Project Title: The Next Step: Improving Program Quality and Child Outcomes in Maryland
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In January 2018, Maryland's highly influential *Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education* highlighted the need for the state to ensure that "all early childhood education programs, irrespective of whether they are provided by public agencies or private providers, are of high quality." Maryland has made significant progress toward this goal. Through the use of federal grants like *Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge* (RTT-ELC) and the former *Preschool Development Grants* (PDG) program, along with federal funding increases, the state has created a more coordinated, efficient, and impactful mixed-delivery system of high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs and services. Maryland has a consolidated governance structure within MSDE, which administers and coordinates a majority of the state's ECE programs, houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, and oversees the state and regional early childhood advisory councils. The state has taken bold actions to double child care subsidy income eligibility levels and increase provider reimbursement rates to expand parent choice and child access to early learning; implemented stricter licensing standards to ensure greater child health and safety; created one of the country's strongest quality measurement and improvement systems to promote excellence and share best practices; and coordinated early childhood family engagement supports and services through a nationally recognized family engagement framework.

However, significant needs remain. Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) data indicate only 45 percent of Maryland kindergarteners demonstrate overall readiness for school. Equally troubling, school readiness gaps exist by income, race/ethnicity, English proficiency, disability status, and county. At the system level, the state struggles to meet the demand for highly effective teachers, while the early childhood data system is in significant need of modernization, as it neither facilitates data-driven decision-making nor has the capacity to assign unique identifiers to support an unduplicated count of children in the early childhood system.

To move the system forward, this grant application presents a plan to engage in a comprehensive needs assessment/strategic planning process that will produce recommendations by consolidating data already gathered through numerous needs assessment and strategic planning processes across the state, as well as engage stakeholders in identifying additional needs. The proposed grant activities build on the state's current early childhood infrastructure to maximize parental choice, share best practices, and improve program quality across all settings. While supporting all children in the state, the grant will have a specific focus on promoting equity for children who are vulnerable or underserved, including children from low-income families, with disabilities/developmental delays, who are dual language learners, and who live in rural areas. The grant will produce system improvements that promote the healthy bodies, healthy minds, and foundational knowledge and skills young children need to succeed in school. Such system improvements will also provide parents with the resources they need as their children's first and most important teacher.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Maryland's B-5 Mixed-Delivery Description and Vision Statement

Maryland's relatively small geographic landscape is home to wealthy suburbs and poor inner-city neighborhoods; small coastal towns, densely populated urban areas, and rural counties; and a wide array of races and cultures from around the world.[1] The state's Birth-through-Age-Five Early Childhood State System (B-5 ECSS) is one of the most advanced in the country, with a coordinated governance structure; state and local Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs); a comprehensive early childhood assessment system; a statewide, validated quality rating and improvement system (QRIS); a trained team of early childhood mental health consultants; and workforce, program quality, and other supports that will be discussed throughout the application. Yet, while Maryland's cultural diversity and B-5 ECSS are considered strengths, differences in service delivery and child/family outcomes by program, income, race, English-language proficiency, disability status, and geography are key challenges facing the system. Maryland's vision for its mixed-delivery system addresses these disparities in service delivery and outcomes.

Maryland's vision for its B-5 ECSS is a well-coordinated and integrated system of programs, supports, and services where every child in the state has the opportunity to access a high-quality early childhood experience, arriving at school with a healthy body, healthy mind, and the foundational knowledge and skills needed to succeed; and that every family has access to the resources needed to be effective as their child's first and most important teacher and advocate. A child's access to quality early childhood experiences and the positive outcomes that result will no longer be contingent on income, race, zip code, disability status, nor English language proficiency.

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[1] Maryland Department of Health. *Language Diversity in Maryland.* Retrieved from: https://health.maryland.gov/mhhd/Documents/Language-Diversity-in-Maryland-Infographic.pdf

The sections that follow operationalize this vision and discuss how coordination, alignment, efficiency, and transitions will be improved in the state.

Maryland's B-5 Mixed Delivery System

Maryland is home to approximately 440,000 children birth through age five.[2] Children in early care and education (ECE) settings are cared for through a robust mixed-delivery system of nearly 12,000 different programs, providers, and settings. These include private and public school-based programs, Head Start grantees, licensed family child care (FCC) homes, center-based providers, informal relative-care providers, as well as other faith-based and community-based programs. Over 52,000 three- and four-year-old children are served in the state's mixed-delivery prekindergarten program, including over 26,600 children in public school settings, 21,600 children in centers, and over 4,600 children in FCC.[3] In addition, over 9,000 children birth to age five are cared for through nineteen Head Start programs, thirty-five Early Head Start programs, and three Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships, and there are nearly 4,000 children in employer-sponsored child care. However, the vast majority of children birth to age five in the state—over 300,000 children—are cared for in licensed child care programs and FCC homes.[4]

In addition to children in these different forms of care, Maryland serves 18,302 infants and toddlers through the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program or Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C, Early Intervention and 12,313 children through IDEA Part B, Section 619 (Preschool Special Education). The state serves 4,000 children and their families

[2] Estimate based on 2017 Maryland KIDS COUNT data derived from U.S. Census Bureau population estimates. Retrieved October 2, 2018 from: https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8376-child-population-by-age-group?loc=22&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/595,383,384,140/16972,16973

[3] Workman, S., Palaich, B., Wool, S. and Mitchell, A. (2016). *A Comprehensive Analysis of Prekindergarten in Maryland.* APA Consulting with Early Childhood Policy Research.

[4] Maryland Family Network. (2018). *Child Care Demographics*. Maryland Department of Education.

through the fifty-eight Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) and state-funded Home Visiting Programs.

Key policies and programs (enacted and implemented) that support the B-5 mixed-delivery system

This fiscal year, Maryland is receiving over $220 million in federal ECE funding. This includes $92.5 million in Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding that supports the state's quality improvement initiatives and provides child care subsidies for nearly 14,000 children in the state. The state's Head Start grantees receive over $96 million in federal funding. In addition, Maryland has received $60 million in Preschool Development Grants (PDG) funding over the last four years and has added $31.2 million in state match funding. Next year, the state will sustain the entire PDG grant with $26 million in state funds. The state received nearly $8 million in federal IDEA Part C funding and $6.5 million in IDEA Part B, Section 619 funding. Additionally, since 2010, the state has received over $41 million in formula and competitive grants for MIECHV.

In addition to this federal funding, Maryland invests heavily in the state's robust mixed-delivery system. In addition to meeting the $23.3 million of maintenance of effort and $30.4 million state match requirement for CCDBG, the state has invested $11.6 million in its Pre-K program to expand the eligibility threshold to 300 percent of poverty. The state provides $1.8 million in supplemental Head Start and Early Head Start funding, which will rise to $3 million next year, and an additional $10 million for Early Intervention. Maryland also provides $10.5 million to support quality initiatives, professional development, and the nationally recognized Judy Center Early Learning Hubs (hereafter referred to as Judy Centers), providing supports and services to Title I school communities. Finally, the state invests heavily in home visiting, spending

over $8 million across multiple agencies to provide additional home visiting services to at-risk communities.

Maryland also has generous philanthropic partners who collaborate closely with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and local jurisdictions on ECE projects. These include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, the J. Willard and Alice S. Marriot Foundation, and the Abell Foundation, among others. MSDE has partnered with the Maryland philanthropic community to support coordination and collaboration, most notably with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to establish the local ECACs discussed below.

In addition to these policies and funding, the state also has a number of programs that support coordination, stakeholder input, quality improvement, and performance evaluation. While not all of Maryland's system components can be described here, the components below are particularly important for the grant and will be heavily leveraged. The system components include:

<u>State and Local ECACs</u>: Maryland's state- and local-level coordinating bodies are an important part of the state's mixed-delivery system by promoting coordination, collaboration, efficiency, and quality enhancement across the state. The state ECAC is a thirty-four-member council, chaired by Dr. Karen B. Salmon, state superintendent of schools, and is comprised of representatives from the state's child-serving agencies, General Assembly, provider community, philanthropic organizations, advocacy groups, training and technical assistance providers, school districts, associations, and other stakeholder groups. The state ECAC coordinates efforts among ECE programs, conducts needs assessments, and develops a statewide strategic report regarding ECE programs.

In addition to the state ECAC, Maryland has created twenty-four local ECACs to represent each county and Baltimore City, which are modeled after the state ECAC. Each local ECAC is

charged with bringing awareness, education, and supports to young children, families, and their communities and developing action plans that address local needs to ensure all children are ready for school.

Maryland EXCELS (Excellence Counts in Early Learning and School-Age Care): Maryland EXCELS, the state's QRIS, awards ratings to participating licensed child care centers, public prekindergarten programs, and FCC homes based on nationally recognized quality standards and best practices. Maryland EXCELS is designed to increase awareness of the elements of high-quality ECE, to recognize and support providers who are meeting those standards, and to educate families and the community about the importance of high-quality ECE programs. Using a five-level rating system, Maryland EXCELS sets a standard for increasing the availability of high-quality ECE programs throughout the state. Equally important, Maryland EXCELS is at the center of the state's quality initiatives in the areas of Licensing and Compliance, Staff Qualifications and Professional Development, Accreditation and Rating Scales, Developmentally Appropriate Learning and Practice, and Administrative Policies and Practices. Over half (54 percent) of the state's licensed providers and 16 percent of school-based Pre-K programs are participating in the system.

Judy Centers: Across the state, there are currently fifty-four Judy Centers located in Title I school zones that act as a vehicle for local collaboration and coordination. Judy Centers are charged with coordinating prekindergarten; early intervention and preschool special education; private center-based and FCC homes; and family support services to deliver a wide spectrum of ECE and family support services. Judy Centers enter into Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the community agencies and organizations that are critical to meeting the needs of vulnerable children and families. Agencies and organizations typically include departments of social services, health

departments, Healthy Families, Head Start, Family Support Centers, adult education and public libraries. Judy Centers cast a wide net to expand the partnerships and engage others in their communities who can deliver necessary services for families whenever a gap is identified, including local businesses.

Family Support Centers (FSCs): Maryland has a network of twenty-five FSCs that provide free, comprehensive services to families, targeting parents and their children from birth through age three. Funded through private-public partnerships, FSCs promote the optimal development of young children through the provision of parent/child activities and a wide range of child development services.

Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs): Every community in Maryland is served by one of twelve regional CCRCs. These centers make up the Maryland Child Care Resource Network (MCCRN), which provides leadership and services designed to improve the quality, availability, and affordability of child care in communities across the state. The CCRCs that comprise the network provide training opportunities and technical assistance to ECE providers throughout Maryland.

Ready for Kindergarten: Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (R4K): Funded through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) and the U.S. Department of Education's Enhanced Assessment Grant, Maryland's comprehensive assessment system includes the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) and Early Learning Assessment (ELA). The KRA is perhaps the country's most advanced kindergarten entry assessment, containing selected response items, observational items, and performance tasks. The assessment was developed by WestEd and the Johns Hopkins University in partnership with the state of Ohio and was guided by a thirteen-member National Technical Advisory Committee of national experts.

The annual KRA has strong psychometric properties.[5] The KRA provides a snapshot of school readiness levels for all incoming kindergarteners by income, race, and other demographic characteristics, and makes it possible to confidently determine if entering students have the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for kindergarten. The KRA also identifies the individual needs of children, enabling teachers to make informed instructional decisions.

The ELA is designed to be used with children from thirty-six to seventy-two months of age in the natural ECE settings (classroom or FCC home). The observational, formative assessment is given multiple times throughout the year in order to track a child's growth, individualize learning opportunities, plan for intervention, engage in real-time instructional planning, and ensure that all children are on the path for kindergarten readiness. The assessment helps teachers document, analyze, and make instructional decisions based on the information they collect. Teachers receive training via face-to-face sessions with additional support from online modules.

