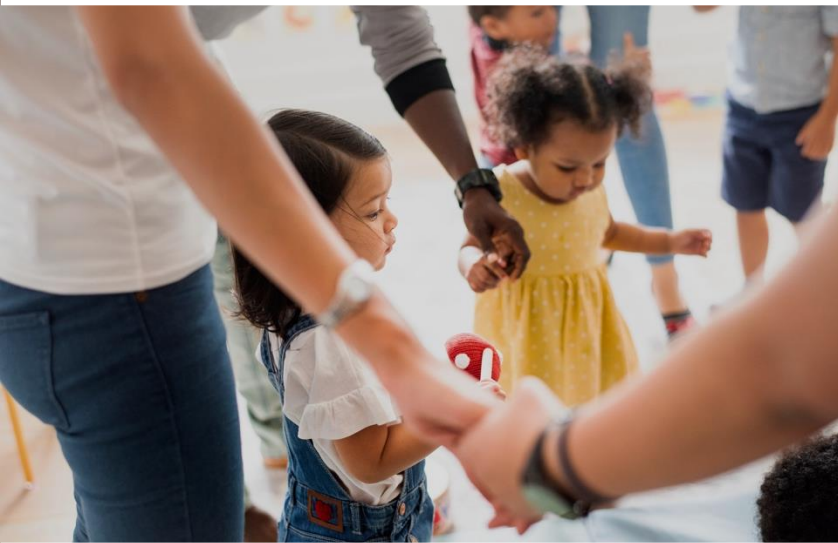


# Indiana's Birth-to-Five Preschool Development Grant



















Progress Update

September 2024



# Introduction

In early 2023, Indiana was awarded a \$42 million-dollar Preschool Development Grant (PDG) over three years from the federal Administration for Children and Families. This is the second iteration of PDG funding that Indiana has been awarded and aims to help accelerate and build Indiana's capacity to implement long-lasting change within the early care and education (ECE) system. Grant priorities and intended outcomes include:

Grant Activity Area	Intended Outcome
 Update Statewide B-5 Needs Assessment 	A clear and current articulation of the strengths and gaps of Indiana's B-5 mixed delivery system to support stakeholder understanding and action.
 Update Statewide B-5 Strategic Plan 	A shared plan for addressing B-5 system priorities and building critical stakeholder and partner coordination.
 Maximize Family Engagement 	Enhanced family knowledge and access to the B-5 mixed delivery system to support healthy child development and school readiness.
 Support the Workforce and Disseminate Best Practices 	A strengthened and more prepared workforce to support the needs of all children and families, especially those marginalized and underserved.
 Support Quality Improvement 	Improved program quality across the B-5 mixed delivery system to support increased learning and readiness outcomes.
 Enhance Quality and Expand Access to ECCE Programs 	Increased access to high-quality care in underserved areas of the state.
 Coordinated Application, Eligibility, Enrollment for Families 	Improved navigation, access and delivery of critical support services.
 Improved Workforce Compensation 	Increased workforce quality and stability.
 Increased Access to Inclusive Settings 	Expanded access to inclusive care settings for underserved children and families.

The Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL) is working alongside the Indiana Department of Education's Office of Kindergarten Readiness (OKR), as well as other internal and external stakeholders, to plan and implement the grant. Partners are deeply committed to not only ensuring the successful implementation of grant activities, but also to sustaining these initiatives well beyond the grant period. Through collaborative efforts, they aim to create lasting ECCE improvements by building infrastructure, strengthening networks, and securing additional resources to continue advancing outcomes for young children and families in the post-grant landscape.

This report outlines the state's planning and implementation progress for the Birth-to-Five (B-5) Preschool Development Grant, including key insights from a recently completed needs assessment and progress toward specific grant priorities. The state is committed to keeping stakeholders informed about ongoing grant updates and upcoming milestones, while continuing to offer opportunities for stakeholders to actively contribute and help shape future plans.





## Understanding the Current ECCE Needs of Hoosier Families, Providers and Communities

In early 2024, Indiana’s OECOSL and OKR engaged the Purdue University Center for Early Learning (CEL) research team to conduct a detailed statewide needs assessment that describes the availability, accessibility and quality of existing ECCE programs in Indiana serving children birth to age 5. The needs assessment was designed to demonstrate changes in the ECCE landscape since the 2019 needs assessment was published, while also providing new insights into the challenges and barriers faced by families with young children and the ECCE workforce. The goal of the assessment is to clearly articulate the strengths and opportunities of Indiana’s current birth to age 5 mixed delivery system to support understanding and action among early learning partners.

