

Project Title: Building Rhode Island B-5
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Project Abstract: Rhode Island (RI) proposes to use the PDG B-5 grant to propel our B-5 system into the next phase of development, building on a decade of focused state and community-wide collaboration supported by federal awards and state funding to support infrastructure. RI's progress related to outcomes for kids and families is impressive. Today, 98% of children are enrolled in health insurance, 64% of eligible families are enrolled in an evidence-based home visiting program, and approximately 23% of children (including 41% of low-income children) are enrolled in Head Start or State Pre-Kindergarten before entering Kindergarten. We have also implemented important policy changes, including a year of continuous eligibility and tiered rates of reimbursement for childcare providers.

Even as RI has made progress, many children continue to face gaps in supports and services. For example, only 12.4% of child care providers who accept Child Care Assistance Program vouchers for low-income children are rated high-quality and only 36% of children ages B-5 who are victims of abuse or neglect receive a comprehensive developmental screening. We seek to serve the children in RI who are at the highest risk of not being on a path to be ready for Kindergarten due to not receiving the supports they need. This target population includes: children of low-income families, children with developmental delays, children who have behavioral or mental health challenges, children facing trauma – particularly victims of child abuse or neglect, children in non-English speaking families, and children who have experienced homelessness.

To further improve the State's B-5 system and address needs, RI must establish a clear assessment of the current state of the workforce, early childhood care and education facilities, and family needs; develop a coordinated governance, data and funding strategy to address the needs; and support programs and providers operating collaboratively, efficiently, and at the scale to ensure that our most vulnerable children have the right supports at the right time through a seamless system of care, services and supports for children B-5 and their families.

We propose to use the PDG B-5 opportunity to direct and coordinate resources to better serve our target population groups by pursuing the following activities: (1) Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment by leveraging existing needs assessments and researching family demand, facilities, workforce, and funding needs across the system; (2) Develop a strategic plan that updates the vision for the B-5 system and makes recommendations about governance, data infrastructure, workforce, family engagement, funding streams, expansion of quality programs (including universal Pre-K), and transitions across the system; (3) Maximize target parent choice, knowledge, and engagement by supporting a media campaign, improving the B-5 website, enhancing referral services, piloting and evaluating parent programming, and engaging parents in system governance; (4) Support providers by sharing best practices, coordinating technical assistance and professional development supports across state agencies, piloting staffed family child care networks, and supporting transitions with coordinated data; (5) Improve overall quality by beginning to scale programs that have demonstrated success and supporting transitions; and (6) Conduct a performance evaluation to ensure that our work is leading toward improved child-level outcomes.