Progress and Success:

As a result of the state's RTT-ELC grant, prior PDG grant, the recent increases in the CCDBG funding, and state investments, Maryland has made significant progress toward its vision for a high-quality mixed-delivery system. Key successes include the doubling of the state's income eligibility thresholds for child care subsidy and dramatically increasing provider reimbursement rates. These increases, in addition to new licensing requirements that help keep more children safe and healthy in ECE settings and support quality with lower ratios and teacher requirements, maximize parental choice and are a considered a major success in the state.

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[5] MSDE. (2018). *Ready for Kindergarten: The 2017-2018 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Technical Report.* See: *https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/3/kra_technical_report_2017-2018.pdf*

In addition, the state has expanded the number of Judy Centers from thirteen in 2001 to fifty-four in 2018 using federal, state, and local blended funding, providing coordinated, comprehensive services to more Title I communities. Also, the ability to understand the school readiness of children by demographic characteristics using the KRA is a major success and helpful to the state's coordination and planning efforts.

Finally, Maryland has become a national leader in early childhood family engagement. The state has developed an early childhood family engagement framework and toolkit that sets common family engagement goals for all communities, provides strategies to meet those goals, outlines resources to support implementation of the strategies, and identifies model family engagement practices throughout the state. The state has also created a dedicated family engagement website through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Maryland provides family engagement technical assistance to other states as the lead through a project with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

Hurdles and Challenges:

Although significant progress has been made in several areas of Maryland's ECE system building process, the state is still working toward its ultimate vision for a universal coordinated mixed-delivery system. A key challenge for the state is the low percentage of children demonstrating school readiness when they enter kindergarten and the large gaps that exist by race, income, disability status, English proficiency, and geography.

A major challenge with the state ECE system involves the state's early childhood data system—the Child Care Assistance Tracking System (CCATS)—which is aging and built on a custom data platform that limits its ability to adapt to new federal regulations and the state's evolving data needs. To support the state's ECE providers and promote parental choice, the data

system must store and integrate numerous pieces of information associated with licensing, subsidy eligibility and reimbursements, educator qualifications, and quality. In Maryland, access to all the pieces of information necessary to make fundamental determinations about the subsidy reimbursement rate, which is based on a number of factors, including providers' Maryland EXCELS quality ratings, involves a cumbersome and inefficient process within CCATS. More importantly, the lack of programming flexibility rules out the possibility of creating a unified application for services that would allow a family to apply, and be determined eligible for, multiple services across state agencies at one time. This is clearly a hurdle to the state's vision of a more unified and efficient system and an unnecessary burden on families. Also, Maryland has a unique identifier system for K-12 that it is proposing to utilize in the ECE system. This will require a data system modernization. Finally, the customized data platform makes it significantly more difficult to keep up with the latest security threats. The state's plans for data system improvement to promote parent choice and knowledge are discussed in Activity 3.

Another barrier that will be addressed in the application is the state's struggle to provide access to high-quality natural and inclusive early childhood programs for children with disabilities and development delays. The state's plans to overcome this barrier through the implementation of the regional technical assistance model are discussed under Activity 3. Given these successes, challenges, and hurdles, Maryland's mixed-delivery vision discussed is particularly relevant, and the state will continue to move toward this vision in collaboration with its state partners. MSDE's partners and the opportunities for collaboration, coordination, and sharing best practices are identified and discussed in the activity sections of the application and logic model section. The sections also discuss how MSDE will provide systematic statewide technical assistance through

the quality assurance specialists as part of Maryland EXCELS and the state CCRCs, as well as through the Judy Centers and Early Learning Coordinators Network.

Activity 1: B-5 Needs Assessment

In contrast to the state's vision, child and family outcomes in Maryland are predicted by birth circumstances and whether or not family have access to quality programs and services. It is because of these challenges that the state places a distinct emphasis on assessing, understanding, and responding to the needs of its diverse population. For example, the state's KRA provides an annual assessment of readiness on four critical domains of development and learning: social-emotional development; language/literacy; mathematics; and physical well-being and motor development. The KRA data has uncovered a low overall school readiness rate (45 percent) with dramatic differences by race, income, English-language proficiency, disability status, and geography.[6]

Early in 2018, preliminary findings were released from a massive, comprehensive statewide needs assessment and strategic planning process for Maryland's entire educational system, including the B-5 ECSS. Required by statute, the *Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education* (also known as the Kirwan Commission) began a needs assessment that started in the fall of 2016 and concluded late in 2017 to develop policy recommendations related to the state's education funding formulas and areas of the education system that will enable Maryland to perform at a world-class level. As part of this needs assessment and strategic planning process, the Commission held seventeen full-day meetings, four public hearings, and four evening

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[6] Ready at Five Maryland. (2018). *Readiness Matters, Equity Matters: The 2017-18 Kindergarten Readiness Report.* *https://www.readyatfive.org/school-readiness-data/readiness-matters-2018/1499-readiness-matters-equity-matters-maryland-s-2017-2018-kindergarten-readiness-assessment-report.html*

events to obtain as much input as possible from parents, teachers, students, and other members of the public related to the state's educational needs.

In addition to the Commission, various agencies and organizations across the state have conducted needs assessments. As part of developing this application, the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) within MSDE used its most recent state ECAC meeting and a community needs survey to engage a full range of stakeholders and partners across the state in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) application process. This stakeholder engagement supported MSDE in crafting the B-5 mixed-delivery vision above and helped the department to better understand the full range of needs assessments that had been recently conducted by state agencies, localities, and non-governmental partners. The wealth of information in these needs assessments is extraordinary, and focused on a wide range of areas, including: the supply and demand of child care across the state; the children and families served by the MIECHV program; the child care subsidy system; the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences across the state; the quality of implementation of Maryland EXCELS; the needs of the state's local ECACs; an assessment of the state's Pre-K program; Head Start coordination and collaboration issues; and the needs of the state's early intervention and early childhood special education programs. Appendix A (in file 2) provides a list and brief description of the most relevant of these needs assessments.

Given the sheer number of recent needs assessments conducted in the state, the plan for developing an effective statewide B-5 needs assessment will begin by leveraging all of the state's currently available needs assessment data. In addition to these assessments, the state will also examine the twenty-four agreements that are required between the state's Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and Head Start programs (and other early childhood programs as applicable), as

well as research conducted at the state and local level on transition supports and gaps between the B-5 ECSS and K-12 system in the state. The plan for developing an overall effective statewide B-5 needs assessment using all of this data includes is discussed below. (The steps are organized in **Projects 1a to 1f** in the budget justification section**)**.

Step 1. Develop a protocol by which to analyze all currently existing needs assessments in a systematic way, including looking across the assessments to understand the following: (1) geography covered (state/local, and if local, which localities); (2) target population addressed; (3) policies/programs covered; (4) barriers to funding, the provision of high-quality early care, education supports, or coordination/collaboration issues uncovered; (5) and recommendations to address needs of the target population and overcome barriers.

Step 2. Host focus groups with affected stakeholders, including Head Start programs and the vulnerable families, to add context to the findings and determine whether there are additional needs or gaps to be addressed.

Step 3. Review findings with state administrative and advocacy partners serving the target populations to: (1) align the state's vision and logic model to the results; (2) identify gaps in data, research, or coordination related to the quality and availability of programming and supports while considering the needs of families working, looking for work, or in job training; and (3) determine scope of final needs assessment report.

Step 4. Work with researchers to develop a methodology to efficiently and effectively conduct an analysis of current data and additional data collection and analysis of needs as necessary.

Step 5. Conduct the supplemental needs assessment work.

Step 6. Summarize needs assessment findings and solicit final feedback from the state ECAC.

Step 7. Finalize needs assessment report.

There are two areas in which the state is certain that additional needs assessment work will be required. The first is an assessment of the state's Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). As discussed later in the mixed-delivery system section, a critical hurdle for the state is the shortage of high-quality teachers to serve in early care and education programs. To assess IHEs, the state will use the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory*, created by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California at Berkeley **(Project 1d)**. The tool provided critical data to support a coordinated and comprehensive professional preparation and development system for the early care and education workforce. The *Inventory* captures variations in IHE programming and capacity, and will allow the state to identify the gaps and opportunities in the available offerings and support strategic planning to improve the state's early childhood workforce.

A second area where additional needs assessment information will be required is in the area of facilities (**Project 1e**). To assess facilities and address facilities-related concerns, the state will analyze child care licensing data and conduct a facilities survey. The state will consult with national non-profit organizations like Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the Illinois Facilities Fund, which have done similar assessments in other states, to ensure that the state is obtaining the appropriate information to assess and address facilities-related concerns.

The steps above and supplemental needs assessments will allow the state more holistically understand the needs of it vulnerable population, the practices of the state's Head Start programs (and other ECE programs) as they transition children into the K-12 system, and issues of collaboration between programs and services, and in service delivery. A discussion of how the state's plan to develop and track measurable indicators of progress that align with the state's vision and logic model will be discussed in the Program Performance Evaluation Section.

Coordination challenges emerge from a lack of a consistent definitions of key early childhood terms across programs in Maryland's B-5 ECSS. From a systems coordination perspective, the de facto definition of "vulnerable" refers to those children and families who are eligible to access the different programs and services in the state. As such, "vulnerable" is defined both by income and "category" across the state's early childhood programs, and in many cases is driven by federally mandated eligibility thresholds and categories. Head Start, for example, serves children from families at or below 100 percent of the FPL, as well as different categories of children and families, including homeless children, children in foster care, children with disabilities, and children receiving Supplement Security Income (SSI) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. Maryland's child care subsidy program has a different definition of vulnerable (i.e., different eligibility criteria), serving families who are working or employed in an approved training program or attending school, and are also recipients of Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), SSI, or with incomes under 65 percent of state median income (285 percent of the FPL).

For the state Pre-K program, LEAs are required to provide, at minimum, half-day prekindergarten to children from families up to 185 percent of the FPL. The Pre-K Expansion program expands eligibility to 300 percent of the FPL. Children who are identified as most at risk of failing to meet the state's academic achievement standards are eligible to participate in the Title I preschool programs offered by the LEAs.

The IDEA programs serve children who are identified as needing early intervention or special education services by meeting certain categorical eligibility requirements as defined by federal law.

In other parts of the system, such as child assessment, the KRA analyzes children by income, English-language proficiency, race, and disability status, highlighting these characteristics of "vulnerable" children as affecting their well-being. An important part of the needs assessment process will involve obtaining a consensus definition of "vulnerable" to help determine the scope of the needs assessment process.

Similarly, "quality" in Maryland is defined by the different program standards of the state's ECE programs. However, the state uses Maryland EXCELS to bring the disparate programs under a common definition of quality. Level 5, the highest level in Maryland EXCELS, defines a high level of quality as including director and teacher credentials; developmental screenings for all children in the program; program accreditation; participation in other programs that support children, such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program; cultural and linguistically sensitive curriculum and activities; limited screen time; and the use of the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS) rating scale to measure teacher-child interactions and promote continuous quality improvement. All program types are eligible to participate in Maryland EXCELS, and as of October 2018, 72 percent of child care centers, 40 percent of family child care homes, and 16 percent of school-based public prekindergarten programs were participating in the voluntary Maryland EXCELS program.

"Availability" in Maryland is defined by the licensed capacity of the state's various child care programs and school settings by different age groupings compared to the demand for child care, which is measured by the number of children under age six in the different age groupings. The Maryland Family Network (MFN), which operates the statewide MCCRN, publishes an annual report on the supply of regulated care in the state, past and anticipated growth patterns of centers and family child care providers, and demand for child care, which helps define availability.

"Rural" is defined by statute under the Annotated Code of Maryland and includes eighteen of the twenty-four Maryland jurisdictions. Rather than being defined by population density, Maryland's definition of rural takes into consideration geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and lack of access to and availability of health care. The following eighteen Maryland jurisdictions fall under the state definition of rural: Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, St. Mary's, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico and Worcester Counties.

