDE Latanya Scott, MSDE Roann Tsakalas, MSDE Judy Walker, MSDE |
| U.S. Department of Education Project Officer(s) | Tanesha Hembrey, Lead Project Officer |

Overview of PDG Monitoring

The Department of Education is committed to supporting States as they implement the expansion of high-quality preschool programs for eligible children through their PDG grant. Consistent with this commitment, the Department has designed a monitoring process to assess a State's implementation of the program requirements and its approved Scope of Work for PDG and the State-level systems and processes needed to support implementation.

During the recent desk monitoring, Maryland's implementation of PDG was reviewed across several key areas: Capacity Building and Increasing Slots, Subrecipient Monitoring, Birth to Third Grade Continuum, Budget and Sustainability, and Fiscal Accountability which represent the core priorities for implementation as outlined in the PDG Monitoring Tool. In each area, the Department identified key elements that are required under PDG and are likely to increase the access to and quality of State Preschool programs and lead to increased high quality opportunities for young children and their families.

Maryland was identified for a desk monitoring review based on the following factors:

- Maryland is a PDG Expansion State and the Department is conducting desk monitoring or onsite monitoring visits of all PDG grantees; and
- Maryland had not been monitored previously during the grant period.

The report contains the following sections:

- **Summary of Call.** This section describes, in brief, the topics covered, the lead agency and sub recipients visited, as well as personnel participation in any meetings or activities.
- **Highlights of the State's Implementation.** This section identifies key accomplishments in the State's implementation of PDG as identified during the site visit.
- **Status of Implementation of PDG.** This section indicates the State's implementation progress based on the monitoring and information collected.
- **Elements Requiring Next Steps.** This section identifies any elements for which the State is not on target for meeting its timelines outlined in the approved scope of work and includes next steps that the State must take to meet the grant outcomes, as identified during the monitoring.
- **Recommendations to Strengthen Implementation.** This section provides recommendations to support the State in continuing to meet the goals and timelines of its PDG grant, as identified during the monitoring.
- **Additional Comment.** As appropriate, this section includes any additional information related to the State's implementation of PDG not included elsewhere.

Summary of Visit

The PDG desk monitoring review for MSDE was conducted on August 18, 2016. During the desk monitoring call ED and MSDE officials discussed various aspects of PDG implementation including building capacity and increasing slots; subrecipient monitoring; fiscal and budget implementation; and birth to third grade continuum. MSDE provided documentation to ED officials before the scheduled desk review. ED officials reviewed the documents, used annual performance report (APR) information, and used various monitoring activities during the time of the grant (e.g. monthly calls) to provide information regarding implementation during the desk monitoring review. ED officials discussed the identified challenges and barriers to PDG implementation including cost allocation, areas of limited participation, technical assistance to grantees and outreach to parents.

Highlight of the State's PDG Implementation

- MSDE has grant check-in monitoring that happens in the fall and full grant monitoring occurs in the spring, these are both on-site. The fall check-in provides onsite technical assistance to ensure that the program will have a successful school year. The MSDE reviews enrollment including whether the programs are at full capacity or in need of recruitment strategies, checks income eligibility verification to ensure programs are enrolling children who are eligible, and more. The MSDE staff conducts classroom visits to see if any instructional technical assistance is needed. The MSDE provides technical assistance throughout the year. Off-site that includes questions on invoicing or spending grant funds, resources for students and teachers, and/or technical assistance involving quality requirements, professional development, QRIS, and accreditation.

- In the spring, the MSDE conducts another on-site full monitoring visit. This is a more extensive visit with longer time spent in the classrooms reviewing all the required documentation in the monitoring tool.
- MSDE requires all its subgrantees are to hire a Maryland certified ECE teacher for the PreK PDG PreK program. Teachers must be paid commensurate to the salary of a PreK teacher in that local school system. Payroll records are checked during monitoring to ensure that this requirement is implemented.
- MSDE acknowledged difficulties finding certified teachers willing to work in community based programs; MSDE has provided commensurate pay to address this concern and help attract new teachers to its mixed delivery model.
- MSDE passed a law during the Maryland General Assembly's 2015 legislative session to require local Departments of Social Services (DSS) to notify income eligible families of PreK offerings. When families go to local DSS offices to apply for other services they receive information flyers and materials regarding available PDG PreK programs in the area. This will help subgrantees with recruitment and ensure that these families find available PreK slots.
- MSDE's PreK programs either have achieved or are working to achieve accreditation and meet Maryland EXCELS (TQRIS) level 5 by July of 2017. The TQRIS standards ensure high quality, inclusion for students with disabilities, and continuous program improvement.

