

# Improving Early Childhood Education Systems

Julie Poppe, Abby Thorman and Matt Weyer

The first five years of a child's life are [a period of growth](#) that creates the foundation for long-term learning and success. However, investment in and coordination among early childhood programs supporting children and their families from birth to age five remains fragmented — at [national](#) and [state levels](#) — leading to variable and often less-than-desirable outcomes for children and families. This fragmentation may exacerbate inequities faced by children and their families related to income, race and ethnicity, culture and other demographics.

Created as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the [Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five \(PDG B-5\)](#) program is a competitive, federal grant designed to strengthen states' early childhood systems and improve transitions between programs and services — such as home visits, early intervention settings, child care and pre-K education — to effectively prepare young children to enter kindergarten ready for success. The PDG B-5 grants enable states to assess pressing needs within their birth-to-age-5 (B-5) systems and invest strategically in infrastructure and initiatives that will strengthen their overall efficiency, effectiveness and impact. A small focus of this Policy Brief is the pre-K to kindergarten transition, as it is an inflection point at which the child moves from the B-5 system into the K-12 system and is one of several tools to measure how a state's B-5 system is performing.

## KEY PDG B-5 QUESTIONS

- What is the definition of vulnerable/underserved? What populations will be served?
- How many children are being served and how many are on a waitlist?
- What are gaps in data or research?
- What are key concerns for facilities?
- What are the barriers to funding high-quality ECE (early childhood education) services/supports?
- What transition supports affect how children move between ECE and school entry?
- How are families engaged?

Renewal Grant Funding Opportunity  
Announcement

In 2018, 46 states and territories were awarded PDG B-5 grants to complete needs assessments and strategic plans. A total of 23 states were awarded renewal grant (PDG-R) funding in late 2019 and early 2020 to further invest in [existing B-5 programs, governance systems and the infrastructure](#) that support them. States were encouraged to coordinate service applications, strengthen infant/toddler programs and improve transitions; all states awarded renewal funding wrote to these bonus point areas in their renewal grant applications. Some states are leading ambitious early childhood reform efforts that renewal grants could directly accelerate; other states are focusing on targeted projects, such as piloting new programs or initiatives, updating regulations or requirements, or engaging consultants to review programs or data capacity and make recommendations.

This Policy Brief provides a high-level summary of the analysis conducted by Education Commission of the States on the proposed plans of states that received renewal grants. Education Commission of the States acknowledges that these are proposed plans and what is implemented may differ, especially in light of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Analysis included reviewing states' needs assessments and strategic planning processes, and identifying trends across applications, with a focus on:

- Collaborative transitions and alignment from birth to the early grades.
- Parent engagement and maximizing parental choice.
- Workforce and professional development.
- Ensuring program quality across all settings.
- Data systems and governance.
- Coordinated early childhood services application process.
- Supports for infants and toddlers.

## Preschool Development Grants: Planning and Renewal Investments

In December 2018, the federal government awarded PDG B-5 planning grants to [46 states and territories](#) that applied. These initial, one-year grants allowed states, within their own context, to conduct a needs assessment and create a single B-5 system strategic plan that included how to support transitions from early care and education settings into K-12 education.

In December 2019, the federal government released the PDG-R grant application. These three-year grants are designed to help states build upon their initial PDG B-5 grant-funded activities to create stronger B-5 systems and address priorities in the needs assessment and strategic plan. The PDG-R grants focus on strengthening overall systems, particularly related to data, better coordination and delivery of services, program quality improvement, parent engagement and workforce development. The grants also focus on making connections to other B-5 services — such as home visits, mental and physical health, and family support — to prepare children to enter kindergarten through an aligned system.

## Funding Streams in B-5 Systems

The long-term goal of PDG B-5 funding is to help states build more comprehensive B-5 systems; invest existing funding more strategically; and achieve greater equity, impact and sustainability. B-5 funding includes a complex mix of federal, state, local and private funds with different funding streams supporting early learning, child health and development, and family economic stability. These include:

- Child Care and Development Fund.
- Grants from foundations and businesses.
- Head Start/Early Head Start.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Parts B and C.
- Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting.
- Medicaid.
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
- State pre-K funds.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps.
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Title V Maternal and Child Health.
- Varying state and local investments and dedicated funds.