Maryland's plan for an unduplicated count of children being served in existing programs/ awaiting services

To obtain an unduplicated count of children across all of the state's ECE programs, the state will use a matching protocol that is part of the functionality of *Business Object* software by SAP. The state has the enrollment lists of the ECE programs in the state, including the child care subsidy program, the prekindergarten program, IDEA Part C and Part B, Section 619, and the state-funded Home Visiting program. The state will work with local Head Start grantees and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH)'s MIECHV program to include their enrollment lists. An unduplicated count will be obtained by merging these lists and comparing the children across five common fields: (1) Legal First Name; (2) Legal Last Name; (3) Date of Birth; (4) Gender; and (5) Racial/Ethnic Group. The software can create a number of reports, including an unduplicated count of children across the programs, the percentage of children in more than one program, and the percentage of children in different combinations of programs (e.g., Head Start and prekindergarten, prekindergarten and subsidy, etc.).

For the unduplicated count of children awaiting services, the state will obtain waiting lists information from the Head Start and other programs (as applicable) at the same time as the

enrollment lists. MSDE currently does not have a waiting list for the subsidy program, but CCATS has the capacity to maintain a list of children awaiting a child care subsidy if necessary. Similar to the unduplicated count of children receiving services, the waiting list information will be run through the *Business Object* software to obtain an unduplicated count of children awaiting services and whether children are on multiple waiting lists.

Maryland's unduplicated count of children and plan for the B-5 statewide needs assessment will set a strong foundation for the strategic planning process.

Activity 2: B-5 Strategic Plan

MSDE will use the strategic planning process to operationalize the state's vision and chart a clear path toward a well-coordinated, aligned, and integrated system of high-quality programs, supports, and services for all children and families. As discussed, state agencies, as well as state- and local-level organizations, have dedicated significant financial and human resources to assess the needs of Maryland's B-5 ECSS and recommend improvements. These plans, however, focus only on parts of the B-5 ECSS in isolation and have never taken a comprehensive look at the system. Through the needs assessment process described in Activity 1, the state will identify and fill gaps in its understanding of the current landscape. Next, the strategic planning process will bring together the recommendations of the state's strategic plans and supplement it with new ideas based on additional needs uncovered in Activity 1. The result of the strategic planning process, which is described in detail below, will be a comprehensive plan with recommended activities, a timeline, a capacity analysis, and examination of the barriers and supports available to successfully move the state toward its ultimate vision.

The strategic planning process will draw on principles of design thinking (e.g., "empathy for the client") and implementation science (e.g., capacity "drivers," stakeholder buy-in, etc.) to

ensure that the recommendations are impactful, can be implemented with fidelity, and are developed with the needs, resources, and preferences of vulnerable children and families in mind. In addition to providing recommendations for the state's B-5 ECSS, including new partnerships to support coordination, quality, and effective transitions, the plan will also include: **(1)** An assessment of the barriers to achieving the recommendations and ways to overcome those barriers; **(2)** An assessment of the capacity of the state system and current partnerships—including those between Head Start and other early childhood programs and LEAs, as well as between other entities within the state that support quality and transitions between the early childhood system and K-12—and the enhancements to system capacity and partnerships that will be necessary to support implementation; **(3)** An implementation plan for the recommendations developed in light of the state's current partnerships, barriers, and capacity; **(4)** A communication plan to promote stakeholder buy-in and to explain why and how the recommendations will be implemented, and how they will better serve children and families; and **(5)** A monitoring plan with indicators that track the implementation of activities and progress toward goals.

The strategic plan will be created using the steps below. (These can be found under **Project 2** in the budget justification section):

1. **Review of existing strategic plan recommendations.** The first step in the strategic planning process will be to leverage the strategic plans that have already been created in the state. The current strategic plans will be analyzed using a similar framework to the needs assessment, where the recommendations will be organized in light of the population addressed, policy area, organizations involved, and other key criteria. The analysis will also assess how relevant and impactful each recommendation is in light of the state's vision, goals, and theory of change outlined in the logic model (discussed later in the application).

2. **Review new needs assessment findings from Activity 1.** The goal of Activity 1 is to identify gaps in the state's current needs assessments and conduct additional data analysis and new data collection as necessary to better understand the needs. These needs will be identified and used to drive the process for making recommendations in the final strategic plan.

3. **Conduct a literature review and best practice search to meet the needs.** After the full range of needs are identified, a literature review and best practice search will be conducted to ensure that the recommendations in current strategic plans reflect the latest research and best practices in the field, and that the recommendations identified to address the new needs generated from Activity 1 also meet that standard. Research and best practices from a number of national technical assistance centers, including the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO), the BUILD Initiative, the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning, the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, the National Center on Child Health and Wellness, and other centers will be reviewed.

4. **Engage the state's early childhood stakeholders.** Once initial recommendations have been developed as a result of the literature review and best practice search, a series of eight regional listening sessions across the state will be hosted to obtain stakeholder input. The sessions will focus on ensuring that the initial strategic plan recommendations meet the needs from various stakeholder perspectives, explaining how the recommendations would be implemented in practice, and discussing the resources that would be necessary to support successful implementation. These meetings will bring together a wide range of early childhood stakeholders, including Head Start and other early childhood programs, LEAs, the state Judy Centers, the Maryland Family Network, libraries, the ECE provider community, the state's

disabilities community, advocates, parents, and other stakeholders.

5. **Create a draft strategic plan informed by stakeholder input.** After the listening sessions, a draft of the strategic plan will be created that contains the components described above. As noted, in addition to outlining the recommendations, an important role of the strategic planning process will be to promote stakeholder buy-in. As such, the draft document will include an implementation plan and communications plan based on stakeholder input.

6. **Present draft statewide strategic plan to the state ECAC.** The state ECAC will be actively involved throughout the strategic planning process, including the community regional meetings. After being developed, the draft statewide strategic plan will be presented to the ECAC for its review and input. Work groups will be formed to support implementation and monitor progress.

7. **Finalize plan based on ECAC input and submit and submit to the Departments for approval.** Based on the input from the ECAC, the strategic plan will be finalized and submitted formally for approval.

The strategic planning process described above will incorporate the work of the state in meeting the requirements of the CCDBG Act. To date, the state has revised its child care licensing requirements, which are currently out for public comment, to meet the new federal regulations pertaining to background checks, health and safety, and pre-service requirements for child care workers. In addition, the state has updated its regulations for the state subsidy system, which will be reviewed by the Maryland State Board of Education, and which include changes to allow for twelve-month eligibility and legislation passed at the state level to increase provider reimbursement rates. The state will also use the strategic planning process to seek input into the revision of Maryland EXCELS to support increased participation and improve outcomes for

children. The state will also be revising its early childhood educator credentialing standards to align them with the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission, which call for higher staff qualifications.

Finally, it is important to note that the needs assessment and strategic planning process will be facilitated by the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC), a non-profit organization located in Maryland. MAEC is particularly well-suited to engage in this work given its understanding of the Maryland system, focus on equity, and emphasis on working with fathers and diverse families.

Activity 3: Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge

Maximizing parental choice and knowledge—particularly for vulnerable families—has always been a fundamental goal of Maryland's efforts to improve program quality and create a more coordinated, aligned, and efficient mixed-delivery B-5 ECSS. Maximizing parental choice and knowledge requires a number of core system elements, including: **(1)** A wide range of high-quality, easily accessible ECE programs that vary in program size, type, setting, and pedagogical philosophy. **(2)** A quality measurement and improvement system that accurately measures the quality of ECE programs and provides supports to incentivize and increase quality. **(3)** A system for communicating to families in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way the importance of choosing high-quality ECE and disseminating information to families and other interested stakeholders about the quality of individual ECE programs. **(4)** Financial supports for parents to offset the cost of care so they can afford the high-quality option they prefer for their child.

As discussed in the *B-5 Mixed-Delivery System Description and Vision Statement* section, Maryland has these system components in place. The PDG B-5 grant will allow the state to build on this foundation. The strategies and activities presented below will help the state achieve its vision by bringing more providers into the state's quality rating and improvement system, providing additional professional development to improve program quality and support culturally

and linguistically sensitive settings, modernizing the data system to make it easier to access the state's early childhood programs and other social services that are needed to support the children served, and increasing parental knowledge and expertise.

Activities to maximize parental choice and knowledge

Project 3a. Bringing more providers into Maryland EXCELS: While Maryland EXCELS effectively measures and communicates program quality to families, the state is constantly working to bring more providers into the quality rating and improvement system. Currently, the state has 4,479 providers in the system, which represents 54 percent of all licensed providers and 16 percent of school-based prekindergarten programs. Accordingly, an important activity funded under this B-5 PDG grant will be to provide capacity-building services that will support more home-, center-, and school-based programs in communities that serve a high number of vulnerable children to obtain a published Maryland EXCELS rating and help currently rated programs in those communities move up one or more quality levels.

This increased participation in Maryland EXCELS will be achieved through high-quality technical assistance conducted by the state's CCRCs and will include coaching, training, and the use of targeted incentives/resources. Specifically, the capacity-building by the CCRCs will include: (1) site visits to programs and a quality assessment; (2) a determination of provider interest and commitment to participation in Maryland EXCELS; (3) a written plan with initial steps to improve the quality; (4) an agreement to participate in training and intensive coaching; (5) additional supports with a focus on infant/toddler training for programs already serving or who want to serve children from birth to age three; (6) training and one-on-one coaching in the center or home; and (7) management of "case files" on each provider served.

CCRCs are uniquely positioned to work closely with child care providers to move them up the Maryland EXCELS rating scale. They have extensive knowledge of child development and learning; a strong understanding of the state's child care operations and regulations; established relationships and credibility among the provider community; and close oversight by MFN to ensure effective, efficient service delivery. MFN and the local CCRCs will work in collaboration with MSDE Quality Assurance Specialists, Center for Technology in Education/Johns Hopkins University staff, Judy Centers, and others working to improve the quality of early care and education in Maryland.

Project 3b. Supporting culturally and linguistically sensitive ECE settings: One of the fastest growing populations in Maryland consists of children of parents who speak a language other than English at home (also known as Dual Language Learners or DLLs). The language learning and developmental experiences of this population of children, both at home and in ECE settings, are critical to their future success and to the outcomes achieved by the Maryland educational system. To support parents who speak a home language other than English and their children, the state will work with WIDA (formerly World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment). MSDE is already a member-state of the K-12 WIDA consortium. By implementing the WIDA Early Years program, the state will be able to align the B-5 and K-12 systems, better supporting transitions and expanding access to a comprehensive, research-based system of language standards, assessments, professional learning, and educator assistance focused specifically on language development at home and in ECE settings.

Participation in the WIDA Early Years program will also provide a number of supports to the state's ECE programs, as well as build cultural and linguistic competencies among stakeholders and leaders both inside and outside of state government. Key activities include: (1) revising the

state's vision for supporting multilingual children; (2) implementation of WIDA Early Years resources; (3) integrating WIDA Early Language Development Standards with the state's early learning standards; (4) networking with other states implementing the programs; and (5) providing high-quality professional learning opportunities and resources to their ECE workforce.

Project 3c. Implementation of Together-Juntos: In addition to the work implemented by WIDA, the state will also partner with MAEC to serve as a statewide parent technical assistance (TA) center. The center will train the state's early childhood administrators to infuse an equity perspective into their work in order to ensure that all early childhood programs administered by MSDE are administered in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner. Given that leaders set the tone for the entire administrative system, it is important that MSDE leadership be trained in culturally responsive practice. As part of the state's coordination efforts, MAEC will provide culturally responsive leadership training to forty staff across MSDE, which includes administrators of the child care subsidy program, licensing, Maryland EXCELS, state Pre-K program, IDEA Parts C and B, Section 619, Judy Centers, and other programs, including those operated by MSDE's sister agencies. A subset of these state administrators will receive additional training in a train-the-trainer model so they can build the knowledge of front-line staff on culturally responsive practices.

