

Abstract

The state of Vermont requests \$7,231,681 in Preschool Development Grants-Expansion Grant (PDG-Expansion) first year funds for the Vermont PDG-Expansion Initiative (the Program or Project), an ambitious but achievable plan including 498 new PreK slots and improving 795 existing slots for low-income four-year-olds in the first year of funding. These 1,293 PreK slots represents an expansion of access to a total of 49.90% of Vermont's eligible four-year-olds. By the end of the fourth year of funding, this number will rise to 1,818 or 70.17% of eligible four-year-olds statewide.

The portion of funds for administrative purposes (5%) will be used to hire Program and Fiscal Managers who will manage the PDG-Expansion implementation statewide; to fund a contract for external program evaluation; and limited expenses relating to travel and equipment.

The Grant Coordinator (who will serve as the program manager) will also provide technical assistance to subgrantees and facilitate and support a Professional Learning Community to enable subgrantees to share best practices, collaborate on training and professional development and support each other in developing high-quality preschool programs. This specific assistance was requested by the subgrantees during the proposal development process. The Fiscal Manager will provide technical assistance to subgrantees to properly braid various funding streams to enhance the sustainability of their PreK programs.

Private philanthropic dollars - part of Vermont's 58% match of requested funds – will support mentoring to increase the number of licensed early education teachers in Vermont.

Vermont has defined “high-needs communities” as Supervisory Unions (SUs) and Supervisory Districts (SDs) (LEAs) that have 25% or more of their children at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). A total of 33 subgrantees (all seven of Vermont's Head Start

programs and 26 of Vermont's Supervisory Unions and Districts) in approximately 150 high-needs communities statewide have formally agreed to participate. Thus, Vermont's PDG-Expansion project will have statewide reach.

Proposed Program outcomes will target children, families, and high-quality preschool programs.

Vermont has demonstrated a strong and enduring commitment to the early learning and development of young children and a record of accomplishment in providing high-quality early learning programs, and other programs and services, for children from birth to age five. Yet, work remains to be done. Vermont ranks high in access but does not fully achieve the quality defined as high quality preschool programs (HQPP), and that quality varies across individual programs in a mixed delivery model. Act 166, Vermont's universal PreK legislation, has been enacted but is primarily focused on access and equity. With universal voluntary access achieved, increasing quality and dosage in the state preschool program for four-year-olds under 200% FPL will be significantly accelerated with the resources requested in this proposal. This will help to close the achievement gap for poor children.