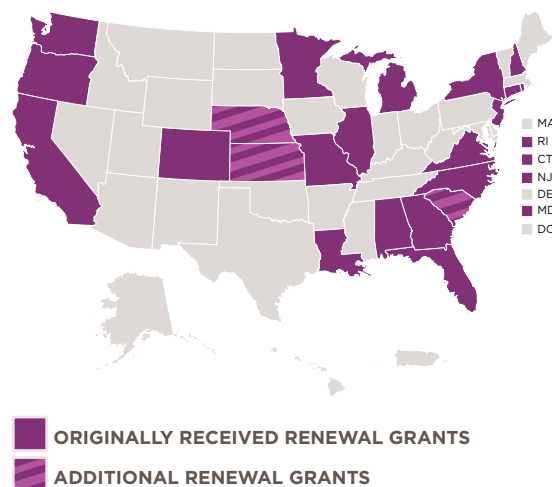
## Analysis and Grant Proposal Structure

Education Commission of the States staff and consultants reviewed all available and awarded renewal applications, analyzed strategies for trends and promising practices, and synthesized the results. These are not meant to be exclusive or exhaustive lists but, rather, examples that show different approaches to B-5 systems development.

Grant application evaluation categories and the point system used by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services included:

- Needs assessment (6 points).
- Strategic plan (10 points).
- Parent engagement and maximizing parental choice (12 points).
- Workforce and professional development (12 points).

**Twenty-three states** received renewal grants (20 initially, followed by three additional states).



- Quality (20 points).
- Data systems and governance (30 points).

States could also choose to include three additional areas, which were each worth three bonus points. The areas are:

- Coordinated application, eligibility and enrollment.
- Infants and toddlers.
- Collaborative transitions and alignment from birth to the early grades.

## Collaborative Transitions and Alignment From Birth to the Early Grades

States can reduce the likelihood of children falling behind academically and socially by ensuring a collaborative child and family-focused [transition from pre-K into kindergarten](#) and by [strengthening the pre-K to K-3 continuum](#) to create opportunities to close the achievement gap. [Research shows](#) children who experience discontinuity in transitions are more likely to be chronically absent and not make the academic gains necessary to succeed in school. Other research on successful transitions points to [improved academic growth and increased family involvement](#), with strong benefits for children living in poverty.

As part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts receiving Title I funds are required to develop [formal agreements](#) with local Head Start grantees and other early childhood programs and providers, which can be specific to coordination that supports better transitions. States have worked on collaborative efforts — including coordination, alignment and data linkages — among state agencies and local education agencies to ensure successful transitions for children from birth to age five and beyond. Other state efforts have included developing resources related to transitions and summer programs for vulnerable populations.

## Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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State approaches to improving transitions have included collaborative professional development between pre-K and kindergarten teachers and administrators on developing transition guides and resources, sharing data, aligning curricula and more. Below are state-specific examples:

- **Alabama** plans to share professional development for early childhood practitioners, teachers, mental health consultants and administrators through the early grades and plans to increase the number of professionals participating in professional development programs.
- **Colorado** proposed to develop a transition roadmap that will be used as a framework to strengthen partnerships between early childhood programs and school districts.

- **Connecticut** aims to expand its PK-3 Leadership Program for elementary school principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, early learning directors, school superintendents and administrators. The program focuses on curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation, and improving equitable outcomes for pre-K through third grade.
- **Florida** plans to offer transition summits, professional development and an array of resources to local communities to support stronger transitions to the early grades.
- **Illinois** proposes eight kindergarten-transition community partnership pilots to identify and implement practices aligned to local needs that support successful transition to kindergarten.
- **Maryland** is considering a series of leadership academies for principals and early childhood education directors across the state to focus on joint professional development, data sharing, curricular alignment and parent support parents.
- **Minnesota** intends to embed a transition toolkit in the P-3 Principal Leadership Program (funded by ESSA Title II).
- **Missouri** wants to increase elementary principals' knowledge of the [mixed-delivery system](#).
- **New Hampshire** proposes a Kindergarten Entry Assessment and Transition Task Force to design a comprehensive plan that addresses identified KEA- and transition-related issues.
- **Georgia, North Carolina** and **Washington** are among several states exploring data platforms to support transitions work.

