

Grant Title: Feasibility Study of a Pay for Success Approach to Expand Cuyahoga County's Universal Prekindergarten Program: Determining Capacity, Outcomes and Impact

Applicant: Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood

Abstract

Expansion of high quality preschool through Cuyahoga County's Universal Prekindergarten program is a critical priority for the community. Funded through Invest in Children, the county's public/private partnership, the program will expand to reach 4000 children in 2017, yet the capacity will still fall far short of meeting the community need. With significant new state and/or federal investment uncertain at best, Cuyahoga County is committed to exploring creative local financing options to help take this tested, proven model to scale. This proposed Feasibility Study will determine the viability of a Pay for Success approach to expand the reach of Cuyahoga County's Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program.

Specific project objectives include: (1) determine the provider/community capacity for expansion of the UPK program beyond 4,000 seats; (2) determine the workforce capacity for expansion in the community; (3) extend examination of school outcomes for children from UPK up to third grade; (4) evaluate relationship of children's social/emotional development and executive functioning and school readiness; (5) create a Pay for Success cost/benefit analysis and preliminary economic model based upon the outcomes observed; (6) determine capacity to raise additional capital through Pay for Success model.

The feasibility study activities will include: (1) activation of a project management team and work groups who finalize the work plan; (2) examination of the existing program and community capacity for change, including an assessment of the cost structure and the barriers or challenges to expansion;

(3) assessment of the legal and regulatory environment for expansion and use of PFS mechanism; (4) assessment of the funding environment; (5) evaluation of the accessibility and quality of data and recommendations for how to address and data challenges/barriers; (6) identification and alignment of outcome metrics within the evaluation methodology; (7) report out on viability of PFS model for expansion of UPK model.

This project will address both the absolute priority and the competitive preference priority for this opportunity. First, we propose a detailed feasibility study to meet the absolute priority. The study will determine the viability of using a PFS approach to expand the UPK preschool program for the targeted population: children ages 3-5, not yet enrolled in kindergarten who are at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and who have not yet benefitted from access to the County UPK program. Second, we will evaluate executive functioning in UPK children and how that relates to school outcomes, to meet the competitive preference priority: **Outcome Measures Across Various Domains**.

The feasibility study outcomes include kindergarten readiness, on-time grade matriculation, and third-grade reading proficiency. These outcomes will be used in the PFS model, if it is determined to be viable. If viable, the final report will provide guidance for entering transaction structuring, including a description of the roles and responsibilities of each partner, an effective governance structure to facilitate implementation of PFS, a description of the proposed rigorous evaluation plan, and a description of how to overcome barriers/challenges to scaling the program to serve the target population. If not viable, the final report will provide a description of why the project is not feasible and a discussion of potential alternatives to PFS that would contribute to the public good and goals of stakeholders.