In their work, the Purdue CEL team updated the 2019 needs assessment by examining the state of the ECCE system and producing side-by-side contrasts of data when available and appropriate. In a companion report the Purdue CEL team also collected survey data from families with young children and educators of children birth to age 5 during the spring of 2024. The survey data supplements the statewide administrative data presented in this report by offering a more refined view of the recent experiences of families with regards to their ECCE needs across dimensions of access, affordability, child development, and program engagement. Additionally, the survey data collected from the workforce highlights the working conditions of early childhood educators, including their compensation and benefits, well-being, job outlook, and professional resources.

Together, these reports synthesize information regarding what is known about availability, access, and quality of ECCE, as well as what gaps remain, to pinpoint strategies for supporting an equitable and flourishing birth to age 5 early learning system and maximize subsequent PDG activities. Recommendations made based on needs assessment findings include:

### RECOMMENDATION I:

#### Grow the Supply of High-Quality funded ECCE for Infants and Toddlers

The demand for ECCE among families with low incomes who have infants or toddlers far outweighs the supply of ECCE in Indiana. In fact, data from this needs assessment suggests infant and toddler care is less accessible than care for preschoolers, even though there is capacity to serve a greater share of infants and toddlers relative to preschoolers. Infants represented only 9% of all children in Indiana with active CCDF vouchers in 2023. In fact, most Indiana counties provided funded care to less than half of the infants and toddlers in poverty who were eligible to receive services in their area. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average cost for infant care in Indiana is \$1,051 per month compared to an average of \$796 per month for preschool care. Thus, families may struggle to access infant/toddler care both because of the low supply but also because of the lack of financial support. A recent report from the First Five Years Fund estimates the economic impact of challenges with infant and toddler care costs Indiana \$2.2 billion every year.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

### **Build and Sustain a High-Quality ECCE Workforce**

The number of high-quality programs in Indiana has significantly increased over the past five years. This increase was almost exclusively driven by growth in programs rated as Level 3 on Indiana's quality rating system, Paths to QUALITY™ (PTQ). The increased supply of high-quality ECCE combined with policy changes raising the income eligibility for families to receive subsidies resulted in On My Way Pre-K enrollment more than doubling over the same time period. Despite these strengths, more work is needed to ensure that children's experiences within high-quality programs are leading to positive developmental and learning outcomes. For example, a study conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) found overall low levels of instructional support across Indiana ECCE programs and concluded Indiana lags behind other states with respect to preschool quality. NIEER recommended redesigning the quality rating system to ensure educators have sustained support to enhance language and cognitive development. Therefore, investing in the training, education, and retention of the workforce to facilitate the delivery of high-quality ECCE should be a top priority for the state.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

### **Adopt Transition Policies that Leverage Collaboration with Early Intervention Services**

Children and families faced unprecedented disruptions to their daily lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. One consequence for children's well-being has been a greater prevalence of behavioral problems observed in preschool children. The data presented in the needs assessment shows increased engagement with First Steps across nearly all Indiana counties over the past five years. Yet, these early intervention services typically only reach a fraction of the population in need. Early intervention services are a critical resource to families by providing early detection and referrals and ensuring that families have help during the transition to formal schooling. However, Indiana is one of many states that has not adopted formal policies to guide the transition process from preschool to kindergarten, although it does offer a newly-developed transition toolkit that outlines recommended practices. Strengthening collaborations with First Steps and expanding access to early childhood mental health consultants are two approaches that the state may consider to further support families during this critical time. The Office of Head Start also proposes several additional strategies for promoting mental health in young children.

## **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

### **Learn from Model Counties and Develop Local Partnerships**

The needs assessment highlighted counties that may serve as exemplars based on their progress in addressing ECCE gaps over the past five years. As local key players and invested parties examine data from their respective areas, it may be beneficial to develop partnerships with neighboring or adjacent counties, or counties with similar needs, to pool resources and tackle problems at-scale. Additionally, taking lessons learned from model counties, replicating, adapting, and implementing their proven strategies may serve to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the ECCE system.