#### STATE EXAMPLE



**Connecticut** aims to support the transition from pre-K to kindergarten through its Parent Teacher Home Visit program, [a proven strategy](#) that builds relationships between families and teachers. After pre-K and kindergarten teachers are trained, they will conduct shared home visits for selected children who will be entering kindergarten in the fall from community and school-based pre-K settings.

## Needs Assessments and Strategic Plans

States developed comprehensive needs assessments and strategic plans using their initial PDG B-5 grants in 2019. These needs assessments and strategic plans were an essential part of planning and a driver of the renewal grants. ACF approved most states' needs assessments and strategic plans; a handful of states received extensions on their reviews and resubmissions. A primary focus of states' work in the initial year was to better understand the quality and availability of programs and services, and to learn how an improved system could identify and support vulnerable populations. As a requirement of the PDG renewal, states must update their needs assessments and strategic plans.

***“Vulnerable children do not create their vulnerability, but rather their environments and experiences may make them vulnerable to poor and maladaptive functioning and wellbeing.”***

– MICHIGAN RENEWAL GRANT APPLICATION.

## Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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With limited resources and capacity, states may need to make challenging decisions about how to best invest resources and specifically meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations. The definition of vulnerable populations in every state’s needs assessment included children from low-income families and children with special education needs; and some states’ definitions also included children who were dual-language learners, homeless, in the child welfare system, or from rural, military or tribal communities.

- Seven states (**California, Florida, Kansas, Oregon, Minnesota, Virginia** and **Washington**) plan to customize supports and prioritize tribal populations in their quality-improvement approach. Multiple states have strategies to expand access and improve quality in rural areas.
- Eight states (**California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, New York, North Carolina**) proposed to create or expand supports to children who are experiencing homelessness.
- **Washington’s** strategic plan includes a focus on eliminating race and family income as predictors of school readiness.

## Parent Engagement and Maximizing Parental Choice

Engaging parents and providing them the information and support they need to make informed choices are important to help families find the services they need and access them efficiently and seamlessly. It is also important to engage parents as leaders in planning and decision-making to inform system design and delivery. To aid in this work, states can access a [series of resources](#) and a [policy statement](#) on family engagement from the U.S. departments of Health and Human Services and Education.

## Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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Multiple states have strategies to strengthen parent engagement and choice. Most renewal grant applications emphasized parent engagement or family leadership development and other skills through [local parent cafes](#) and family ambassadors or networks. Here are specific state examples:

- **Connecticut** is considering an Office of Family and Community Partnerships that would respond to family and community feedback. The state will also train more parents to be parent leaders, develop a state-level parent cabinet, gain feedback from parents in multiple languages and fund local B-5 system partnerships through community grants.
- **Maryland** plans to increase financial supports to allow families to choose high-quality care.
- **Michigan** proposes to continue to fund [trusted advisor grants](#) and use a trusted messenger to increase family knowledge and choice.
- **Rhode Island** aims to embed [family navigators](#) in “health equity zone” communities to create strong partnerships that aim to ensure access to services.
- **Virginia** is exploring models for family engagement, including exploring technology to reach rural families.
- Eight states (**Alabama, California, Connecticut, Kansas, Georgia, Maryland, New Hampshire** and **New York**) are focusing on [two-generation approaches](#) and, in some cases, economic security strategies.
- Four states (**Florida, Georgia, Michigan** and **New York**) are eyeing transitions to strengthen alignments within their early learning systems, including with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and home visits.