Project 3d. Quality Early Childhood Media Campaign: The state will partner with Maryland Public Television (MPT) to produce targeted, well-crafted media messages that increase parental awareness of the importance of ECE in building a strong foundation for their children. Message testing will be conducted with diverse parent focus groups across the state to determine the most effective strategies for reaching diverse families and to gain insights in how to tailor messages that resonate with fathers and hard-to-reach populations. In addition to on-air messaging through public service announcements, MPT will develop a multi-platform approach to producing content that

can be delivered online, using social media, and by leveraging existing local and statewide communication networks. MPT will produce four 15-second spots in multiple languages that will air approximately seventy times over a 2-3-month period. The spots will be available for online distribution and will be an important way in which MSDE works to make the families of vulnerable children aware of child care subsidies and other important support services.

Collaboration with IDEA programs

Within MSDE, DEC collaborates closely with the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES) to ensure that families who have concerns about their child's development are connected to Part C Early Intervention or Part B, Section 619, Preschool Special Education. DEI/SES has established a statewide B-5 comprehensive system of coordinated services for children with developmental delays and disabilities, and their families. Consistent with the requirements of the IDEA, the DEI/SES, in partnership with Local Infants and Toddlers Programs (LITP), local school system preschool special education services, the Maryland School for the Blind, and the Maryland School for the Deaf, conducts public awareness activities (i.e., Child Find) on the availability of and access to early intervention and preschool special education services for: (1) families of young children; (2) physicians and pediatricians; (3) publicly funded prekindergarten programs; (4) family and center-based child care providers; and (5) other private early care and education programs that may be unique to a jurisdiction.

DEC has included the use of developmental screenings in Maryland EXCELS as an important quality indicator and to incentivize the use of developmental screenings in early childhood programs across the state. Working in coordination with DEC, DEI/SES has worked to expand and simplify the referral process for ECE providers. Local ECE providers can refer families to the DEI/SES or their local Child Find office to request an evaluation of a child in the areas of

development about which parents have concerns. The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program (MITP) has developed, and will soon launch, an online referral tool that will allow parents, family members, and other community referral sources to easily begin the referral process. As child care providers across the state increase the use of developmental screenings, the online referral will offer an additional mechanism for access to early intervention services and opportunities for collaboration to support families.

To support these efforts, PDG B-5 grant funding (budgeted in the maximizing parent choice and knowledge section of the budget justification) will be used to expand the *Regionalization for Results* (**Project 3e.**) TA model. Through this technical assistance model, leaders from LITP, preschool special education, ECE programs, and other community partners in targeted communities will receive TA and resources to intentionally collaborate to create and build opportunities for all children to access high-quality inclusive ECE providers. The funding will allow for the training of designated local program staff in evidence-based peer-to-peer reflective coaching practices, and provide professional development for ECE providers in universally designed instruction, formative assessment, and evidence-based social-emotional interventions paired with ongoing reflective coaching provided by trained coaches. The project will be an important way in which the state works to counter the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences experienced by the state's vulnerable child population.

Collaboration with state agency administering CCDF, CCR&R, and early learning councils

As discussed in the *B-5 Mixed Delivery* section, Maryland has a consolidated governance structure in which MSDE houses the state Head Start Collaboration Office; administers the CCDF, the state prekindergarten program, IDEA Parts C and B, Section 619, Title I preschool programs, the state Home Visiting Program, and the Judy Centers; and oversees funding for the MCCRN and

state and local ECACs. This governance structure ensures collaboration and efficient coordination of the programs to support efforts to maximize parental choice. In addition, MSDE and the MIECHV program are members of the Maryland Home Visiting Coalition.

Empowering parents to facilitate smooth transitions and parent education initiatives

As noted, Maryland is a national leader in statewide family engagement. Using RTT-ELC funding, the state developed *The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland's Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children.* The *Framework* has united state agencies and other state-level organizations, ECE technical assistance providers, advocates, and other stakeholders around a common definition of family engagement for families with young children. The *Framework* provides goals for the state's family engagement initiatives, strategies to support those goals, and highlights effective family engagement practices that are being used across the state. Key goals articulated in the *Framework* include supporting family well-being, creating collaborative relationships with families to empower them in their role as a child's first teacher, and supporting families in all of the transitions that occur in early childhood. The state has completed a toolkit, technology plan, and communications plan, as well as a dedicated family engagement website, to support implementation of the *Framework*. As a national leader in this area, Maryland is providing technical assistance to other states through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in partnership with CCSSO.

Family engagement is key to achieving Maryland's vision for its B-5 ECSS. Accordingly, the PDG B-5 grant will fund a number of family engagement activities, including:

Project 3f. A family engagement summit: MSDE will bring together parents, providers, teachers, program coordinators, and other stakeholders to share best practices on how to coordinate and collaborate to promote family engagement and build community partnerships. Over 300 members

of Maryland's early care and education community will work with national and local ECE experts who will share insights on a variety of topics. The summit will have an equity and implicit bias focus with sessions led by Dr. Rosemarie Allen, a national expert on culturally responsive practices.

Project 3g. Strengthening Families: In an effort to promote practices that ensure children and families thrive and to build protective factors that help reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect, the state will expand its Strengthening Families model. In the model, parents and other caregivers learn about the protective factors through Parent Cafés— two-hour, structured get-togethers that engage parents and other adults in meaningful conversations about what matters most to families with young children and how to build protective factors at home and in early childhood settings. Through the grant, forty Parent Cafés will be hosted across the state.

Project 3h. Learning Parties: Developed by Ready at Five, Learning Parties are interactive, hands-on, parent/child parties that promote young children's development. Based on the belief that parents are their child's first teacher, the parties include a parent training component to support parenting skills and a child development component where children engage in child-directed activities aligned with the specific concepts discussed at the parent portion of the Learning Party. In addition, the parties include parent-child activities and a home connection and learning library. Parents and children are given a "homework assignment," as well as a variety of books, developmentally appropriate materials, and educational toys to start an early learning library in their home. Two new Learning Parties—one on media interactions and another on financial literacy—will be implemented in the two-generational approach to learning.

Project 3i. Hospital bags outreach: In an effort to support the most important transition in early childhood (birth), MSDE will collaborate with the MDH's Center for Immunization to redesign

and enhance the annual distribution of 85,000 bags to mothers giving birth at all hospitals in Maryland. The new bags would include an eighteen-month child development calendar and information on selecting quality child care, applying for a child care subsidy, early literacy activities, and information and resources on comprehensive family and child programs and services. The information will be provided in multiple language to ensure they are accessible to all families across the state. This statewide approach to ECE information dissemination will ensure that the families of vulnerable children receive information about accessing important ECE supports and other information starting at the birth of their child.

Project 3j. *Data system modernization to promote coordination, alignment, and parental choice and knowledge*

Perhaps the most important way in which MSDE will collaborate and coordinate with a wide range of ECE programs and services will be through a significant modernization of its data system. The ability to connect families and their children to a range of services; to support families in making informed choices about ECE providers; to utilize state funding in a more efficient way; to meet CCDF requirements; and to track children in different ECE programs and through their transition into the K-12 system depends on an integrated, well-conceived, and high-functioning data system. Currently, the state's ECE data system is the weakest aspect of its B-5 ECSS and the most pressing barrier to coordination and collaboration. The funding from the B-5 ECSS grant will allow the state to take a giant step forward in its effort to: **(1)** create a unified application that includes eligibility determination for a child care subsidy, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TANF, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Pre-K; **(2)** develop an ECE portal that allows parents, providers, trainers, and other authorized staff to easily access data (licensing

information, Maryland EXCELS ratings, teacher credentials, subsidy level, attendance, etc.) and interact with MSDE; and **(3)** connect to the state's K-12 State Assigned Student Identifier (SASID) system to assign a unique identifier when a child enrolls with an ECE provider to allow for an unduplicated count of children and to track progress through the ECE and K-12 systems. The funding from this grant will allow for the development of the ECE portal; hosting "greenhouse" collaboration and idea-generating sessions to ensure that the data system is responsive to the state's diverse agencies, parents, and other stakeholders; and the design of the foundational system architecture.

Activity 4: Sharing Best Practices among State ECE Providers

MSDE has an established process of sharing best practices with the state's diverse ECE providers. It has strong relationships with the state's Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) and partnerships with (or frequently accesses materials developed by) the major national technical assistance centers, including the CEELO, CCSSO, National Governors Association (NGA), National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA), National Head Start Centers, and others. For example, the state is receiving TA through CCSSO's State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards, and is working with NGA and CCSSO to strengthen the state's early child workforce system with a team that includes the Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA), Governor's Children's Cabinet, and IHE.

MSDE also has a well-developed TA infrastructure that provides support to the state's B-5 ECCS through a continuous feedback loop with providers. This TA infrastructure is MSDE's most important tool in disseminating best practices related to quality enhancements, collaboration, and transitions that are generated and/or identified by national TA centers and organizations.

MSDE provides systematic TA to local communities and community-based organizations using a TA system that consists of eight coordinated components:

Quality Assurance Specialists: To support providers in Maryland EXCELS, MSDE currently employs fifteen Quality Assurance Specialists that work with programs in the state's QRIS. Quality Assurance Specialists use the EXCELS standards to assess where each program is on the pathway to quality. To support goal setting, Quality Assurance Specialists help the program assess and evaluate their current practices and policies against national best practice and Maryland EXCELS standards. Quality Assurance Specialists must have a Bachelor's degree in education, educational administration, or a closely related field, and two years of professional administrative or educational experience in or affiliated with an educational program.

Johns Hopkins University Program Coordinators: Through a grant from MSDE, Johns Hopkins University employs Program Coordinators who are assigned a caseload of providers participating in Maryland EXCELS. Program Coordinators provide review and rating services for programs submitting evidence in pursuit of a quality rating. These professionals also serve as facilitators for programs as they interact with the Maryland EXCELS system, providing guidance on how to improve quality in their programs. Program Coordinators work closely with MSDE Quality Assurance Specialists to support participating programs in meeting, maintaining, and improving their quality rating.

Pre-K Program Manager and Monitors: MSDE employs a Pre-K manager and four Pre-K monitors to provide technical assistance to the public school and community-based Preschool Development Grantees across the state. Besides monitoring and ongoing support visits, the Pre-K monitors host regional three-day trainings on literacy, math, and the classroom environment from content experts and provide one-day workshops on topics of interest or need. These trainings are open to all ECE providers in the system. Pre-K monitors also facilitate collaboration between kindergarten teachers in the public school and the community-based programs in their feeder area with classroom visits,

mentoring, and shared professional learning. The Pre-K monitors have Bachelor's degrees and practical experience in the early childhood field.

Training and TA to Early Childhood Supervisors: MSDE's Early Learning Branch provides technical assistance to the Early Childhood Supervisor in each of the state's twenty-four school districts. Trainings are held three times a year, and there are annual support visits to the district. As part of this technical assistance and through a partnership with Ready at Five, two Early Childhood Symposiums are held each year for both community-based and public school stakeholders. The Early Learning Branch also collaborates with the MSDE Division of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning and DEI/SES to ensure that professional learning opportunities, such as the two-day regional summer Educator Symposiums, provide content specific to ECE-kindergarten transitions, best practices on inclusive settings, and support for Pre-K teachers.

Judy Center Partnership Specialists: Judy Center Partnership Specialists support the fifty-four Judy Centers throughout Maryland through on-site monitoring visits at least once a year and differentiated TA provided to ensure Judy Center standards are met and maintained. There are monthly professional development opportunities offered by MSDE-approved trainers coordinated by an MSDE Training Approval Coordinator. MSDE also provides a four-day annual conference for all Judy Center staff on grant writing guidance, updates on standards, training, and information regarding ECE best practices, including addressing the diverse needs of vulnerable populations.