## RECOMMENDATION 5:

### Invest in an Early Childhood Integrated Data System

Developing a comprehensive picture of ECCE often necessitates merging publicly-available and administrative data sources. However, definitions of variables, data collection procedures, documentation strategies, and timelines often differ across sources. For example, through its needs assessment, Purdue CEL identified several inconsistencies, gaps, or duplicates in the data, such as when trying to compile and estimate enrollment data by PTQ level, that prevented the CEL team from drawing accurate conclusions. A concerted effort to ensure consistency and coordination of ECCE data sources can help Indiana better identify needs, set more achievable goals, and more effectively track progress. Establishing an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) can also increase equitable access to early childhood programs through better understanding families' experiences in the ECCE system and supporting strategic planning for resource allocation. One way to improve data systems is to foster collaboration and communication between agencies whom families interact with from birth through formal schooling. Progress has been made with the Indiana Management Performance Hub, but the state still lacks a longitudinal data source that tracks children and families through their interactions with ECE programs. The National Center for Education Statistics outlines several approaches for states to consider for selecting an ECIDS model that best meets the needs for states. Further, Child Trends offers a synthesis of how other states are using PDG funds to address data integration needs.





## Refreshing Indiana's B-5 Strategic Plan

Indiana made significant progress through the implementation of its 2020-2022 B-5 Strategic Plan, focusing on developing a more cohesive and effective ECCE system. Key achievements include improving the quality of ECCE programs, launching innovative tools like the Early Learning Marketplace for families to reserve ECCE seats in real-time, and advancing Kindergarten Readiness Indicators (KRI) to better prepare children for school. Indiana also introduced the Early Ed Connect system to streamline access to child care assistance and invested in enhancing service coordination across agencies, particularly through the adoption of the Salesforce platform to modernize operations and data-sharing processes. The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network also played a vital role in supporting families and providers by offering resources, guidance, and technical assistance to improve ECCE availability and quality.

Despite this progress, the state faced significant challenges during the pandemic, including workforce shortages, funding limitations, and access barriers for vulnerable families. Financial constraints hindered the ability to scale up quality improvements, and workforce deficits limited the availability of high-quality ECCE programs. Additionally, barriers to accessing care and developmental delays in children due to disruptions during the pandemic exacerbated existing gaps. Data collection challenges and fragmented systems across agencies further complicated efforts to integrate and improve services statewide.

As Indiana works to refresh its B-5 strategic plan, these insights, coupled with the recent statewide needs assessment and stakeholder engagements, will inform the state's next steps. Stakeholders have provided valuable feedback on how the system has evolved and offered ideas for overcoming challenges, which will help shape future priorities. The refreshed plan will focus on addressing the most pressing issues and charting a path forward to ensure that all children and families in Indiana have access to high-quality, equitable early child care and education.



## Highlighted Progress Toward Other Grant Priorities

Indiana's 2022 B-5 Preschool Development Grant application was designed to accelerate system transformation efforts and deepen impact for Hoosier children and families. Strategies were aligned to support key priority areas including amplifying the voices of families in decision-making, introducing new workforce recruitment and career pathways, strengthening instructional practices and investing in the expansion of high-quality early learning programs in underserved areas. Key efforts underway now through the end of the grant period include:

### MAXIMIZING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

#### Family Advisory Council

Indiana is establishing five Family Advisory Council across the state, aligning with the service and delivery areas of the CCR&Rs. These groups are designed to ensure that family voices, particularly those from underserved populations, are actively involved in shaping early childhood and family service policies. Participants will represent diverse communities, including those receiving state or federal assistance, families with children at risk for developmental delays or disabilities, and dual or multi-language learners.

Family members in these advisory groups will be compensated for their time and contributions, with a focus on gathering feedback based on their lived experiences. The state will use these insights to inform policy and implementation changes within Indiana's B-5 early childhood system. This initiative is critical for creating a more inclusive, responsive system that better meets the needs of all families, particularly those who have historically faced barriers to accessing high-quality ECCE programs and services.

### SUPPORTING THE ECCE WORKFORCE

#### Registered Apprenticeship

Indiana is leveraging PDG funds to expand its Early Childhood Education Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program starting in the fall of 2024. This initiative gives high school students the opportunity to earn college credit, gain valuable work experience, and potentially earn above minimum wage through a federally approved apprenticeship. The program begins in students' have both in-person and virtual course options, leading to a Child Development Associate (CDA) certification or an associate degree.