#### STATE EXAMPLE



With its PDG-R funds, **New York** proposes to create a position for a statewide transition coordinator. The coordinator will engage with parents by implementing a pilot program to support children’s transitions from birth through age 5 broadly and expand support for students transitioning to kindergarten. Local kindergarten-transition teams will apply for funding, with an emphasis on serving tribal families and families experiencing homelessness. The state intends to engage with families early to inform and prepare them for upcoming transitions and will draw from a range of partners, including local hospitals, pediatricians, child care programs, home visiting programs, pre-K programs and local government agencies.

## Workforce and Professional Development

The [B-5 workforce](#) — an important element of a high-quality early learning experience — is typically [under-supported](#), [poorly paid](#) and [critical for allowing parents to return to work](#) during and after the COVID-19 global pandemic. Enhancing adult-child interactions is paramount to overall quality. Recently, there have been calls for strengthening workforce development systems, including those reflected in the work of National Association for the Education of Young Children’s [Power to the Profession](#) partnership with leading early childhood agencies and the [Transforming the Workforce](#)

for [Children Birth Through Age 8](#) report from the National Academy of Sciences. Ensuring the workforce is prepared to support [effective pre-K to kindergarten transitions](#) — through strategies like joint professional development, sharing assessment data, curriculum and standards alignment and other approaches — can have positive impacts on child and family outcomes.

## Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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One of the priorities of PDG-R was for states to develop systems of aligned and stackable credentials to provide a [career ladder and growth opportunities](#). While many applications broadly addressed developing stackable systems that lead to college credits and degrees, only a handful of states outlined plans to accomplish this within the three-year grant cycle. States are also developing strategies to strengthen their professional development systems with stronger coaching systems. Here are some examples:

- **Florida** plans to build the capacity of system leaders — including its State Advisory Council — to develop systems, policy and programs that have a stronger equity lens; this will be complemented by equity coaches, who will work with stakeholders throughout the state to recognize and address disparities through data-driven and targeted strategies intended to close equity gaps.
- Six states (**Alabama, California, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan** and **Washington**) had a specific focus on equity in their professional development strategy. Some states are proposing to develop or expand access to professional development systems that will support the needs of multilingual children and ensure that teachers and other professionals can support the needs of dual-language learners.

### STATE EXAMPLE



**California** aims to develop 225 hours/15 college credits of new, online and blended content and make it available to early childhood professionals statewide. This will be augmented by a new coaching certification through which coaches will be certified and receive badges in areas of demonstrated expertise (e.g., infant/toddler, dual-language learning); virtual coaching will also be provided to meet diverse needs, particularly in rural communities.



**Illinois** wants to expand its stackable system of credentials through [Gateways Credentials](#), each with up to six levels (from entry level to master's degree), developing a new strand for home visitors.



## Quality

While all states have basic health and safety standards through early childhood program licensing, states have worked over the last 15 years to more systematically improve the quality of these programs, which has a [measurable impact on children's outcomes](#). States typically focus on strengthening quality through [Quality Rating and Improvement Systems](#). QRIS measures program quality beyond basic standards, typically assigns stars or levels to inform consumer choice, and provides quality-improvement supports to help programs across the mixed-delivery system — which consists of services offered through a variety of programs and providers such as Head Start, licensed family and center-based child care, public schools, and community-based organizations supported with a combination of public and private funding. Supports may include coaching and scholarships for the workforce or funding for learning materials.

### Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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States focused on three primary strategies in their applications: reviewing, streamlining and aligning program standards; building [trauma-informed care and mental health strategies](#); and strengthening the overall B-5 system. Here are some examples:

- **Florida** is considering scholarships for directors to complete the [Trauma-Informed Care Credential Endorsement](#) and practitioners to complete a new Trauma-Informed Care Specialization.
- **Missouri** wants to expand its three-tiered trauma training throughout the state.
- **North Carolina** proposes to augment its statewide QRIS and use observational assessment data to inform more intentional transitions from pre-K to kindergarten.
- Some approaches are comprehensive and include reviewing standards at all quality levels (e.g., **California, Florida, Georgia** and **Illinois**), while other states (such as **Oregon**) want to invest in extensive targeted support to help programs improve quality.
- Four states (**Alabama, Florida, Michigan** and **Virginia**) are hoping to expand the use of the [Classroom Assessment Scoring System](#) (CLASS) to increase focus on adult-child interactions.
- Thirteen states (**California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia** and **Washington**) aim to expand access to a variety of [early childhood mental health consultation](#) supports.

