

# 2018-2020 Kentucky Preschool Partnership Grant Evaluation Report

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*Receiving the Preschool Partnership Grant through the Kentucky Department of Education has been a catalyst for innovation, [which] has required unconventional thinking. It has been a challenge for partners to work together. But, we have been incentivized to rethink preschool. We have been granted the opportunity to reconsider how we are operating, what we are prioritizing and how we can lean into revolutionary changes. Previous models are no longer serving our future. The most creative solutions develop from people of diverse backgrounds merging together to form unexpected partnerships. The process requires us to look beyond ourselves and commit to actually improving practices. Enhancing early childhood experiences is how we best counterbalance the worst parts of this world. We, as a community, have to work together to make this long-term investment. The Preschool Partnership Grant has incentivized opposing sectors to examine strengths and weaknesses and to find a balanced common ground to stand upon. There is a compelling need to work together to turn shortcomings into opportunities for our community. It is that sense of urgency that must motivate us to overcome fear... the fear of change, fear of transparency, fear of vocalizing our areas of weakness. We. Are. Better. Together. Thank you for this opportunity to grow.*

## PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

- *It is just the perfect fit especially to the rural community! I have been in childcare for 20 plus years and thought I knew a lot but this partnership has opened my eyes to a whole new level.*
- *I have learned more about Kindergarten readiness and what each child's goal should be. I have learned that in this business to more partnerships you have the better all-around education the children will receive! Now I understand the quote "It takes a village to raise a child.*
- *I think that it has been a very positive collaboration. Communication and a sense of community has increased. In the past, it seemed more as a competition between programs but it is more of a sense of working together to provide the best opportunities for the children and families that we serve.*

## **Data Source for This Report**

This is a report of a mixed-methods evaluation study, designed to help KDE determine if Preschool Partnership Grant (PPG) funds had measurable, positive impacts on child outcomes and school readiness for children enrolled in participating districts and their respective community child care partner programs. Included in the report are results for year 1 of the two-year study from the end-of-year district survey data, partner survey data, family survey data, and focus group data, as well as mid-year data and end-of-year data from 2017-2018 for comparison purposes. The focus groups with district personnel from 34 districts were 45-60 minutes in duration. The end-of-year district surveys represent all district grantees' responses. The end-of-year partner surveys were completed by 64 programs. The end-of-year family surveys represent 475 family members' perspectives.

The report examines the intent of the grant which is to increase the quality and hours of preschool programming for at-risk preschool children through partnerships with CCAP providers in the community. Forty-six districts participated in the grant, and several districts applied for, and received, more than one grant, resulting in a total of 52 grantees. Every grant applicant was required to set outcomes for the partnership activities in their PPG application. Each district developed grant outcomes to focus on several of the following: expanded programming hours, kindergarten readiness, enrollment, professional development, hiring of staff, curriculum development and alignment, classroom materials, child-find efforts, STAR ratings (state quality rating), family and community engagement efforts, communication and collaborative efforts with partners, services and referrals for children with delays or English Language Learners, CCAP overage fee financial assistance, and transportation.

## **Children Served Through Grant**

The forty-six districts, with their respective partners, served a total of 3,418 preschool children. The preschool children served by the grant were 13.87% Black or African American, 7.87% Hispanic or Latino, <1% Asian, <1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 0% American Indian or Alaska Native, 74.04% White, and 5.90% Other race/ethnicity. Two hundred and seventy-six children were identified as English Language Learners, and 1,523 children were identified as having a disability. Six hundred and fifty-five children were referred for services.

Information regarding Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) eligibility is provided in Table 1. CCAP enrollment was not provided in the previous year's (2017-2018) end-of-year data, so mid-year (2018-2019) data was used for comparison purposes with CCAP eligible students in the current year. The mid-year data reflects the estimated number of CCAP eligible students, as reported by districts.