The expansion of the program will impact several school districts during the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school years, with several districts also partnering with local community-based child care programs to offer the same opportunities. This initiative aims to address the ECCE workforce shortage by creating a pathway for students to pursue careers in the field, while simultaneously building the state's capacity for high-quality ECCE.

#### Early Childhood Education Workforce Credentials

Indiana's Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL) has successfully lobbied for the expansion of the Workforce Ready Grant program, a workforce initiative aimed at equipping job seekers with essential credentials for in-demand roles. The program now covers the tuition and fees for qualifying ECCE programs, including the Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. The Workforce Ready Grant has supported over 33,000 Hoosiers in obtaining better jobs, with

recipients earning nearly \$7,000 more annually after completing their certification.

Additionally, the Employer Training Grant reimburses employers up to \$5,000 per employee for training and retention, providing a significant incentive for businesses to invest in workforce development. This expansion in ECCE programs addresses the growing need for skilled professionals in the sector and aligns with Indiana's broader goals of strengthening its ECCE system by increasing both the quality and quantity of the workforce.

Indiana's Non-Formal CDA Project is a scholarship program that helps early childhood educators complete the professional early childhood education, and assessment necessary to apply for, and earn the national Child Development Associate® (CDA®) Credential™ administered by the Council for Professional Recognition.

The Indiana Non-Formal CDA® Project scholarships are made possible through funding from the Child Care Development Block Grant awarded to the Office of Early Childhood, and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL), a division of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), and the Indiana Division of Workforce Development (DWD) funds provided to local Adult Education Programs. The project is administered by the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, Inc. (INAEYC).

PDG funds have allowed the expansion of the Non-Formal CDA Project to support more adult education students in completing their credential and obtaining the necessary professional development and portfolio. Program offerings begin January 2025.

### **Career Ladder Mapping & Microsite**

Additional efforts are underway and aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of ECCE professionals in Indiana through Career Ladder Mapping and the creation of a Microsite. The Career Ladder Mapping initiative aims to make the wide range of ECCE career opportunities more accessible and understandable for current and potential professionals. Given the workforce challenges in the ECCE field, it is crucial that individuals entering or already in the field are aware of the various career paths and growth opportunities available to them. This initiative helps by clearly defining the "on and off ramps" within the ECCE career pathway, allowing professionals to make informed decisions about their career progression. By presenting these opportunities in a uniform and digestible way, this effort is expected to improve both recruitment and retention, addressing the state's critical ECCE workforce shortages.

The creation of a Microsite complements the career ladder effort by serving as a centralized online resource for current and aspiring ECCE professionals in Indiana. Feedback indicated that information about the state's training and education opportunities was difficult to find and understand. The Microsite addresses this by hosting the career ladder mapping, providing visual representations of career opportunities, and featuring testimonials from Hoosier ECCE professionals. This resource will be essential in guiding individuals as they explore the field, understand credentialing processes, and stack their qualifications for greater opportunities. By making this information more accessible, the Microsite is expected to enhance awareness of the ECCE profession and contribute to a more robust and informed workforce.

### **Statewide Educator Job Board with Supply & Demand Marketplace**

The Indiana Educator Job Board, powered by Nimble, initially launched in 2022 to help K-12 schools across the state recruit educators using user-friendly, data-driven tools. With the support of



Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds, the platform has been expanded to include ECCE providers, offering them the same recruitment tools to streamline hiring processes and fill vacancies at their programs. This expansion includes enhanced dashboards, labor market insights, and additional filtering options to differentiate between K-12 and ECCE data.

By providing free access to ECCE providers, the Indiana Educator Job Board aims to address critical workforce shortages in the ECCE sector. The platform's data-driven approach will help providers more effectively target skilled jobseekers, making recruitment more efficient. This effort is essential in building a robust ECCE workforce, ensuring that Indiana's youngest learners have access to high-quality educators and care, ultimately supporting the state's broader ECCE goals.

## **Child Care Management System (CCMS) Effort**

Indiana is using Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds to provide free or subsidized access to a Child Care Management System (CCMS) for eligible ECCE programs. The system aims to support providers by offering tools for building robust financial management systems, enhancing their operational effectiveness. Providers can apply for two years of free access to one of three state-approved CCMS vendor platforms, a crucial opportunity for those who may lack the resources to implement such technology on their own. A 2023 statewide survey revealed that only 35% of home-based providers utilize a CCMS, compared to 48% of center-based providers, highlighting a significant gap in access across different types of ECCE programs .