#### STATE EXAMPLE



Among the applications, **Virginia** outlined a comprehensive quality approach, expanding a multifaceted, quality-improvement strategy through local community pilots that assess program quality, developing and investing in quality-improvement plans that focus on teacher-child interactions and CLASS scores, and engaging diverse stakeholders in the process of developing local quality-improvement strategies.

## Data Systems and Governance

Because B-5 systems use multiple funding streams and fulfill multiple roles and responsibilities, data and governance are critically important. [Early childhood integrated data systems](#) identify who is eligible for, can access and can benefit from different programs, as well as programmatic impact on children and families. These data systems are often disconnected from K-12 state longitudinal data systems, making it challenging to measure impact beyond kindergarten entry or to support seamless transitions from pre-K into kindergarten.

In applications, states prioritized creating an unduplicated count of children accessing the array of B-5 services, improving systems to identify and enroll eligible children in programs to serve their unique needs, and analyzing the impact of investments from early childhood through early elementary.

### Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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Data systems and their capacity for linking early childhood to K-12 [vary across states](#). Most states describe siloed data systems that are not linked or integrated within B-5 programs and have significant limitations regarding their ability to access and analyze data.

States included a range of strategies for designing new data systems, improving existing systems, linking systems across diverse programs, improving user-friendliness of data access, or enhancing already robust and highly integrated systems. Numerous states noted their data-integration efforts will be accelerated if they receive a State Longitudinal Data System grant. States also described their governance models in their applications. While [governance models](#) vary, all states now have some version of a State Advisory Council. These councils identify strategies to create integrated and aligned B-5 systems across the many sectors that impact the lives of young children and their families (and, in some cases, birth-to-age-eight systems). In most states, the council oversees the implementation of the strategic plan developed using initial PDG B-5 grant funding; however, the level of oversight varies from state to state. Councils are typically staffed by the agency that delivers B-5 programs and have representation across the mixed-delivery B-5 system (e.g., Head Start and family child care). They address issues such as health, family support, mental health, child welfare, K-12 and higher education in the early childhood context. Here are some examples:

- Three states (**Illinois, Maryland** and **North Carolina**) have comprehensive data systems that are integrated both across early childhood education services and with K-12.
- Five states (**California, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri** and **New Jersey**) propose to use PDG-R funding to create a unique identifier that will follow children through the early childhood system. Five additional states already have a unique identifier in place (**Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland** and **North Carolina**).
- Six states (**California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Rhode Island** and **Virginia**) want to improve data integration to inform policy and planning.
- Five states (**Alabama, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York** and **Virginia**) are working to align their early childhood data systems with K-12.

### STATE EXAMPLE



**Florida's** Early Childhood Integrated Data System can link data across all B-5 sectors and services; leverage individual, child-level linkages to understand the needs of children and families; and aggregate data to understand population-level needs across B-5 services at local, county, regional and state levels. The system provides ongoing analysis of how well services are meeting the needs of young children and their families and produces standard reports (e.g., frequency and distribution of service use, demographic characteristics by community, duration among recipients and prevalence of [risk and protective factors](#)). The system also has capacity to complete extensive analyses that answer targeted questions about the health and well-being of young children.

## Coordinated Application, Eligibility and Enrollment

B-5 programs and services for children and their families span multiple levels of government and a multitude of agencies and providers. The needs of children and their families are often multifaceted and interconnected; and most programs (e.g., child care assistance, early intervention, mental and physical health services, home visiting programs, nutrition and pre-K programs) are siloed. [Integrated service delivery](#) helps to ensure that children and their families are getting the services they need in a seamless way, including through a coordinated application process.

### Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

States have addressed coordinated application, eligibility and enrollment in various ways. Here are some examples:

- **Florida** plans to move forward with a single-point-of-entry system to make application and enrollment more seamless for parents.
- **Minnesota** is working to consolidate eligibility verification across programs for children and families.
- **New York** aims to promote co-location of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children offices in Head Start and Early Head Start sites.
- As part of its renewal work, **Oregon** proposes to hire a coordinated-enrollment manager to support the planning and implementation of coordinated-enrollment systems in the state.
- **Virginia** is considering coordinated enrollment pilots to self-assess, develop action plans, focus on family engagement in designing systems and improve transitions by embedding strategies within the coordinated enrollment model.

- **Georgia** and **New Jersey** plan to update or expand work on a system to provide a single point of entry (i.e., coordinated application and enrollment) into early childhood programs, a user-friendly app with consolidated information or co-location of services.
- **Maryland** and **Michigan** included the opportunity to support local approaches to a unified application or enrollment system that will inform the development statewide.
- Five states (**Alabama, Kansas, Minnesota, New Hampshire** and **Washington**) want to strengthen the coordination and expansion of the [Help Me Grow](#) model as a mechanism to support health care and to support child care professionals in identifying developmental and behavioral issues in children. Also, parents will be directed to a call center that will connect them to local resources and services.

### STATE EXAMPLE



**Missouri** is planning to use regional hubs to improve families' access to the B-5 system through a single point of entry and coordinated enrollment. This pilot will begin in rural areas of the state to support the most vulnerable populations, including children with disabilities, those experiencing trauma or mental health issues, English language learners, those in foster care or those experiencing abuse or neglect. Families will answer a series of questions — online, over the phone or in person — to complete the enrollment process and quickly determine eligibility for programs and to connect families to other appropriate community resources.

## Infants and Toddlers

Recent [brain science](#) shows babies develop a million new neural connections every second. Babies are born learning, and what they learn and how they learn lays the foundation for the rest of their lives and their success in school. Since renewal grants have an emphasis on B-5 cross-sector systems building, the need to include infants and children under age 3 is critical for the development of comprehensive B-5 services. It is also important to address the multiple transition points that exist within the B-5 system, including transitions into and out of infant and toddler supports, child care and pre-K — all culminating with the transition from pre-K to kindergarten as the system benchmark for ensuring school readiness.

## Trends in Renewal Grant Activities

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While nearly every state noted concern about the shrinking numbers of family child care providers, particularly in rural communities and areas that contain few or no child care options ([child care deserts](#)), the strategies to improve quality and expand access varied. In addition to addressing

child care shortages, numerous states focused on [early childhood mental health consultation](#) and [home visiting](#) supports. Here are some examples:

- Five states (**Connecticut, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Virginia** and **Washington**) propose to work in rural communities and child care deserts to expand access to infant and toddler child care, with a specific focus on family child care. **Michigan** and **Rhode Island** plan to increase the number of high-quality infant and toddler slots in programs modeled from Early Head Start-child care partnerships.
- Three states (**Connecticut, Georgia** and **Michigan**) are also aiming to invest in family child care networks to increase accessibility and improve the quality of home-based providers.
- **Kansas** and **North Carolina** plan to implement a targeted quality-improvement strategy specifically for infant and toddler care settings.
- **Michigan, North Carolina** and **Oregon** propose to study infant and toddler quality child care costs.
- Another strategy to serve more infants and toddlers was to strengthen the capacity of family child care businesses and development of a [shared services](#) network. This strategy was proposed by three states: **Connecticut, Virginia** and **Washington**.
- Voluntary home-visiting is an [evidence-based](#) strategy used to help pregnant women and new parents meet the social, emotional, cognitive and health needs of their young children. Four states (**Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota** and **New York**) aim to create connections with home visiting programs. **Connecticut** and **New**

## SPOTLIGHT ON HEALTH

State policymakers interested in strengthening the B-5 continuum also want to consider the various health needs of young children (e.g., nutrition, mental health and more) and the agencies that provide the support and assistance that young children receive before entering the public education system.