Status of Implementation of PDG

In the desk monitoring, the Department used a monitoring and accountability rubric to help determine progress of the State's implementation. The rubric includes three implementation status levels:

- **Level 1 – Developing:** the State is in the process of developing this activity, or the activity is very new. The State may be facing challenges in implementation, roll-out, or communications with sub recipients and other stakeholders.
- **Level 2 – Implementing:** the State has developed and implemented the activity, although the activity might still benefit from adjustments, training, or communications with sub recipients and other stakeholders.
- **Level 3 – Sustaining & Continuing Improvement:** the activity is well-established in the State, and may be undergoing a process of evaluation or program improvement. Sub recipients, stakeholders and users have been trained and/or communications strategies have been established.

| Element | Status |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Capacity Building and Increasing Slots | |
| The State public awareness and recruitment activities are targeted towards eligible 4 year old children in high need communities and families 200 percent below poverty. | Sustaining and Continuing Improvement |
| The State's expansion efforts are targeted towards increasing the access to high quality preschool programs for 4 year olds. | Sustaining and Continuing Improvement |
| The State has a plan to ensure that existing State Preschool slots | Implementing |

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| met the twelve standards of a High Quality Preschool Program under the PDG funding. | |
| Subrecipient Monitoring | |
| The State Lead Agency has a process to monitor grant and sub-recipients activities to ensure implementation of the goals and performance measures outlined in the approved PDG State Plan. | Sustaining and Continuing Improvement |
| The State is on schedule with its monitoring of sub recipients to ensure that all of the high quality standards for Preschool are met within PDG funded preschool classrooms. | Sustaining and Continuing Improvement |
| The State is providing access to comprehensive services to all children enrolled in the PDG funded preschool classrooms. | Sustaining and Continuing Improvement |
| Birth to Third Grade Continuum | |
| The State has aligned the PDG funded program within the Birth to Third Grade Continuum of early learning standards and activities that help prepare children for kindergarten thru third grade. | Implementing |
| The State is implementing a data collection system for tracking student outcomes from prekindergarten to kindergarten entry through third grade. | Implementing |
| The State is implementing a transition protocol to ensure that children transitioning from early care and education environments to kindergarten to third grade settings receive the supports necessary for a smooth transition. | Implementing |
| Budget and Sustainability | |
| The State has policies and procedures to track the State and Subrecipient budget activities to ensure that funds are expended according to State, Local and Federal procurement laws. | Implementing |
| The State has in place a system to track the “use of funds” under the PDG grant. | Implementing |
| The State has a plan to ensure that High Quality State Preschool Programs will remain of high quality after federal funds are no longer available. | Sustaining and Continuing Improvement |
| Fiscal Accountability | |
| The State has policies and procedures in place to ensure the grant funds are expended according to the federal laws outlined in the federal Super Circular and EDGAR. | Implementing |
| The State has a system in place to ensure that its Sub recipients are meeting the federal laws of the Super Circular and comply with the “supplement not supplant” requirements. | Implementing |

Elements Requiring Next Steps:

- None

Recommendations to Strengthen Implementation:

- MSDE should continue to provide technical assistance to its grantees regarding subgrantee recruitment of eligible families into the PreK programs in the hardest to reach communities, for students with disabilities, and English Language Learners.
- MSDE must continue its efforts to comply with the PDG requirement that funding to “improve slots” with existing PreK spaces must be full-day programs. MSDE included the provision to use the ‘improved slot’ definition to expand the PreK by offering comprehensive services through the States Judy Center model. The PreK programs at five Judy Centers are currently half-day programs. MSDE requested a budget amendment that was approved to move the \$825,000 spent on these half day programs, this amendment allowed MSDE to fund the identified Judy Centers with federal quality improvement funds instead of PDG funds for the remainder of FY16. However, in FY17, all five identified Judy Centers will come into full compliance with the PDG requirements by improving their half-day PreK classrooms to full-day. This will enable MSDE to award those sub-grantee sites PDG grant funds.