MCCRN: The state funds twenty-three staff in twelve regional CCRCs in the MCCRN that train on various topics and provide early childhood mental health consultation. Trainers must have a degree in early childhood education or a related field; experience in a licensed child care setting; the ability to work with adults; and strong computer skills. The MCCRN provides targeted and

customized support using professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients. The MCCRN also provide TA to community groups and others, including business groups, the local ECACs, and local governments. The TA activities are recorded through a Technical Assistance Data Tracking System in order to keep track of the work being done. The MCCRN Network operates *LOCATE: Child Care,* which is a free referral service with detailed information on all regulated child care in Maryland through an online website or by phone with access for families who are speakers of languages other than English. The trained referral specialists help families identify care based on their preferences for program type, location, and cost, as well as their needs for special education services and language support.

ELA Trainers: MSDE provides technical assistance to ECE providers on the state's early learning standards and how to collect and use formative assessment information to tailor instruction to the needs of each child. ELA trainers supply kits and professional development to more than fifty child care programs in the state, including seventeen Head Start sites, to serve nearly 1,200 children each year. These trainers provide joint professional learning opportunities/events between school districts and child care programs on analyzing and using KRA data to improve instruction and support the transition from the B-5 ECSS to kindergarten.

The Child Care Credentialing and Professional Development Fund (CCCPDF) program: Funding is provided for state colleges and universities to fund CCCPDF Coordinators to support teachers pursuing an Associate's or Bachelor's degree in early childhood education. In addition, MSDE credentialing staff provide TA to child care centers and family child care providers as needed to support the application process and regulations for all programs and grants within the Credential Branch.

Best practice topics to be disseminated through the TA system

While MSDE uses its TA system to disseminate best practices on a broad range of topics and issues, the PDG B-5 grant offers a unique opportunity to focus on three key priority areas. In addition to those initiatives that maximize parental choice and knowledge described in the previous section, MSDE will use this opportunity to support the dissemination of the following best practices:

Project 4a. Leadership academy for principals and ECE directors: Sharing best practices and providing professional opportunities to build the capacity of ECE directors and school leaders is critical to Maryland's vision. The leadership academy will support ECE leaders—in programs and schools—to effectively promote the learning and development of the children they serve and aid it the seamless transition across systems. MSDE will partner with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) to develop a job-embedded, sustained, and on-going professional learning experiences to acquire the practical skills necessary to address the academic, social-emotional, and physical needs of all young children.

Project 4b. Inquiry-based coaching and resources for the Children Study Their World (CSW) curriculum: The CSW curriculum and CSW Professional Development Resources were developed by faculty and staff in the Center for Early Childhood Education and Intervention at the University of Maryland in coordination with MSDE staff. The curriculum and materials are available free of charge via an iTunesU course app to all licensed child care programs and public Pre-K teachers throughout Maryland. The resources accessible to providers and teachers from their phones, tablets, or personal computers. The curriculum and associated resources were piloted in sixty-one Pre-K and center-based classrooms and two family child care homes with great success. Funding from the PDG B-5 grant will support the development of a comprehensive infrastructure to support

and sustain the implementation of the CSW curriculum in 400 additional classrooms. This best practice approach includes professional development for teachers and curriculum coaches, additional supports for family child care providers, and a free app for parents and caregivers that supports home-program connections and family engagement.

Project 4c. Kennedy Krieger 0-3 Evidence-Based Intervention: MSDE continues to address the challenge of access to high-quality natural and inclusive early childhood programs for children with disabilities. Research documents that the biggest barriers to natural and inclusive learning opportunities are the *attitudes and beliefs* of providers, so MSDE will implement a best practice intervention that provides evidence-based professional development focused on inclusive child care settings for children with disabilities. This intervention aims to improve ECE providers' knowledge, skill, and self-efficacy related to implementing evidenced-base instructional practices within inclusive, community-based child care settings.

Project 4d. Piloting *LENA Grow*: Improving the quality of infant and toddler classrooms has also been a challenge in Maryland. Accordingly, MSDE will pilot *LENA Grow*, an innovative professional development program that uses technology to measure and improve the "talk environment" in infant and toddler classrooms. The program includes "talk pedometers" that measure the amount of interactive talk that each child in a classroom is exposed to, data reports, supporting materials, and professional development. This intervention is particularly important in supporting Maryland's most vulnerable children, given the research that shows that children from low-income households hear significantly fewer words than their higher-income peers. The program provides objective measurement of children's language environments without introducing additional assessments and can help improve family engagement by making parents more aware of the power of early talk. Teachers in the pilot will receive regular feedback about

levels of interactive talk in the classroom and structured coaching sessions that use the data and provide concrete methods for increasing conversation without increasing teacher burden. Maryland will implement and evaluate *LENA Grow* in two fifteen-classroom cohorts for twelve weeks.

Funding totals for these activities are included in the budget justification section.

Activity 5: Improving Overall Quality of ECE Programs/Providers/Services

The needs assessment and strategic planning conducted under Activities 1 and 2 of the grant will inform the quality activities discussed below. As indicated in the timeline section, it is anticipated that the needs assessment and strategic planning process will take six months to complete, leaving six months remaining to focus on the quality activities. From a state perspective, this timing corresponds with the end of the state fiscal year (June 30). As such, closing out the needs assessment and strategic planning by the end of June and starting the quality improvement initiatives in July will be seamless from the perspective of the organizations contracted to do the work. The quality improvement activities proposed below will: (1) utilize key components of the state's coordination and collaboration infrastructure; (2) build on the quality investments through RTT-ELC and the former PDG grant and be responsive to the findings of the needs assessment and aligned with the strategic plan; and (3) be completed within the remaining grant period. These activities include:

Project 5a. Local ECAC quality improvement grants: The local ECACs are the state's county-level coordinating bodies that were originally funded by the state's RTT-ELC grant. Through these quality improvement grants, each local ECAC will respond to the findings and recommendations of the needs assessment and strategic plan with quality activities that are tailored for their areas. Grant funds will be provided to meet professional development needs that may be revealed, strengthen community engagement activities to increase provider quality, or support quality

improvement in other areas including transitions, establishing communities of practice, and initiatives that are most needed in the area.

Project 5b. Judy Center Best Practices Grants: Judy Centers are the state's local collaborating entities charged with promoting coordination of the disparate early childhood programs in communities with a large number of vulnerable children. RTT-ELC and PDG funding, as well as private and local contributions, supported the expansion of Judy Centers across the state. Similar to the local ECACs, each Judy Center will receive a grant to respond to the findings of the needs assessment and strategic plan with quality improvement activities. These activities are targeted at the community level, and will have a particular emphasis on the transition from ECE to the K-12 systems. Grant funds will help Judy Centers better fulfill their mission of coordinating different community organizations and agencies to meet the comprehensive needs of vulnerable families in the community.

Project 5c. Library Grants: Maryland's public libraries play a vital role in the state B-5 ECSS as one of the few connection points to vulnerable children who are not yet in an ECE setting. Maryland's public libraries have transformed beyond books and literacy to become community anchors that connect families to services and with each other. Maryland librarians are trained to support and boost individual potential, ingenuity, and achievement in the community. Libraries received RTT-ELC funding to create Family Advisory Councils and currently collaborate with schools, Judy Centers, Head Start, and other community programs. Libraries provide free learning opportunities, resources, and services to everyone in their communities so that all young children can begin developing their early literacy and critical thinking skills. Small grants for each library system, based on needs surveys, will help in this effort to engage and connect more families to not only library services, but also to the rich array of other programs and services in each community.

Funding for each of these activities is discussed in the budget justification section.

Organizational Capacity and Management

MSDE will be the state entity that administers the funding and manages the required grant activities (See Governor Hogan's letter in File 2). The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) within MSDE will take the lead on administering the grant. Maryland's consolidated early childhood governance structure makes DEC the appropriate state entity to administer the grant. DEC is responsible for most of the state's early childhood programs and services, with the exception of MIECHV, which is housed at the MDH, and IDEA Parts C and B, Section 619 programs, which are administered by MSDE's DEI/SES. DEC has responsibility for child care licensing and Maryland EXCELS; the child care subsidy program; the state's Pre-K program and Preschool Expansion Grant; the credentialing of early childhood professionals; and the state's workforce and professional development/training system. DEC also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, oversees the early childhood data system, and funds the MCCRN, Judy Centers, FSC, early childhood mental health consultant network, and a number of other smaller early childhood initiatives.

DEC has a track record of strong federal grant implementation, having successfully managed an RTT-ELC grant and PDG. DEC has exceptional organizational capacity and a seasoned management team. DEC includes the Office of Child Care, Early Learning Branch, Collaboration and Program Improvement Branch, Fiscal Management Unit, and Research and Data Unit.

DEC works collaboratively across multiple offices at MSDE to coordinate early learning programs and services with programs funded through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and other federal- and state-funded programs (See organizational chart in File 2). DEC has a strong relationship with DEI/SES, co-administering the Maryland Home Visiting Program. DEC and

DEI/SES also partner with MDH on the Maryland Home Visiting Coordinating Council. DEC leadership serves on the Maryland State Interagency Coordinating Council, for which DEI/SES is the lead. In addition, DEC serves as the lead on the state ECAC, which includes DEI/SES, MDH, and the Maryland Department of Human Services (MDHS), as well as other ECE stakeholders from across the state. DEC also plays a lead role on the state's Family Engagement Coalition that guided the development of the *Framework* to better coordinate the state's family engagement efforts.

Nearly all of the activities proposed under the grant will be the ultimate responsibility of DEC with DEI/SES, MHD, and the MDHS participating in a strong collaborative partnership. DEC has the organizational capacity to administer the funding and manage the development and sustainability of the grant activities. DEC staff have experience doing similar work and will be successful in implementing the grant activities. The RTT-ELC and PDG were of similar scope and size to what is proposed in this grant application and a number of key staff who worked on the other grants will oversee the activities proposed here. Key staff on the project include:

Steven R. Hicks, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Early Childhood: Prior to his appointment at DEC, Mr. Hicks was Executive Director of the non-profit *Ready at Five.* He previously served as Senior Policy Advisor at the U.S. Department of Education and has vast experience with federal grants management. An early childhood educator for over twenty years, Mr. Hicks is a nationally board-certified teacher in early childhood and holds a Master's degree in early childhood and primary education and a Bachelor's degree in economics. He will directly oversee the needs assessment and strategic planning process with the support of the research staff highlighted below. Mr. Hicks will oversee the entire grant and be supported by the following staff who will have responsibility for the other specific projects.

Jennifer Nizer, Office of Child Care Director, DEC: Ms. Nizer has over thirty-one years in the early childhood field and has been a teacher's assistant, teacher, certified kindergarten teacher and director of early childhood programs throughout her career. Ms. Nizer was the Director at Johns Hopkins Bayview's Child Development Center, a NAEYC accredited program, for over fourteen years and was the president of the Maryland State Child Care Association, where she was a tireless advocate for child care centers and providers throughout the state. Ms. Nizer holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree from Towson University in early childhood education. She will have primary responsibility for (with the support of additional staff that will be hired) the WIDA Early Years Project, Maryland EXCELS expansion, LENA Grow, and Kennedy-Krieger 0-3 intervention (see budget justification).