<i>Table 1. CCAP eligible children (mid-year to end-of-year)</i>		
Baseline Number of Children	Number of Children at End-of-Year	Difference
1326	1490	+ 164

There was an increase of 164 students across participating districts according to what was reported on the current end-of-year survey. Some of the districts expressed difficulty with

recruitment of children in the focus groups and end-of-year surveys due to timing in the first year, and indicated potential for more children in year 2:

*Our biggest hurdle has been recruitment with this beginning in the middle of the year because a lot of times families, they don't want to change those childcare decisions that they've made at the beginning of the year. So, I'm hopeful that recruitment will be easier and we'll have, we'll have lots of kids interested with being able to go ahead and recruit them for this program along with the regular preschool registration for the coming year.*

*[Grant] didn't get started until late in the fall so we had some challenges getting the classroom up and running. ... this allowed us to start a new classroom in a local community center. It's located in a very poverty-stricken area .... trying to convince parents that they were going to get the same caliber and education at the community center in a classroom that we created was our first challenge.*

## **Collaborative Efforts and Improvement in Quality among Districts and Partners**

*This grant has been instrumental in elevating the quality of care for preschoolers in our community. It has galvanized the stakeholders in order to bolster the services provided by community partners.*

The 52 grantees offered a total of 248 family engagement activities and engaged in 419 meetings with their respective partners during year one. The majority of districts' key partners were at 4 or 5 STARS. This section outlines some of the collaborative efforts among childcare partners and districts. Additionally, it highlights the indicators of quality improvement over the grant period, including professional development training, screening and recruitment efforts, and family engagement activities.

### **Professional Development Training Offered through the Grant**

Districts provided a total of 317 training sessions throughout the year, averaging 6 per district. All districts provided multiple trainings on numeracy and literacy. Districts also sent their staff and their partners to various academies (e.g., Early Literacy Academy and Early Numeracy Academy) and institutes offered by the Regional Training Centers, regional educational cooperatives and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood. Teachers also participated in

monthly PLCs to share literacy and numeracy strategies they were using in their classrooms and conducted multiple face-to-face and online trainings. Many of the trainings focused on introducing the selected curriculum for alignment between the district and partners. The districts reported 20 different curricula being implemented by themselves and their key partners. Nine of the 20 curricula are literacy specific. Only nine districts reported they have not aligned their curriculum with their key partners. Six districts and their partners also implement specific social-emotional curriculum. Creative Curriculum® is the most common among all districts and their key partners. Other topics centered around social emotional learning, trauma informed care, strengthening families, health, nutrition, safety, kindergarten readiness, and challenging behaviors.

Most districts reported that training needs were identified through collaboration and regular meetings. Also, other meeting venues in the community, e.g. the Community Early Childhood Council (CECC) were reported by some districts as the place in which needs were identified. Other sources of training needs, included feedback from teachers, input collected from preschool staff and daycare partners, child assessment data, and staff evaluations. Regardless of the venue by which needs were identified, it is clear that districts believed that the partnership and collaboration with their community partners were at the root of the matter.

### **Screening and Recruitment Efforts Made Possible by the Grant**

All districts provided some type of screening and recruitment efforts. Districts and partners screen through a variety of methods and systems, and most of the time it was a shared or joint screening roles and efforts, advertising at community events and through other community partners. For example, one district reported that their mobile classroom provided screenings and drove recruitment in their district.

*“A screening blitz was conducted by the group of stakeholders in which 103 children were screened and families were provided coaching about how to help their child prepare for school readiness and provide information about Head Start, public preschool, child care, and therapeutic care.”*

### **Family Engagement Efforts Made Possible by the Grant**

Districts provided 248 family engagement activities, at an average of 5 per district for the year. Literacy and numeracy were a large focus of the family engagement activities, and all districts reported literacy and numeracy as the main focus of their engagement activities. The events were provided in a variety of formats and venues (e.g., local libraries, partner sites, district sites, and other various community locations). These family events emphasized helping families to implement what was learned and to better engage with their children at home. Other topics included nutrition, readiness awareness, and social/emotional skills. Tangible materials and resources were often the focus and outcomes of these events (Table 2).

