



Head Start's Involvement as a Strategic Partner in Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education Statewide Systems-Building Efforts

September 2022

Acknowledgments

PDG B-5 TA Center staff would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

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Suggested Citation

Thornburg, K. R., Coffey, M., & Andersen, D. (2022). *Head Start's involvement as a strategic partner in comprehensive early childhood care and education statewide systems-building efforts*. SRI International.

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Executive Summary

The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Initiative requires states to facilitate and build partnerships to strengthen their comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems. A crucial partner in building state EECE systems is the State Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO). HSCOs have the similar purpose of facilitating partnerships between Head Start grantees and other state, local, and tribal entities including the PDG B-5 Grantees. This report presents the PDG B-5 TA Center findings of the analysis we conducted to examine the role of the HSCOs in the PDG B-5 states and territories that received renewal grants.

Based on a review of the available reports (renewal grant applications and annual progress reports), and a focus group with HSCO Directors, the PDG B-5 TA Center staff learned that the majority of HSCOs are involved in the planning and execution of PDG B-5 activities or other work regardless of the location of those offices. Of the 28 states and territories awarded PDG B-5 Renewal Grants, the HSCO directors are located in the same agencies as the PDG B-5 Grantee in 16 states and in different agencies in 11 states. Guam does not have an HSCO.

Both PDG B-5 state agency leads and the HSCO directors reported that the involvement of HSCO directors was important in helping states move forward in their systems work although challenges were encountered related to the role of governance, collaboration, and limited commitment to engage with Head Start. This report concludes with the strategies and activities PDG B-5 state leaders and HSCO directors used to engage Head Start as an important partner in building a comprehensive ECCE system to better serve young children, families, and the professionals who work with them.



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Introduction

This report describes how the Head Start Collaboration Offices (HSCOs) and Head Start programs, in general, were involved in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) application process and implementation efforts to improve early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems in the 28 states that received PDG-B-5 Renewal Grants.¹

According to the Head Start Act, HSCOs exist “to facilitate collaboration among Head Start agencies ... and entities that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income children from birth to school entry, and their families.” The HSCOs provide a structure and a process for the Office of Head Start (OHS) to work and partner with state agencies and local entities. Together, these partners leverage their common interests around young children and their families to “formulate, implement, and improve state and local policy and practices” (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022).

To examine the role of HSCOs and Head Start grantees and the extent of their involvement in PDG B-5 efforts, the PDG B-5 TA Center reviewed the 28 PDG B-5 Renewal Grant applications and 23² 2021 PDG B-5 Annual Performance Progress Reports (APPRs) and conducted a focus group with 17 HSCO directors. All quotes in this report from PDG B-5 leads are from the APPRs and those from the HSCO directors are from the focus group. The results we provide in the following sections describe the ways HSCO directors have been involved in PDG B-5 activities, the challenges faced in attempting to do so, and the strategies used by HSCO directors and PDG B-5 project leaders to work together to improve their state’s comprehensive ECCE systems-building efforts.

How and to what extent was Head Start engaged in the PDG B-5 work?

Most states reported that the HSCO directors were involved from the beginning of the PDG B-5 work. During the focus group, HSCO directors reported that they were involved in conceptualizing, or at least reviewing, the content of the renewal grant applications and participating in some of the activities identified in the Strategic Plans. The directors were asked to rate their involvement along a continuum from “some involvement” to “extremely involved.” Only 2 of the 17 HSCO directors who participated in the focus group reported little to no involvement.

¹ PDG B-5 grants were awarded to 28 states and U.S. territories. In this report, the term “states” refers to both states and territories. Idaho was not able to obtain state legislature approval to expend the funds so the funds were returned leaving 27 states that received renewal grants.

² Five of the 28 states did not submit APPRs.



One lead agency staff member reported in their APPR:

The HSCO director is part of the agency leadership team and is very involved in various PDG [B-5] activities including leading or assisting efforts with Parent Cabinet: ECE Systems redesign and SAC. The HSCO works closely with all divisions across the agency to work to align efforts, standards, comprehensive service and activities, and to use Head Start as a model for high quality.³

One HSCO director stated in their focus group discussion:

We emphasize that the Head Start program is interconnected with lots of state systems, and the children and families served by Head Start also receive services from lots of state systems. Head Start services can be so helpful in preventing further issues. One of the pilot systems included in the PDG [B-5] grant has just been included in our Governor's budget to go to all of our child welfare offices. It is exciting to see intentional connections between children in child welfare and early learning, including Head Start!

Was Head Start more involved if the HSCO was located in the lead agency of the grant?

We hypothesized that an HSCO located in the same office as the lead agency of the PDG B-5 grant would have more involvement in the work. To investigate this possibility, we reviewed the location of lead agencies for the HSCOs in states that received PDG B-5 Renewal Grants, along with the degree of involvement of the HSCOs as reported in the APPRs and the focus group.