Cynthia La Marca Lessner, Collaboration and Program Improvement Branch Chief, DEC: Ms. La Marca Lessner has over twenty years of experience in early childhood education and supported the implementation of the state's RTT-ELC grant. Prior to her work at MSDE, she worked in various positions including teacher's assistant, teacher, and director. Ms. La Marca Lessner has over fourteen years of experience working with Head Start and worked as the Mental Health and Disabilities Coordinator for Howard County Head Start for ten years. This role required her to work closely with various community services agencies and LEAs to coordinate systems for children and families. Ms. La Marca Lessner has a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins in early childhood/special education. She will have primary responsibility for (with the support of additional staff that will be hired) the following activities: Together-Juntos, Learning Parties, Strengthening Families, Family Engagement Summit, as well as the ECACs, Judy Centers, and Library Grants (see budget justification).

Judith Walker, Early Learning Branch Chief, DEC: As head of the state Pre-K program, Ms. Walker plays a key role in the implementation of the state PDG grant. She has forty-one years of educational experience including teaching kindergarten and serving as an elementary principal in several Title I schools. She also served as President of the Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals before becoming the Early Learning Branch Chief. Ms. Walker holds a Master's degree in early childhood education and a Bachelor's degree in elementary education. She will have responsibility for the coaching and resources for CSW Curriculum expansion.

DEC also has the organizational capacity and staffing to implement the data system modernization project. This major activity under the grant will be led by **Carol Walter, PMP,** who is technical manager for the development and operation of CCATS and the portal. Ms. Walter had more than a decade of experience leading system development at the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) before coming to MSDE in 2009 as a Senior Project Manager to remediate and stabilize CCATS. At DLLR, she managed in-house development and contracts on both mainframe and web systems supporting unemployment insurance benefits, employer contributions, appeals, job bank, workforce development, safety, and financial regulations. Before transitioning to IT management, she led special projects for employment and training, including national demonstration projects for Unemployment Insurance Profiling and One Stop Career Centers, and played a key role in the creation of the U.S. Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Information Technology Support Center. Ms. Walter began her career with the state of Maryland in 1976 managing grants under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. She has a Master's of Science in information system management and is a certified Project Management Professional.

Ms. Walter will be assisted by **Ms. Amber Green.** Ms. Green has worked with Maryland's Office of Child Care program and supporting systems in a variety of roles for over fifteen years. Ms. Green brings an exhaustive understanding of CCATS, having experience with the system since the creation and development of proposed system flows and navigational processes as part of the preliminary design review for CCATS Phase II. Throughout the ongoing operation of CCATS, Ms. Green has served as a Documentation Specialist, Senior Business Analyst, Functional Team Lead, Technical Trainer, Test Manager, and Help Desk Lead. She currently serves as the CCATS Application Support/Help Desk Manager. Prior to her work on CCATS, Ms. Green was a doctoral student and educator at the University of Maryland-College Park in women's studies.

DEC also has the fiscal, administrative, and performance management capacity to effectively administer the grant funds. DEC has a Fiscal Management Unit that has successfully managed multiple federal grants. The unit is managed by **Donna Pennewill, Fiscal Management Unit Director at DEC,** who has over twenty-one years of experience administering grants in compliance with federal and state requirements. She is currently responsible for the development of conformable fiscal reporting systems for various projects and funding streams. In addition, she is responsible for a full range of program management duties that include providing oversight for the planning, designing, reporting, analysis, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of fiscal projects. Mrs. Pennewill has a Bachelor's of business administration in finance from the University of Baltimore.

The research and data unit is headed by **Dr. Charlie Mitchell**. Dr. Mitchell specializes in early childhood development and policy with an emphasis on quantitative and computational methods. Dr. Mitchell's past work includes examining out-of-school-time program disparities in in San Antonio, working on early education policy at the Baltimore Education Research

Consortium's Early Education Data Collaborative, and investigating the impacts of a STEM intervention on elementary school students. Assisting Dr. Mitchell is **Kenneth Blackman**, a research statistician trained at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Mr. Blackman's work includes evaluating the effectiveness of mandatory driving under the influence (DUI) programs by analyzing participants' changes in attitudes towards drinking and driving, and their subsequent driving records.

In addition to these DEC key staff members, Mr. Hicks will collaborate closely with his counterpart at DEI/SES, **Marcella Franczkowski, Assistant State Superintendent for the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services.** Ms. Franczkowski's professional career in public service as an administrator and educator spans more than three decades. She was appointed by the Maryland State Board of Education to her current role in July 2011 and is responsible for the provision of statewide programmatic and fiscal leadership for Maryland's early intervention and special education and related services, birth through age twenty-one. She also served for three years as the program manager and branch chief for Maryland's Infants and Toddlers and Preschool Special Education Programs.

Finally, in addition to MSDE staff, the program performance evaluation will be supported by a number of researchers at universities across the state. These include:

Steve Sheldon, Assistant Director and Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Education. Dr. Sheldon is the assistant director of the Center for School, Family and Community Partnerships. He specializes in family and community engagement and program evaluation. As a professor, he teaches graduate-level courses about family and community engagement, and he works with the Seattle Public Schools to help middle and high schools engage families around the transition to ninth grade. He is also a co-author of several books related to

family engagement partnerships, including *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (3rd Edition)* and *Principals Matter: A Guide to School, Family, and Community Partnerships.*

Project Timeline and Milestones

Table 1 below provides a monthly breakdown of the different activities that will be completed as part of the grant. As noted in the table, the needs assessment and strategic planning process will begin immediately and carry through the first six months of the year. The analysis of the current needs assessments and strategic plans will be conducted in the first two months of the grant. Any supplemental needs assessment work will be conducted in months 2-4 with the needs assessment work completed by the end of month four. This is a reasonable timeframe given the breadth of the current needs assessment data, as noted in *Activity 1*. As such, the supplemental data collection and analysis should be relatively minor and not require an extended period of time. After the analysis of current strategic plans is completed in months one and two, the needs assessment data completed by the end of month four will be used to complete the strategic planning process in months 4-6. The needs assessment and strategic planning processes will be completed by the end of month six, allowing the quality initiatives to start at the beginning of month seven, as indicated in the table.

Given the size and scope of the project conducted under *Activities 3* and *4*, most will run the entire grant year. The largest project in the grant—the modernization of the data system—will run the full twelve months and include a number of subtasks that will be completed throughout the year. These subtasks will run on concurrent tracks and include:

- Child Care Enrollment and Reporting System pilot, including the development of an interface with the K-12 unique identifier system and point of entry attendance system (months 1-12)

- Unduplicated count analysis (months 1-3 to correspond with the needs assessment work)

- "Greenhouse" collaboration and idea-generating sessions (months 1-3)

- Prepare architectural design for unified application based on Greenhouse sessions (months 4-12)

The family engagement summit will take place in month seven of the grant. For other projects in *Activities 3* and *4*, start-up will occur in the first quarter with implementation beginning no later than month four and carrying through the rest of the year. This is a reasonable timeline and commensurate with the scope of the work, as it allows time for sub-grants and contracts to be awarded (months one and two) and ample time to implement and complete the work. MSDE has well-established relationships with the partners who will implement the work, and MSDE staff and its partners have experience implementing such work under larger federal grants like RTT-ELC and PDG. These will be "accelerating factors" that support the rationale of the timeline proposed.

The activities for improving overall quality will begin in month seven of the grant after the needs assessment and strategic plan are completed. This will allow six months of remaining time to implement the quality improvement activities. Six months is a reasonable timeframe in which to implement the quality improvement activities because they are being implemented by three strong system components and established partners—the local ECACs, the Judy Centers, and the Maryland Association of Public Library Administrators (MAPLA). As noted, the start of the quality initiatives (July 1, 2019) corresponds to the beginning of the state's new fiscal year, and

Table 1: Timeline by Grant Project

Activity	Description	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Activity 1: Needs Assessment	Analysis of current needs assessments (Project 1a)	X	X										
	Stakeholder input (Project 1b.-1c.)	X	X										
	Supplement needs assessment work (Projects 1d.-1e.)			X	X	X							
	ECAC review and finalize				X								
Activity 2: Strategic Planning	Current strategic plan review (Project 2)	X	X										
	Review needs assessment findings for Activity 1					X	X	X					
	Literature and best practice review					X	X	X					
	Engage stakeholders/regional meetings				X	X							
	Create draft strategic plan							X	X				
	ECAC review and finalize							X	X				
Activity 3: Parental Choice and Knowledge	Maryland EXCELS Expansion (Project 3a.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	WIDA Early Years Program (Project 3b.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Together-Juntos (Project 3c.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Quality Early Childhood Media Campaign (Project 3d.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	IDEA Collaboration/Regionalization for Results (Project 3e.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Family Engagement Summit (Project 3f.)							X					
	Strengthening Families (Project 3g.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Learning Parties (Project 3h.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Hospital bag outreach (Project 3i.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Data system modernization (Project 3j.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Activity 4: Best Practice	Leadership academy (Project 4a.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Curriculum PD (Project 4b.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Kennedy-Krieger study (Project 4c.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	LENA Grow (Project 4d.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Activity 5: Quality	Local ECAC quality grants (Project 5a.)							X	X	X	X	X	X
	Judy Center expansion (Project 5b.)							X	X	X	X	X	X
	Library grant (Project 5c.)							X	X	X	X	X	X
PPEP	Program Performance Evaluation Plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

MSDE will be able to allocate funding to the partners quickly. Three partners will be a part of the both needs assessment and strategic planning process and later projects, so they will be able to react quickly to the findings as they create specific plans for quality improvement activities at the county and community level.

DEC uses Microsoft Project, so progress toward the project milestones will be documented through this project management software.

Program Performance Evaluation Plan

MSDE has a plan for program performance evaluation that will drive continuous quality improvement (CQI). There are three overarching goals to Maryland's program performance plan:

1. To ensure the MSDE is a good steward of federal funding by tracking how funds are spent and assuring that the state receives significant value in services for expenditures.

2. To understand whether the funded activities achieved the anticipated outcomes.

3. To support a CQI process that will: (a) identify new activities that better meet the needs of the target population; (b) refine the current activities to better address the needs; or (c) scale the proposed activities so that they have a wider-reaching impact.

To meet these goals, MSDE will utilize three different types of performance measures:

1. Financial measures: MSDE's grants management system will be used to track how the funding is spent and whether subcontractors are meeting their milestones with quality deliverables that are on time and within their budgets.

2. Process measures: MSDE will measure whether the activities proposed are implemented with fidelity.

3. Outcome measures: MSDE will measure the impact of the activity on the target population, provider, or agency.

How MSDE will use these measures to meet its performance plan goals is described below.

Description of inputs—organizational profile, key staff, budget, and other resources

The foundation of performance measurement is an understanding the current capacity of the entities implementing the activities and baseline data on the outcomes that MSDE wants to improve. The current capacity of the MSDE, including organizational capacity and key staff, is described in the *Organizational Capacity and Management* section of the application, and the link between the inputs, grant activities, and the anticipated outcomes are outlined in the *Logic Model/Outcomes* section. The budget for the program evaluation can be found in the *Budget and Budget Justification* section.

With regard to baseline data, Steps 4 and 5 of the needs assessment process are designed to better understand the extent to which MSDE has baseline data and to support the data collection effort for any outcomes in which MSDE does not currently have this data.

How inputs, processes, and outcomes will be measured

The inputs, processes, and outcomes will be measured using the following performance evaluation plan:

Step 1: Review anticipated outcomes of grant activities

The first step in the performance evaluation plan is to finalize and clearly articulate MSDE's anticipated outcomes for each grant activity. The activities under the *Maximizing Parent Choice and Knowledge* and *Best Practices* activities have a specific scope (e.g., number of provider or families touched) and intensity (e.g., number of trainings) that are expected to have an impact on either a system component, ECE provider, or family/child. The activities under *Quality Improvement* are intentionally more general so that they can be responsive to the findings of the needs assessment and strategic planning process.

