

State Advisory Council for Early Education and Care

Proposal for Supplemental Funds

Goal 1: Objective 1.3., Activity 1.3.1. (Year 1-3)

Promote formal agreements between public schools and Head Start *and child care (added)* programs regarding transition for all children and their families, including children with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Goal 1: Objective 1.4., Activity 1.4.3. (Year 1 - 3)

Promote cultural sensitivity and outreach for minority and immigrant children through professional development

Proposed Activity: Implement the Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment through Stories (VIOLETS) Program which is a 12-week early childhood language program that promotes the development of pre-reading skills, oral language proficiency, and background knowledge for preschool-age children with language needs and English Language Learners. The program includes the presentation of 'core knowledge' themes that tie the book to state and/or national standards and a language awareness component in which pre-reading skills and concepts of print are introduced. Materials are available in English and Spanish. The project will be part of Maryland's new P to Grade 5 initiative in collaboration with the Breakthrough Center which represents the state's approach for local school system capacity building and school improvement.

Scope of the implementation: At a minimum, 20 selected quality child care and Head Start programs in Title 1 attendance areas, with a priority on Title 1 areas of low-performing schools. The criteria for selection include a) quality of program as defined in terms of participation in the credentialing, curriculum, and/or accreditation project; b) disproportionate high percentage of children from low-income families and/or English Language Learners; c) commitment of program to implement VIOLETS.

Conduct a one-day statewide training session each year for, at a minimum, 20 child care and Head Start teachers, introducing them to the implementation of VIOLETS. The implementation for each cohort of trained teachers will be enhanced by on-going coaching and will impact no less than 300 preschool-age children per year, and 900 children over three years. The impact of the second and third cohorts will be 600 and 300 children, respectively. Thus, the total participation of children in VIOLETS over three years will be 1,800 children.

Conduct a field evaluation to measure the effects on vocabulary and comprehension skills of children participating in the program and track

the children's school performance longitudinally through third grade.¹

Rationale:

The major focus of the Council's work will be improved analyses of school readiness data and a targeted approach to addressing the early life gap in high quality learning opportunities (see p.26 in the Application for State Advisory Council Funding). The most recent data of the report, *Children Entering School Ready to Learn – School Year 2009-10*² showed a statewide gap in school readiness skills for low income children (19 percent gap for "full readiness" in Language and Literacy) and English Language Learners (21 percent gap for "full readiness" in Language and Literacy). A well-implemented VIOLETS program within the scope of this proposal has the potential of significantly narrowing the school readiness gap and to improve the early reading and mathematical skills for young children who are at-risk of not meeting the state's proficiency standards for reading and mathematical in grade 3.

Background:

MSDE, in partnership with Ready at Five, embarked on the development of VIOLETS in 2008. The program was designed by Dr. Diane August, Senior Research Scientist, in response to the state's school readiness results from 2007-08 which showed a significant school readiness gap for English Language Learners. The State Board of Education charged MSDE to comprehensively address the readiness gap for Hispanic children and English Language Learners. Since then, the project has been piloted in prekindergarten classrooms at several suburban schools. Its evaluation, conducted by the University of Houston, shows significant effects on children's vocabulary and reading comprehension skills.

Costs:

Based on 20 teachers per cohort, the costs per teacher for the training and implementation of VIOLETS are \$1,913 which includes the costs for training, coaching, and the VIOLETS materials. Thus, the total costs are \$38,263 p.a. The annual costs for the field-based evaluation are \$500 per teacher, including orientation and administering a pre-and post-test on all participating children. Thus the total annual costs, impacting 20 teachers, for the field evaluation are \$30,000. The annual costs are, including facilities/meals, \$49,063, and the total federal funds requested for the three-year project are \$165,440 with a State match of \$386,027.

¹ MSDE commits to tracking and reporting on cohorts 2 and 3 beyond the grant period.

² The report uses the results of the MMSR Kindergarten Assessment (see for more information www.MDSchoolReadiness.org)