This initiative is important because it seeks to improve business best practices for ECCE providers, especially those who serve a majority of families benefiting from CCDF. By prioritizing outreach to home-based providers, the state aims to promote equity within the mixed-delivery system. The intended outcomes include better billing practices, increased communication with families, and streamlined document management, which will ultimately enhance the quality and accessibility of child care services across Indiana. These improvements are expected to create a more efficient, sustainable, and responsive ECCE system.

## **ENHANCING ECCE QUALITY AND ACCESS**

### **Employer-Sponsored Child Care Fund**

Indiana's Employer-Sponsored Child Care Fund is a collaboration between the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the Office of Early Childhood and Out-Of-School Learning, and the Indiana Manufacturers Association. The fund provided \$25 million to help businesses address the growing demand for child care by offering seed funding to employers and non-profits to establish or expand employer-sponsored child care benefits. This initiative required employers to contribute at least 10% of the funding they received from the state and allowed them to cover costs related to child care programs such as on-site care, priority waitlist partnerships, and tuition benefits.

A total of 86 employers from 56 counties, including 10 rural counties, were awarded grants. These grants will support the child care needs of over 405,000 employees across Indiana. The most common investments made through this fund were in providing on-site care, offering tuition benefits, making community infrastructure improvements, addressing critical child care challenges and helping Hoosier families balance work and family life.

## IMPROVED WORKFORCE COMPENSATION

### Compensation Study

Indiana is utilizing PDG funds to conduct a comprehensive statewide compensation study of the ECCE industry. This study is critical in addressing the significant wage disparities faced by early educators compared to other similar occupations. While the wages of early educators in Indiana have grown by 42% since 2005, this increase lags behind the wage growth of occupations requiring comparable skills, such as parking lot attendants and retail salespersons, whose wages increased by 87% and 66%, respectively, during the same period. The study aims to provide valuable data to inform efforts to improve salaries and overall working conditions in the ECCE field, which is crucial to reversing the current workforce shortages.

To carry out this study, OECOSL is partnering with Talent First and leveraging a work plan that was previously executed in Michigan. The effort will include a thorough review of public data alongside a survey to capture the experiences and sentiments of current ECCE employees in Indiana. The data will be used to develop an interactive online dashboard, giving policymakers, stakeholders, and employers access to detailed insights on ECCE compensation across the state. By addressing wage concerns and highlighting other factors such as workplace flexibility and career advancement opportunities, the study aims to create a more competitive and attractive environment for early educators, ultimately helping to stabilize and grow Indiana's early childhood workforce.

## INCREASED ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

Indiana is working to expand access to inclusive settings that provide equitable early childhood education and care for all children, including those with developmental delays or special needs. This initiative aims to ensure that all children, regardless of background or ability, have access to high-quality early learning environments.

Indiana is implementing the Pyramid Model, a positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) framework that uses systems-thinking and implementation science to promote evidence-based practices. Through the use of PDG funding, Indiana is thrilled to become the 42 Pyramid Model state, partnering with Part B and Part C to provide grants to ECE and developmental classrooms that have children with disabilities and/or IEPs (Indiana's vulnerable children).

The grant will support work in the following areas:

- Building and developing a leadership team to guide implementation of the Pyramid Model within a classroom, school or program
- Increasing staff involvement with the pyramid model
- Developing a variety of mechanisms used to establish partnerships with families in the implementation of the model
- Adopting program-wide expectations that provide a shared focus and shared language for describing behavior expectations to children, staff, and families.
- Building capacity amongst staff through professional development/coaching in order to effectively implement the Pyramid practices
- Developing or maintaining a program-wide data collection and review system
- Purchasing and implementing tools directly related to the above priorities.

Indiana will continue to provide regular updates on the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) through published reports and the state's dedicated grant webpage. These updates will include progress on key initiatives, outcomes from ongoing projects, and insights from stakeholder engagements. By maintaining transparency and open communication, Indiana ensures that families, providers, and stakeholders remain informed and engaged in the state's efforts to improve early child care and education.

[Visit Indiana's PDG webpage here](#)