Step 2: With the support of the evaluation team (in-house and contracted researchers/evaluators) and federal technical assistance providers, finalize metrics to measure anticipated outcomes

MSDE will use the three types of outcome measures discussed above to evaluate each activity in the grant. With the evaluation team and federal technical assistance providers, MSDE will update and refine measures for each activity. Table 2 (Performance Indicators by Project) provides potential measures for each activity that will provide a starting point for finalizing the evaluation measures that will be used. For example, under the expansion of Maryland EXCELS activity, the <u>financial measure</u> will track the money provided to the MFN and the Scope of Work (SOW) to provide technical assistance to providers serving vulnerable children; <u>the process measure</u> will track the number of providers receiving technical assistance and the amount and type of technical assistance provided; and the <u>outcome measure</u> will track how many of the providers who received technical assistance followed through to receive a published star rating in Maryland EXCELS (or improved their rating). The use of the financial measures will ensure that funding from the grant is used as

Table 2: Performance Indicators by Project

Activity	Task Description	Financial Measure	Process Measure	Outcome Measure
Activity 1: Needs Assessment	Needs Assessment	Funding allocated, clear grantee SOW/reporting requirements, procurement procedures/accounting polices followed, compliance monitoring	Successful implementation of needs assessment inventory, gap analysis, and supplemental data collection	Completed need assessment document
Activity 2: Strategic Plan	Strategic Plan	See above	Successful implementation of current strategic plans, needs assessment review, lit review and best practice search, etc.	Published statewide strategic plan with recommendations
Activity 3: Parental Choice and Knowledge	EXCELS Expansion	See above	# of providers supported with TA, number of TA contacts	# of new programs with published or increased rating
	WIDA Early Years Program	See above	Programs accessing Early Years Resources	+ change in provider staff attitudes/practices
	Together-Juntos	See above	# of MSDE staff trained/number of trainings	+ change in MSDE staff attitudes/practices
	Media Campaign	See above	# of spots created and aired	Attitude change among viewers
	Regionalization for Results	See above	# of local leaders trained	Increase in # of inclusive child care settings
	Family Engagement Summit	See above	# of participants at the Summit	+ Summit evaluations; attitude change re: racial equity and culturally/linguistically sensitive practice
	Strengthening Families	See above	# of parent cafes and attendance	Attitude change

	Hospital Bag Outreach	See above	Inclusion of DEC materials in hospital bags	+ subsidy take-up rates among families with infants
Activity 4: Best Practice	LENA Grow pilot	See above	# of classrooms implementing technology and professional development	+ in # words heard and conversational turns in pilot classrooms
	State curriculum training for four-year-old classrooms	See above	+ in # of teachers utilizing curriculum and resources	+ in # of teachers implementing with fidelity
	Kennedy-Krieger intervention	See above	# of child care providers trained	+ in inclusive birth-to-3 child care settings
	Leadership academy for principals and ECE directors	See above	Creation of professional development for principals and ECE directors	# of effective ECE-K transition practices disseminated
Activity 5: Quality	Local ECAC quality grants	See above.	Creation of high-quality plan based on needs assessment	TBD based on needs assessment/plan
	Judy Center expansion	See above.	Creation of high-quality plan based on needs assessment	TBD based needs assessment/plan
	Library grants	See above.	Creation of high-quality plan based on needs assessment	TBD based on needs assessment/plan

intended; the process measures will help MSDE understand the fidelity of implementation; and the outcome measures will help MSDE understand what has been achieved through the activities. The process and outcome measures are particularly important for the CQI process because it allows MSDE to understand whether an activity achieved its desired outcome, and if not, to understand whether the lack of an outcome was caused by unsuccessful implementation or an activity that was not properly aligned to the needs of the target population. As such, both measures will be used to refine the logic model and activities.

The outcome measures are directly aligned with Maryland's vision and logic model. If Maryland's vision were to ultimately be achieved, stronger system coordination would ensure all vulnerable children would be in the highest level of quality ECE programs as measured by Maryland EXCELS; all MSDE staff would be exemplars of culturally and linguistically sensitive practices; all infant and toddler classrooms would have rich talk environments; every ECE classroom would be an inclusive setting; and every parent would have the knowledge and information to be their child's first and best teacher and be able to make informed choices about their child's ECE.

Step 3: Establish data collection processes for metrics

MSDE and its implementing partners have data systems in place that can capture a number of the process and outcome measures. For example, the MSDE's CCATs system can capture increased participation in the child care subsidy system; whether new providers received published ratings in Maryland EXCELS; and whether participating providers move up one or more quality levels. MFN, WIDA, and MAEC have systems to track their technical assistance offerings, which are important process measures. For the other indicators, MSDE will work with the evaluation team to identify how best to measure the key indicators and collect and analyze the relevant data.

Step 4: Collect and analyze data

Once the indicators and data collection methods are established, the evaluation team will collect and analyze the data to determine the impact of the activities.

Step 5: Refine logic model and quality activities

At the end of the grant period, the data will be analyzed to get an indication of which activities are working, which need to be refined, and which need to be replaced with more effective interventions. While it will be difficult to discern child outcomes in one grant year, the process and outcome measure should give a good indication of the impact of the activities on different system components during that time, which would lead to stronger child outcomes.

Potential obstacles for implementing the program performance evaluation and how those obstacles will be addressed.

Implementation of the activities identified in the program performance evaluation will be challenging given the short amount of time available in the overall grant timeline. After outcomes from each grant activity are clearly articulated, we anticipate time will be required to successfully finalize metrics to measure the activities, establish data collection processes for the metrics, complete data collection and analysis, and refine the logic model and quality activities as part of the research process. To overcome these obstacles, MSDE will start working on refining the evaluation plan immediately after submitting the application in anticipation of a grant award. This will allow for additional time to begin working on the five steps outlined in the process prior to the award to ensure successful implementation of the program performance evaluation plan.

Logic Model/Expected Outcomes

The figure on page 57 presents a logic model that outlines the conceptual framework for the grant and connects the state and regional community infrastructure, the long-term outcomes, and project outputs with the activities for achieving them. The grant builds upon the state's strong

infrastructure while addressing the needs that remain among the target population and within the state's B-5 ECSS. As discussed previously, the state's vision and goals for the grant address specific needs related to child outcomes, including the low overall school-readiness rate, as well as school readiness gaps among Black and Latino children, children from the state's poorest counties, children with disabilities, and children who are dual language learners. While achieving these outcomes will not be realized fully in one grant year, the activities outlined will work to move the state closer to these long-term outcomes by driving increased coordination and collaboration; beginning the process of simplifying the user experience within the B-5 ECSS; improving the quality ECE providers serving vulnerable children; and promoting stronger parental choice and knowledge of ECE; and increasing parental resources. A description of the connections between the activities, outputs, and long-term goals is below.

Inputs: state and local system components

On the far left of the logic model are the state and local system components (inputs) upon which the grant will build. The first system component is the state's currently existing coordinating entities, which include the state's ECAC, the Maryland State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC), and the Maryland Family Engagement Coalition.

The second set of state-level system components are the partnering state agencies, which include, in addition to MSDE, DHS, which administers the TANF, SNAP, the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, Child Protective Services, and Child Support; the MDH, which administers the MIECHV program, Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP), and WIC; and, the and Department of Health Behavioral Health Administration, which administers Mental Health Services.

MARYLAND PDG B-5 LOGIC MODEL

INPUTS: ECE SYSTEM COMPONENTS		ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
State	**Regional/Community**			
State Coordinating Entities	Local and community coordinating entities	Needs Assessment/Strategic Plan	**Short Term** Stronger state/local coordinating bodies	**Healthy Body**
State agencies, programs, and services	Early Childhood Care and Education Programs	Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge Activities	Coordinated TA system New enrollment and reporting system	**Healthy Mind**
State-level non-governmental partners and stakeholders	Family Support and Resource Centers	Sharing Best Practice Activities	Foundational architecture for data system modernization Stronger family engagement practices/parental knowledge and skill	**Knowledge and Skills**
State-level data system		Quality Improvement Activities	More inclusive child care classrooms More providers in EXCELS **Long Term** Modernized data system ECSS more culturally/linguistically sensitive	**Family Resources**

The third state-level system component is the state's non-governmental partners including the Maryland Head Start Association, Ready at Five, MFN, MSCCA, MAPLA, MAEC, WIDA, the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the state IHE.

The last state-level system component on which the grant will build is in CCCATS, the state's current data system, which houses information on the state licensing, Maryland EXCELS, the subsidy program, and teacher credentialing.

In addition to the state-level infrastructure, elements of the local-level infrastructure will also be leveraged. This infrastructure includes local and community coordinating entities like the local ECACs and Judy Centers, as well as the state's ECE programs, local CCRCs, and FSCs. The activities that will be funded as part of this grant will leverage one or more of the current state and local system components.

Alignment/linkage of the grant activities to the short-term outputs/outcomes

The grant activities are discussed in detail throughout the application. In Table 3 below, the activities are aligned/linked to the expected short-term outputs that will move the state closer to its long-term vision for improving child outcomes and increasing parent resources.

The specific target populations that these activities impact include: providers who are serving vulnerable children and their parents; ECE professionals working with infants and toddlers; MSDE employees who administer different components of the B-5 ECSS; and children with disabilities and who are dual language learners.

The outputs/outcomes of the grant take the state a step closer to its vision of a well-coordinated and integrated system where every child has the opportunity to access a high-quality early childhood experience that will no longer be contingent on income, race, zip code, disability status, or English language proficiency.

Table 3. Alignment of Projects and Outcomes/Outputs

Short Term Outputs/Outcomes	Activities
Stronger state/local coordination	Local ECAC Best Practice Grants Judy Center Best Practice Grants Library Grants
Coordinated TA	Together-Juntos WIDA Early Years Initiative Children Study Their Work Curriculum
New enrollment and reporting system	Data system modernization
Foundational architecture for data system modernization	Data system modernization
Stronger family engagement practices/parental knowledge and skill	Hospital Baby Bags; Strengthening Families, Learning Parties; Parent Engagement Summits, MPT media campaign; Leadership Academy (transitions)
More inclusive child care classrooms	Regionalization for Results TA Kennedy Krieger 0-3 Intervention
More providers in EXCELS/Improved Ratings	Maryland EXCELS TA LENA Grow

Project Sustainability Plan

Maryland has a long history of sustaining innovative practices and effective services after Federal or private investments end. For example, RTT-ELC funds were used to create or expand local ECACs and Judy Centers. Though the grant period ended, local ECACs and the Hubs continue to thrive with local, state, and private funding. In fact, last year, Judy Centers amassed over one million dollars in private and local funding to expand their work in improving the quality of birth through age 5 programs and services. In the past legislative session, a bill passed and was signed into law that sustains funding for Maryland's original PDG award in FY20 and thereafter. RTT-ELC also funded the development of Maryland's comprehensive assessment system, including the KRA and the ELA. After funding ended, Maryland continued to fund the data system, technical assistance, and tools to sustain the system. In short, when there is evidence that early childhood interventions work, their funding is sustained by the state.

MSDE has a plan for sustaining the PDG B-5 grant investments. The grant's biggest project—the modernization of the ECE data system–will be maintained by the current staff and funding in place to maintain the existing system. Quality grants to the ECACs and Judy Centers will require grantees to build stronger community collaborations and create a plan to sustain their initiatives after the grant period. MSDE has a strong technical assistance network with dedicated staff to support these entities in accomplishing and sustaining their goals. To that end, Maryland is partnering with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to implement *Results Count* to help local leadership achieve and sustain positive, measurable outcomes for children and families.

The WIDA Early Years activity includes a capacity-building Train-the-Trainers program and online modules, Promising Practice Implementation Kits, and other resources that be used as supports for families and educators after the grant has ended. The *Children Study Their World* curriculum, professional development resources, and teacher and family apps will be available at no charge to any Maryland teacher after the grant period. Through this grant opportunity, the Together – Juntos activity will build capacity of MSDE staff, educators and parents for high-impact, culturally responsive family engagement through increased awareness, knowledge, and skills. State agencies will continue to have the skills to design and implement statewide culturally responsive family engagement policies, frameworks, and practices aligned to Maryland's regulations and policies, as well as the ESSA, CCDBG, IDEA, Head Start Act, and other federal laws affecting families and children. Finally, there will be a lasting increased capacity of local communities to co-construct, with families, policies and practices which focus on creating partnerships between families, schools, and communities to improve student outcomes.