Table 2. *Family Resources*  
*Family Resources*

<u>Tangible Resources</u>	<u>Other Less Tangible Resources</u>
STEM activity guides in science backpacks	relationship building
Hands-on take-home materials/resources for implementing literacy and numeracy with their children	social and emotional coaching
Everyday fun activities and games that embed math and literacy	behavior management
Fine motor activities to help with handwriting skill development	
Activities, books, curriculum materials (some districts reported in more general terms)	

A total of 475 family members responded to the Family Perceptions Survey. The respondents were mostly female (89.47%) and Caucasian (86.73%). Other respondents were African American (8.21%) and Latino/Hispanic (3.16%), American Indian (1.05%), Asian (<1%), Middle Eastern (<1%), Pacific Islander (<1%), and Not Listed/Other (1.26%). Education level of family member participants is found in Table 7.

Table 7

<i>Education Level of Families (n=470)</i>	Number of Respondents
Some High School	22
<b>High School Diploma or Equivalent</b>	<b>103</b>
Career/Technical Training	22
<b>Some College</b>	<b>95</b>
Associate's Degree	67
Bachelor's Degree	71
Master's Degree or Higher	90

### **Family Beliefs about Activities and Events**

A total of 389 (82%) of families reported that they attended family events or activities sponsored through the partnerships. Regarding the number of family events attended, 116 families reported

that they attended four or more events throughout the year. Eighty-five families attended three events, 92 families attended two events, and 68 families attended one event.

Families were asked about the utility of the family engagement activities and events and the topics they found particularly useful. Those who attended events, responded with a variety of answers, including phonics, speech articulation, math game night, kindergarten readiness with the Born Learning program, and Laugh and Learn. One family member said, “I liked that activities were arranged for me and my child and all I had to do was show up. I don’t consider myself creative, so it is hard for me to come up with fun activities for my little ones.”

Families, overwhelmingly, believe the family engagement efforts of the preschool partnerships contribute to their ability to help their children with regard to Kindergarten readiness, and in particular, reading and math readiness (see Figures 1 and 2).

*Figure 1*

*Percent of Families Who Believe Family Events Have Contributed to Their Ability to Help Their Children in Being Ready for Kindergarten*

