

Project Abstract

Project Name: Quality First: Expanding and Improving Connecticut's State Preschool Program

Applicant: Office of the Governor, State of Connecticut

Overview of Proposed Project: Connecticut's ambitious and achievable plan will build off our existing strong state preschool infrastructure to expand access to high-quality State Preschool Programs for 428 children and to improve the quality of State Preschool Programs for another 284 children, for a total of 712 four-year-olds who are at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line in 14 high-need communities. Having a strong infrastructure of State Preschool Programs that has successfully expanded access twice in the last two fiscal years allows us to place children in high-quality preschool programs quickly and efficiently.

High-quality components, as defined in this grant, will be foundational to this project. Connecticut's plan will enhance quality in areas the state has longed to improve. Connecticut will improve quality by:

- offering comprehensive services in our State Preschool Programs;
- offering teacher compensation equal to K-12 teachers;
- deepening family engagement practices at the local level;
- forging a seamless birth-through-third-grade continuum at the local level; and
- enhancing our professional development system to offer more targeted and individualized coaching, mentoring and consultation designed to meet the unique needs of programs and teachers.

Project Objective

The primary objective is the expansion and improvement of high-quality State Preschool Programs to four-year-old children whose families have incomes at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line.

Key State Activities:

1. Complete MOUs with Subgrantees; issue grant awards; initiate payments
2. Conduct media and outreach campaign to reach out to all parents of eligible children
3. Ensure that eligible homeless children and children living in foster homes are given priority for improved and expanded preschool slots
4. Ensure children with disabilities are included in classrooms with new or improved preschool slots
5. Issue an RFP and contract for a third-party evaluation of this project
6. Hire two new Office of Early Childhood staff for family engagement/community outreach and quality, accountability and reporting
7. Implement CLASS training for school readiness liaisons and others identified by the Subgrantees

8. Initiate Continuous Quality Improvement process with Subgrantees
9. Initiate community collaboration and family engagement process with Subgrantees

Key Subgrantee Activities:

1. Complete MOUs with the Office of Early Childhood
2. Use local decision-making process to select early learning providers and issue sub-awards
3. Use start-up funding to ensure that classrooms are ready by September 2015
4. Ensure new staff are hired and trained prior to September 2015
5. Arrange contracts or MOUs for additional comprehensive services
6. Conduct local outreach to all families of eligible children
7. Provide ongoing monitoring and supervision of all classrooms of new and improved slots
8. Participate in continuous quality improvement process with the Office of Early Childhood
9. Participate in community collaboration activities with the Office of Early Childhood
10. Participate in family engagement activities with the Office of Early Childhood

Proposed Project Outcomes

Children participating in this project will be better prepared upon kindergarten entry. Providing comprehensive services in State Preschool Programs will ensure early identification of children with special needs and ensure that all children are healthy and thriving upon kindergarten entry. Connecticut families will be better informed and engaged in how best to support their children's healthy development. Connecticut will be better equipped to recruit, develop and retain highly trained and skilled early learning teachers by increasing compensation. Communities will be better off because their children will be healthy, thriving and ready for lifelong success.

Subgrantees and Collaborating Organizations

The Subgrantees are the school readiness councils in: Bridgeport, Derby, East Haven, Griswold, Groton, Hamden, Hebron, Killingly, Manchester, Naugatuck, Seymour, Torrington, Vernon, and Wolcott. The following state agencies and organizations will serve as collaborative partners in Connecticut's effort to deliver high-quality preschool to our high-need children: the State Department of Education, Connecticut Birth to Three, Department of Children and Families, University of Connecticut, Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet, and the Connecticut Early Childhood Consultation Project.