The PDG B-5 Renewal Grants were awarded to a wide variety of agencies and other entities. Among the 28 states that were awarded grants, the most common agencies or entities were departments of education; human services; early childhood education; and children, youth, and families. One grant was located in the governor's office, and several lead agencies were outside of state departments, including a university, an early childhood council, a state board of education, and a corporation. Sixteen of the HSCOs were located in the same agency as the PDG B-5 lead agency and 11 were located in a different agency or organization. Guam does not have a HSCO. Table 1 shows the locations of both lead agencies and the HSCOs.

³ So that states remain anonymous, state references have been removed from all quotes.



Table 1. Lead agencies for the 28 PDG B-5 Renewal Grants and locations of Head Start Collaboration Offices

State	PDG B-5 Renewal Grant Lead Agency	Head Start Collaboration Office Location
Alabama	Department of Early Childhood Education	Same
California	Health and Human Services Agency	Department of Social Services
Colorado	Department of Human Services	Same
Connecticut	Office of Early Childhood	Same
Florida	Office of Early Learning	Same
Georgia	Department of Early Care and Learning	Same
Guam	Public Health and Senior Services	<i>No Head Start Collaboration Office</i>
Idaho	State Board of Education	Department of Health and Welfare
Illinois	Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development	Department of Human Services
Kansas	Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund/ Department of Education	Department of Children and Families, Economic and Employment Services
Louisiana	Department of Education	Same
Maryland	Department of Education	Same
Michigan	Department of Education	Same
Minnesota	Department of Education	Same
Missouri	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	University of Missouri Center for Family Policy and Research
Nebraska	Department of Health and Human Services	Department of Education
New Hampshire	University of New Hampshire	Department of Health and Human Services
New Jersey	Department of Children and Families	Department of Education
New York	Council on Children and Families	Same
North Carolina	Division of Child Development and Early Education	Department of Public Instruction
Oregon	Department of Education	Same
Puerto Rico	Administration for Integral Child Care and Development	Governor's Office
Rhode Island	Department of Human Services	Same
South Carolina	Department of Social Services	Same



State	PDG B-5 Renewal Grant Lead Agency	Head Start Collaboration Office Location
Virginia	Department of Education	Same
Washington	Department of Youth, Children and Families	Same
Wisconsin	Department of Children and Families	Same
Wyoming	WY Western States Learning Corporation	Department of Workforce Services

The HSCO directors did not report different levels of involvement in the PDG B-5 systems-building activities as a function of whether the HSCO was housed within the PDG B-5 lead agency. The data did suggest that in some cases, it may have been a bit easier to include HSCOs in planning and projects if they were located within the lead agencies. However, based on information from the focus group, the level of involvement ranged from low to high regardless of the location of the HSCOs and lead agencies. Other factors likely played a greater role. For example, the relationships of the parties involved and prior collaboration on projects before the grant seemed to be major contributors to the level of involvement. Some of the HSCO directors located in a different agency indicated that they had worked together with PDG B-5 directors prior to this grant, often on the state council or on other committees or work groups.

One HSCO director from a state in which the HSCO was located in a different entity stated:

I have the opportunity to work with a variety of colleagues from the multiple departments and agencies who have been collaborating on the PDG B-5 project these past several years. While my office is not in one of their departments, our relationships and longstanding history of collaborating on projects and issues facing our state's children and families makes this seem like another one of those projects—although mind you—a quite large and extremely important project! It is my pleasure to be an ambassador for Head Start and work on the team to build a better system for all young children and their families in our state.



What challenges did states report in partnering with HSCOs?

The review of the APPRs and the findings from the focus group showed that the state PDG B-5 project directors and the HSCO directors saw many benefits of working together, as reported in the next section. Nevertheless, they reported some challenges as well around the role of governance, collaboration, and limited commitment to engage with Head Start:

Governance:

- Two states were restructuring their division, which limited connections with the HSCOs.
- Two states found it difficult to get past the silos even when the HSCOs were in the same agencies. Individual groups stayed busy with their agendas and did not reach out to include others in their projects.
- Three states noted it was a challenge, in general, to find the appropriate role for HSCOs and Head Start. It appears in some states that the PDG B-5 lead chose not to reach out to find projects for HSCOs.

Collaboration tied to funding:

- One state reported that the PDG B-5 grant funds were viewed as being for everyone *except* Head Start because Head Start had its own funding.
- One HSCO director reported that she was involved only when a Head Start grantee received a subgrant from a local school district.

Limited commitment:

- One HSCO director reported that HSCO was involved in planning but now has to reach out to be involved in any activity. At this point, it is only “one-way communication.”
- Another HSCO director reported that it can be difficult for the state to understand the importance of involving a variety of Head Start representatives (the HSCO, local Head Start programs, and Head Start associations).