Dissemination Plan

MSDE has a robust communications infrastructure that disseminates information to key stakeholder and target audiences across the state. MSDE has three communication specialists—

one each for the Maryland EXCELS program, family engagement initiatives, and Division of Early Childhood. MSDE has specific communication vehicles, including newsletters, press releases, the MSDE website, Marylandchild.org consumer website, and MarylandFamilies.org. In addition, multiple technical assistance vehicles (e.g., local ECACs, Early Learning Coordinators, Judy Centers, as well as the MCCRN) allow for comprehensive and timely dissemination of reports and products from the grant project to key target audiences. The goals of the dissemination will provide information that promotes coordination and the other outcomes aligned with Maryland's vision. The state will use pre-existing communication metrics (website hits), newsletter emails opened, etc. to assess the effectiveness of its communication strategies.

Third-Party Agreements

There are no third-party agreements as part of the grant. As outlined in the *Mixed Delivery Section,* MSDE has a coordinated governance structure with administrative responsibility over the programs that are the focus of the grant. This structure obviates the need for such agreements, and MSDE will provide the entire required state match. As noted previously, MSDE will continue its close collaboration with other state agencies and stakeholders.

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds

Fiscal monitors and grant managers collaborate to ensure that grant activities comply with applicable grant statutes and requirements. These concerted practices include reviewing applications, budgets, and proposals; preparing invoice templates based on approved budgets to track categorical expenditures; sampling supporting documentation during site visits as well as when reviewing invoices for payment; and reviewing fiscal activity reports on a monthly basis. All expenditure reimbursements require the review and approval of both fiscal and program staff to ensure that expenditures are in accordance with the grant assurances outlined on grant awards and contractual agreements prior to payment authorization.

In order to comply with fiscal reporting mandates, MSDE reports fiscal activity by individual project through the use of program cost account (PCA) codes established by Maryland's Department of Budget and Management. Using this coding structure, all financial activities are entered into the state's Financial Management Information System (FMIS) and subsequently housed in its financial data warehouse. Through ad hoc queries, the information is retrieved by PCA, funding source, and spending category as required for review, reporting, and analysis.

Project Budget and Budget Justification

Maryland PDG B-5 Budget Narrative

Object Class Categories	Federal	Non-federal	Total
a. Personnel	539,000.00		539,000.00
b. Fringe Benefits	151,459.70		151,459.70
c. Travel	19,700.00		19,700.00
d. Equipment	-		-
e. Supplies	3,654.00		3,654.00
f. Contractual	13,999,510.00	4,500,000	18,499,510.00
g. Construction	-		-
h. Other	47,967.00		47,967.00
i. Total Direct Charges	14,761,290.70	4,500,000.00	19,261,290.70
j. Indirect Charges	236,949.84		-
k. TOTALS (sum of 6i and 6j)	14,998,240.54	4,500,000.00	19,261,290.70

Budget Category - Personnel $539,000
Recruitment of 6.0 FTE (1 Project Manager, 2 Grants Specialists, 1 Interagency and Community Coordinator, 1 Family Engagement Project Coordinator, and 1 Research/Data Assistant at an average cost of $79,000 each and 1.0 FTE (Fiscal Specialist) at a cost of $65,000. The seven contractual employees will be responsible for supporting the five activity areas.

Budget Category - Fringe Benefits $151,460
Required contributions for contractual employees include unemployment insurance (.28% of salary), FICA/Medicare subsidy (7.65% of salary), and health benefit subsidy (estimated $15,531 per staff).

Budget Category – Travel $19,700
Travel for employees to national, state, local meetings/conferences (Regional Meetings, site visits, Alabama Early Childhood Conference)

Budget Category - Supplies $3,654
Office supplies MSDE standard of $522 per employee x 7 employees

Budget Category – Contracts $13,999,510
Contracts and sub grants support the following (proposed vendors are in parentheses):

Activity 1: Needs Assessment $475,800
Project 1a. The Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) will conduct parent, provider and stakeholder focus groups; collect and analyze survey data; synthesize past and current needs assessments; produce a report with recommendations; and disseminate information to stakeholders ($175,000).
Project 1b. Ready at Five will facilitate 8 regional stakeholder convenings throughout Maryland, with both morning and evening sessions to maximize participation and which utilize translation, transcription, child care, report-creation, and synthesis services ($100,000)
Project 1c. Montgomery College will hold 3 Statewide Higher Education meetings, which utilize translation, transcription, child care, report-creation, and synthesis services ($40,000).
Project 1d. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) will conduct an Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory (Inventory), which includes three modules: mapping of Institutes of Higher Education in Maryland, ECE program analysis, and the faculty survey and interviews. CSCCE will implement develop reports and recommendations ($70,000).
Project 1e. Attendance Works will complete the Implementing a Chronic Absenteeism Model, which includes development of MOUs with LEAs and ECE programs; analysis and production of a Kindergarten attendance report; develop overall design for the study, as well as its methodology, timeline and deliverables; project coordination; and research and production of policy report ($50,800).
Project 1f. MSDE will assess Maryland ECE facilities and licensing data; conduct focus groups; and report on findings ($40,000).

Activity 2: Strategic Plan - $125,000
MAEC will review and inventory current strategic plans used throughout the state; convene stakeholders, including State and local ECACs, to incorporate the needs assessment data in to a B-5 strategic plan; and finalize and disseminate the plan throughout the state ($125,000).

Activity 3: **Maximizing Parent Choice and Knowledge - $9,043,710**

Project 3a. Maryland Family Network (MFN) will support family and center-based providers with obtaining accreditation as well as achieving higher levels in EXCEL ($900,000).

Project 3b. The partnership with WIDA Early Years will build on Maryland's long-time K-12 collaboration with WIDA and help Maryland address language development of multilingual children through year-long technical assistance, two partnership kick-off events, three institutes, one Training of Trainers, Promising Practices Implementation Kit roll-out events, Parent Forums, on-line modules and resources, and training and implementation of classroom language observation and instructional planning tools ($400,000).

Project 3c. Together – Juntos: MAEC will provide technical assistance and training to the State of Maryland to promote high impact, culturally responsive family engagement practices that promote the healthy development of young children ($192,710).

Project 3d. Maryland Public Television will produce four public service announcements to inform parents on the importance of early learning and selecting quality ECE programs for web-based programming and public service broadcasting ($100,000)

Project 3e. The University of Maryland School of Social Work will promote and support inclusive settings through professional development for child care providers in developmentally appropriate practices, universally designed instruction, formative assessment, evidence-based, social-emotional interventions – all paired with ongoing reflective coaching provided by trained coaches ($50,000).

Project 3f. MSDE will hold a Family Engagement Summit for 300 participants across the state ($50,000).

Project 3g. MFN will implement 40 parent cafes and regional training opportunities for parents ($80,000) as part of Strengthening Families.

Project 3h. Ready at Five will expand two learning parties to include media and financial literacy and implement them in 6 jurisdictions ($186,000).

Project 3i. MSDE will collaborate with Maryland Department of Health and Maryland Department of Human Services to create and distribute new family welcome bags to 85,000 parents ($85,000).

Project 3j. MSDE will work with existing state contract vehicles, as well as procurement processes to modernize and improve the current ECE data system and implement a unique identifier pilot. Activities include: (a) "Greenhouse" strategic system planning sessions with internal and external stakeholders to identify opportunities and challenges for the system to inform system requirements and expose information gaps the system can address; (b) "lift and shift" of existing systems to Amazon Web Services AWS cloud hosting which provides a highly adaptive, managed environment for modernization efforts; (c) conducting a Fit-Gap analysis to specify customizations need to implement the system; (d) developing the architectural design that will tie together the application modules and drive development to deliver the characteristics of the modernized system; and (e) initiate design development of foundation components that will be required by program modules such as data conversion, data structures for reporting, interfaces with external systems, document creation and management, batch job processing, roles management, and administration. Specific deliverables include Unique Identifier Pilot Implementation, Mobile Attendance Capture/Point of Entry Attendance Capture, Unique Identifier Assessment post-deployment, Green House Report, Fit Gap Analysis Report, and Architectural Design Document ($7,000,000).

Activity 4: Sharing Best Practices - $2,255,000

Project 4a. MSDE will work with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) to adapt curriculum for the Maryland Leadership Academy for Principals and ECE Directors ($35,000).

Project 4b. The University of Maryland will conduct Inquiry-based Professional Development for CSW in 400 child care, Head Start and family care providers, as well as provide a tablet-based access to the preschool curriculum, children's books, math materials, and coaching support ($2,000,000).

Project 4c. Kennedy Krieger Evidence-Based Intervention will conduct a 0-3 evidence-based research study that will (a) produce a professional development intervention designed to improve early childhood care and education providers' knowledge, skill, and self-efficacy related to implementing evidenced-base instructional practices within inclusive, community-based child care settings, and (b) assess the promise of the PD intervention for promoting improved educational outcomes of young children with language, social, and/or cognitive delays ($120,000).

Project 4d. MSDE will partner with Lena Grow to help teachers in 30 infant/toddler programs increase interactive talk and thereby accelerate children's brain growth and language development ($100,000).

Activity 5. Improving Quality - $1,990,000

Project 5a. Local ECAC Best Practices grants of $25,000 each will be awarded to all 24 jurisdictions to implement quality initiatives identified by the needs assessment ($600,000)

Project 5b. Judy Center Best Practices grants of $25,000 each will be awarded to all 54 Hubs to implement quality initiatives identified by the needs assessment ($1,350,000).

Project 5c. Library Grants of $1,000 to $2,500 will be awarded for the enrichment of children in informal child care settings or cared for at home based on needs assessment ($40,000).

Program Performance Evaluation Plan (MAEC) - $110,000
The program performance evaluation will monitor ongoing processes and the progress towards the goals and objectives of the project.

Budget Category – Other $47,967
Federal and Local Technical Assistance Meetings $25,000
The following MSDE budget standards comprise other costs:
- Rental for office space: $18,550 annually ($2,650 per FTE per year)
- Copier: $2,030 annually ($290 per FTE per year)
- Phone and Internet: $1,505 annually ($215 per FTE per year)
- Postage: $504 annually ($72 per FTE per year)
- Insurance: $378 annually ($54 per FTE per year)

Budget Category - Indirect $236,950

Maryland State Department of Education's current approved indirect cost rate agreement is 17.4% based on MTDC

Budget Category - State Match $4,500,000
State Funds in the amount of $4,500,000 appropriated in SFY2020 to provide access to the grant-funded Judy Centers which benefits children and families in local communities. Through a dedicated staff of early learning professionals, the Centers help prepare children age birth through five for school readiness and success.

Bonus Points

Maryland has a meaningful plan as described above to measure the unduplicated number of children being served and awaiting services in each existing program using *Business Object* software to merge enrollment and waiting lists and purge duplicate records.

Conclusion

The PDG B-5 plan presented here will move Maryland toward its ultimate vision for a fully coordinated and aligned B-5 ECCS. The proposed grant activities build on the state's current early childhood infrastructure to maximize parental choice, share best practices, and improve program quality across all settings. While supporting all children in the state, the grant will promote equity for children who are vulnerable or underserved, including children from low-income families, with disabilities/developmental delays, who are dual language learners, and who live in rural areas. The grant will produce system improvements that support healthy bodies, healthy minds, and foundational knowledge and skills young children need to succeed in school. Such system improvements will also provide parents with the resources they need as their children's first and most important teacher.