*(n = 339)*

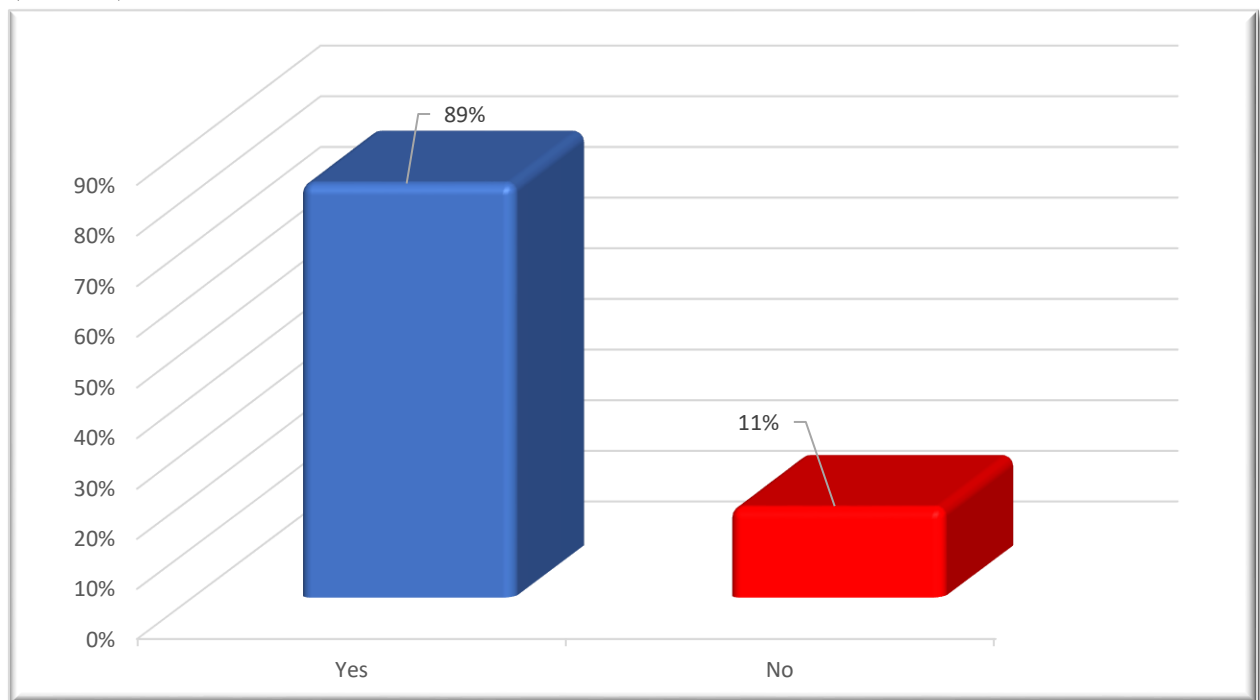
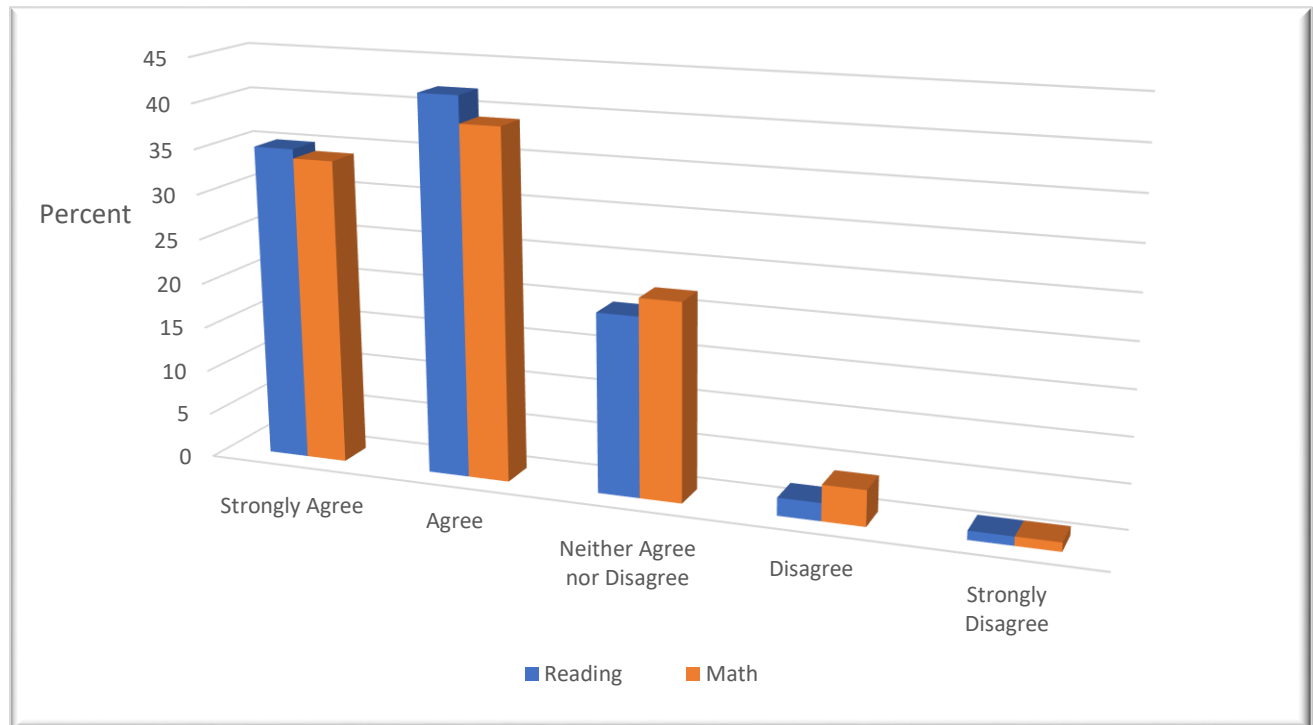


Figure 2

*Percent of Families Who Believe Family Events Have Provided Them With Things to Help Their Children Be Ready for Kindergarten Reading and Math (n = 378 for Reading, n = 323 for Math)*



These responses support the districts' responses on the end-of-year survey regarding the numeracy and literacy activities, resources, and engagement nights aimed at giving families tangible products to work on at home and outside of the preschool classroom.