What strategies/activities did states use to increase Head Start involvement?

We used the renewal grant applications, the APPRs, and the focus group to identify activities and strategies states used to include Head Start in the PDG B-5 work. HSCO directors were part of the leadership teams or served on councils, boards, or workgroups. One PDG B-5 state agency lead commented, “The HSCO director helps ensure the design and implementation of the statewide [PDG] B-5 Strategic Plan includes Head Start and is representative of the children and families they serve.”



The PDG B-5 grantees reported the following activities/strategies that increased the engagement of Head Start in the PDG B-5 grant work.

- Aligning Head Start requirements with efforts to build or enhance comprehensive ECCE statewide systems:
 - Crosswalking goals of the comprehensive ECCE statewide system to the goals of the HSCO
 - Convening workgroups to include Head Start data in integrated data systems
 - Partnering state agencies and Head Start Associations to coordinate with programs to promote the ECCE system
- Working on PDG B-5 state teams and sharing Head Start materials and lessons learned on topics for which Head Start has been a leader:
 - Having Head Start personnel lead efforts in the development of transition materials and toolkits
 - Working together on school readiness committees
 - Having HSCO directors share materials on family engagement efforts
- Leveraging existing professional development and providing collaborative staff training:
 - Using PDG B-5 funds to help Head Start program staff become assessment trainers
 - Asking Head Start programs to serve as pilot sites on trauma-informed leadership training practices
 - Having Head Start lead an infant-toddler registered apprenticeship program
 - Helping to jointly develop universal competencies for coaches and overall infrastructure for coaching and professional development
- Supporting Head Start program applications and implementation:
 - HSCOs assisted Head Start programs in completing funding applications for state-funded preK programs
 - Working with tribal Head Start to become more involved in PDG B-5 activities
- Improving quality:
 - Using PDG B-5 funds to help Head Start become more involved with the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System
 - Sharing standards for comprehensive services so that Head Start can be used as a model for state services
 - Aligning program standards between subsidized early childhood programs and Head Start programs



- Coordinating eligibility and enrollment:
 - Serving together on a leadership team to develop a document on universal application and enrollment processes

The two quotes below (the first by an HSCO director and the second by a PDG B-5 lead) show the importance of PDG B-5 and HSCO staff working together to develop a comprehensive ECCE system.

“Access to training opportunities, support for quality in programs, and access to new, evidence-based practices has always been available to Head Start through the federal and regional network. Many of the PDG [B-5] priorities focus on providing very similar support and networks to private center and family home providers. With that gap in mind, the HSCO role is to observe, collect, and update Head Start programs on PDG [B-5] progress, as the grant provides new opportunities for local collaboration that would broadly benefit children and families of all backgrounds.”

“HSCO and PDG [B-5] will be working on the integration of collaborative agreements related to aspects associated with the [grant], such as family engagement, school readiness, early childhood, early intervention, and implementation of public policies. Through these activities, the integration of various early childhood sectors and other governmental and nonprofit agencies has been achieved, which allows for the initiation of a mixed service system that promotes best practices for the workforce, families, and children.”

Final Thoughts

Most states reported that the HSCO directors were involved from the beginning in the PDG B-5 work. In the APPRs, states expressed many positive thoughts about the work of the HSCOs, and the majority of the HSCO directors shared positive examples in the focus group of their involvement in the systems-building efforts. In the majority of the states, the HSCO directors were involved in leadership teams and brought the voice of Head Start to the planning efforts. They also supported the involvement of Head Start programs in some of the PDG B-5 initiatives. To ensure the HSCOs play a meaningful role in the comprehensive ECCE statewide systems-



building conversations, state leaders should make sure to involve not only HSCO directors, but also other Head Start personnel such as Regional Center Systems Specialists. These personnel can serve at the state level in planning, and local Head Start directors and teachers can also be encouraged to be involved at the local level in various initiatives.

Although some states reported challenges, the data show that Head Start is an important partner in almost all of the states that received a PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, regardless of whether or not the HSCO is located in the lead agency for PDG B-5. Reports from both state agency personnel and HSCO directors provide hope for even more involvement as the work moves forward. As one HSCO director stated:

“I am on the PDG B-5 leadership team and am involved in the decisions. It is a lot of work, but I am glad to be ALL IN. The ECCE systems building is what I was doing, and now it is actually being funded ... and now we are making more strides towards our goals.”

Reference

Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. (2022). *About Head Start Collaboration Offices*. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/about-head-start-collaboration-offices>



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This Center is funded by the U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services, Administration for
Children and Families, Office of Child Care.
Contract Number: HHSP2332015000411



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