- **Connecticut** hopes to expand a doula home visiting pilot by developing a statewide referral network and increasing doula diversity through recruiting and training.
- **Kansas** plans to expand screening for maternal depression at well-child visits.
- **Minnesota** is exploring strategies to reduce infant and maternal mortality among tribal and African American populations.
- **New Jersey** aims to expand its network of doulas to provide health education, labor and delivery birthing support, and short-term postpartum follow-up and referrals. The state will also pilot [Family Connects](#), an evidence-based model for short-term home visiting, maternal and child health assessments, parental support and cross-sector service connections.
- **New York** is planning to expand [Healthy Steps](#), a pediatric primary care model that promotes the health, well-being and school readiness of babies and toddlers. The state is also piloting Strong by Six, which provides comprehensive developmental screenings, including for social determinants of health and education and adverse childhood experiences, and connects children and families to needed services.
- **Oregon** hopes to leverage Medicaid funding to increase the rate of infant and toddler screenings.

**Hampshire** plan to increase funding to expand home-visiting services, while others (**New Jersey**, **North Carolina** and **Oregon**) plan to support implementation of universal home visiting models.

### STATE EXAMPLE



**Louisiana** proposed to use a portion of its renewal funds to pilot strategies across the state's community [Ready Start Networks](#) to expand access to quality infant and toddler child care in centers and family child care programs in child care deserts. To incentivize and respond to community needs, a center is required to offer infant care to receive PDG-R subgrant funding.

## Final Thoughts



***PDG funding will scale what is working, align systems with intention, build critical infrastructure, and foster innovation at the local and state level.***

– KANSAS RENEWAL GRANT APPLICATION.

The PDG-R grants provide opportunities for 23 states to significantly strengthen their B-5 systems. Strategies include strengthening transitions for young children with a focus on the transition from pre-K into kindergarten, addressing workforce and professional development, improving quality and subsequent outcomes and several others. For states not awarded renewal grants, there is still an abundance of vital information within the needs assessments and strategic plans they completed as part of their planning grants.

While renewal grants provide significant funding, they are not a panacea for states looking to significantly expand access or services; rather, they are meant to help states better understand their B-5 systems and develop sustainable improvements within three years. Additionally, these applications are proposed plans — actual implementation may differ significantly as states respond to the immense challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As noted earlier, the pre-K to kindergarten transition period marks the handoff between B-5 and K-12 systems and is an important period for measuring the success of the B-5 system in preparing every student for kindergarten. Yet, transition approaches have been labeled [haphazard](#) and research points to [the disproportionate access to high-quality transition activities](#) among students

of color, English language learners and students from low-income families — the exact groups of students who have demonstrated strong benefits from inclusion.

Ultimately, states that are successful in implementing their PDG B-5 goals will make significant strides toward the creation of an aligned and integrated B-5 system that has a strong connection to K-12. Education policymakers and other state leaders face unique and contextualized challenges and limitations regarding capacity and funding to build enhanced B-5 systems. Yet, through their planning and renewal grant work (and for the states not funded), they can learn from each other to more rapidly and effectively create aligned, responsive early childhood systems that maximize federal and state investments.

# About the Authors



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Julie is an early childhood policy consultant with more than 20 years of experience in navigating the structures of state legislatures and government, conducting legislative and policy analysis, and providing technical assistance. In a prior role, Julie was a program manager and provided leadership and management of the Early Care and Education project at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Julie holds a master's degree in public administration, with an emphasis on public policy, from the University of Colorado Denver and a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Wyoming. She also served as a U.S. Peace Corps education volunteer in Kyrgyzstan. Contact Julie at [jpoppeconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:jpoppeconsulting@gmail.com).

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Abby is a national expert on early childhood systems development with 25 years of experience. She has a wide range of leadership, including helping to implement and standardize child development programs for the U.S. Armed Forces in Europe, leading a bi-state early childhood initiative, being a policy advisor to a governor, working for a philanthropic foundation, designing and scaling statewide innovations such as

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## Matt Weyer



As a senior policy analyst at Education Commission of the States, Matt focuses on early learning issues. Prior, Matt worked for over four years covering early learning issues for the National Conference of State Legislatures, earned his doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies from the University of Denver and was a kindergarten teacher in a bilingual classroom in Denver Public Schools. When Matt

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