### Grantee Key Partner Data

This section outlines the responses received from the Survey of Partner Experiences. The number of participants that responded to items on the Survey of Partner experiences varies. Out of 64 total respondents, 63 were female and 57 were white. The partner respondents tended to be larger for-profit community child care programs with 4 or 5 stars. Table 3 shows the disaggregated data for partner type, profit classification, STAR level, and number of staff members. The respective number of participants are listed for each section.

Table 3

#### *Partner Survey Information*

Type of Partner (n=50)	
Head Start	14
Community Child Care	24
District Child Care	12

For-Profit or Non-Profit ( <i>n</i> =33)	
Non-profit	15
For-profit	18
STAR Rating ( <i>n</i> =48)	
5 STARS	17
4 STARS	17
3 STARS	10
2 STARS	0
1 STAR	4
Number of Staff ( <i>n</i> =49)	
1-4	7
5-9	20
10+	22

### Quality Improvement Efforts for Partners

Based on the Survey of Partner Experiences, 23 out of 46 partners have increased enrollment because of funding. However, the increased enrollment did not mean increase in number of days or hours for the partner sites as only 22% of partners reported that they increased days and/or hours. Out of 50 partners who responded to this item on the survey believe that they have increased the quality of services. These increases were mostly due to greater curricular alignment and coaching and professional development, but respondents also reported that the hiring of additional faculty and staff played a role in the increase in quality. See Table 6 for data on partner outcomes.

Table 6

#### *Partner Outcomes Data (n=50)*

Have you Increased Quality of Services?	
Yes	42
No	5
Maybe	2
What are the Reasons for Increase in Quality?	
Curriculum Alignment and/or Supports	27
Coaching and Professional Development	30
Hired Additional Faculty and Staff	16
Have you Increased Days and/or Hours?	
Yes	11
No	39



### **Increased Collaboration between Partner and District**

A majority of partners who responded to the survey (95%) expressed that they have improved collaboration with their district partners and that this collaborative process has been a positive one. Partners felt that their partnership facilitated children's transition between them and the school districts as well as elevating the partners' role in the education of children to the districts.

*"It has definitely been the best thing we have ever done!! We have been able to introduce the 3/4-year-olds into the school setting much earlier than before. The transition from childcare to preschool has been so much smoother because it isn't a complete shock to them when they enter the school because of joint activities we have had between the school*

*"Yes... as providers we have always wanted to have more collaboration, but at times, it seemed that the school system did not understand our role in the education of children. This has enabled them to be able to see from our perspective more, since they have been to our center, and have collaborated with activities and helped with ECERS ratings. Just being able to meet with them more and having open conversations about how to improve quality has been amazing."*

*"We have brought in amazing trainers in turn creating a more positive and productive classroom environment. The coaching has been very helpful for my staff and the understanding of where the children need to be when they leave our center to enter into Kindergarten."*

*"It has had a tremendous effect in our teaching staff! .... most childcare teachers don't have the degree that [district] teachers have. Being able to attend trainings and have the teachers to share their teaching strategies with our staff and having the teachers and staff from the schools to come to our center and share with our kids had been a blessing! In my opinion this has been by far the best thing we have participated in."*

Other partners reported how they and their respective districts are implementing the same curriculum consistently to ensure children are "receiving the same quality programming throughout the day" and serving increased number of CCAP children by "offering childcare options around preschool schedule to increase overall enrollment and meet child care needs of those families."

## Partner Future Wishes

*“Partnerships need to be expanded and nurtured. Although our existing partnership and collaboration with Pre-School staff is working very well, it would be helpful if our collaboration throughout the district was prioritized.”*

*“[trainings] will not be sustained if the grant isn't able to continue and we will lose the people that have been trained.”*

*“This opportunity has been wonderful and hope that it can continue in the future with funding provided.”*

## Conclusion

The intent of 2018-2020 preschool partnership grant, which provided “an opportunity for school districts and child care providers to improve the quality of services in their communities” through “cooperative public/private partnerships between public school districts and child care providers to develop full-day, high-quality programs for at-risk children” (Grant RFA), has been addressed by the 52 grantees in 2018-19. The districts have collaborated with diverse groups of early childhood stakeholders in addition to their identified key partners and focused on improving the whole child through trainings and family engagement activities. Overall, the districts and their partners felt the grant funding definitely helped improve quality of services/programming for at-risk children.