



Innovations • Solutions • Connections

PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT BIRTH THROUGH FIVE ANNUAL CONVENING 2023

**DECEMBER 5–7, 2023
BETHESDA, MD**

SUMMARY REPORT



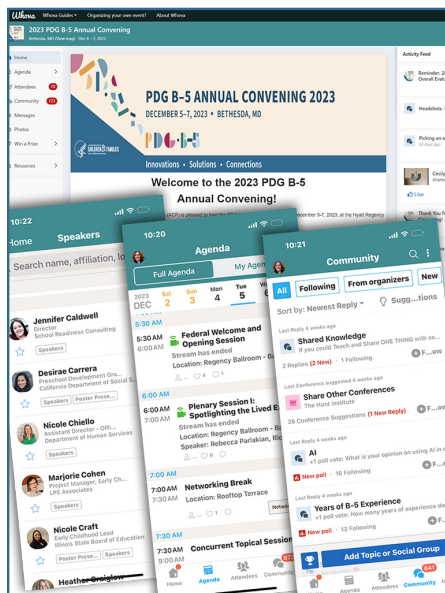
ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Early Childhood Development



PDG B-5 Annual Convening Summary Report

The Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) Annual Convening was held December 5–7, 2023, in Bethesda, MD. The event, attended by 311 participants (30 of which participated virtually) from 45 states, as well as Guam, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC, gave attendees the opportunity to attend plenary and breakout sessions focused on their work and needs as well as enjoy breaks for formal and informal networking. The theme for the event was *Innovations, Solutions, and Connections*.

The planning committee for the convening successfully identified topics of interest and high relevance, as confirmed by the almost universal response of “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” by participants, confirming that they had (a) gained information and strategies that could be used in their PDG B-5 work and (b) heard something they wanted to share with a colleague. The committee was composed of grantee representatives, technical assistance (TA) specialists, and federal staff, which explains their ability to develop an informative and enjoyable event. Their work over the course of many months resulted in a meeting that encouraged active participation. The successful attainment of this goal was reflected in the near unanimous response of “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the evaluation statement “I had opportunities to participate in the discussions.” Attendees also documented their active engagement in evaluation responses where they noted enjoying networking with colleagues and building stronger connections.



Participants were invited to maximize Whova, the official event app that kept attendees informed about events and changes and allowed them to personalize their agenda, view speaker and attendee profiles and session documents, and even arrange networking and meet-ups. Registrants have access to the platform for 3 months post-event. Given the number of comments about wanting slide decks and intentions expressed about reaching out to speakers and other attendees, the app will make this simple and help grantees stay connected to others invested in the work they do. As one participant noted, “The slide deck will be great to refer back to and to share with collab partners.” Another stated, “This was great information! I’ll be in contact.” While the platform also allowed registrants to attend the plenaries virtually, most grantees chose to attend in person. This choice may well reflect the relative lack of in-person events since the pandemic, and comments about networking (see below) make it clear that participants craved the kind of interaction possible when gathered together on-site.

The comments and questions submitted during sessions, discussed after presentations, and included in polling responses indicate the session topics chosen by the planning committee were indeed the most important and appropriate topics for the participants. Specifically, the following issues recurred through participant engagement: family engagement, the early childhood care and education (ECCE)

workforce, grant and project management, data, infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH), and inclusion of children with disabilities. Grantees also expressed appreciation for exposure to peers' work and the opportunity to build connections and renew energy through networking.

Family Engagement

Sessions specifically addressing family engagement included:

- Plenary Session I: Voices from the Field: Spotlighting the Lived Experiences of ECCE Families and Providers
- State Innovations in Family Engagement and Leadership
- Creating a Recruitment, Selection, Engagement, and Compensation Plan for a Family Engagement Group

The first plenary session featured the voices of families in a way that modeled the respect for and inclusion of their perspectives that ECCE professionals strive for: individuals were videoed from a setting of their choice and at a time convenient for them. The clips were woven together so that individual voices told a collective story of challenges and families' need for consistency to build trust in the messages and resources they are offered through programs funded through grants such as PDG B5. Convening participants responded favorably:

"I really like how the voices of providers and families kicked off our time together. I have been at other events when those voices aren't heard until the end."

"Loved the family and professionals videos and grounding with that."

"LOVE, LOVE, LOVE the family voices. It would be cool to walk through any lessons you learned while filming."

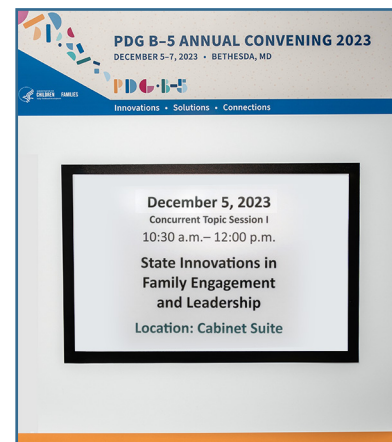
One participant valued the information on family engagement to the extent that the "sessions could have been an all-day event, and I would have attended every one." Another noted that what they learned would improve their own work.

Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce

Sessions specifically addressing the ECCE workforce included:

- Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship Programs: State Approaches and Strategies to Building the Workforce
- Equipping Early Childhood Professionals to Support Multilingual Children and Families
- Increasing Diversity and Representation in the Early Childhood Workforce
- Raising the Bar on Compensation: State Strategies and Using the Salary Scale Playbook
- State Innovations: Pipelines and Pathways for Workforce Development
- State Innovations: Professional Development Strategies

The session on apprenticeship programs generated multiple questions around securing funding for them and who could participate (e.g., can undocumented workers participate?). One school



psychologist noted that while she provides internships and classroom coaching, overall, there is a shortage of those activities. Discussions included mention of challenges with using funds since local and state contracting processes can be cumbersome.

Funding for positions is often limited and low, which multiple grantees noted can leave programs short-staffed. These shortages lead to long wait lists, as noted by participants in the session on IECMH systems. Lower wages for ECCE professionals sparked discussion on Head Start's wage structure. One participant suggested "use a Head Start staff person when discussing wages and benefits. Head Start often has much better compensation and benefits than many programs." And when Florida offered a workforce stipend program, it was so popular they overspent on that line item.

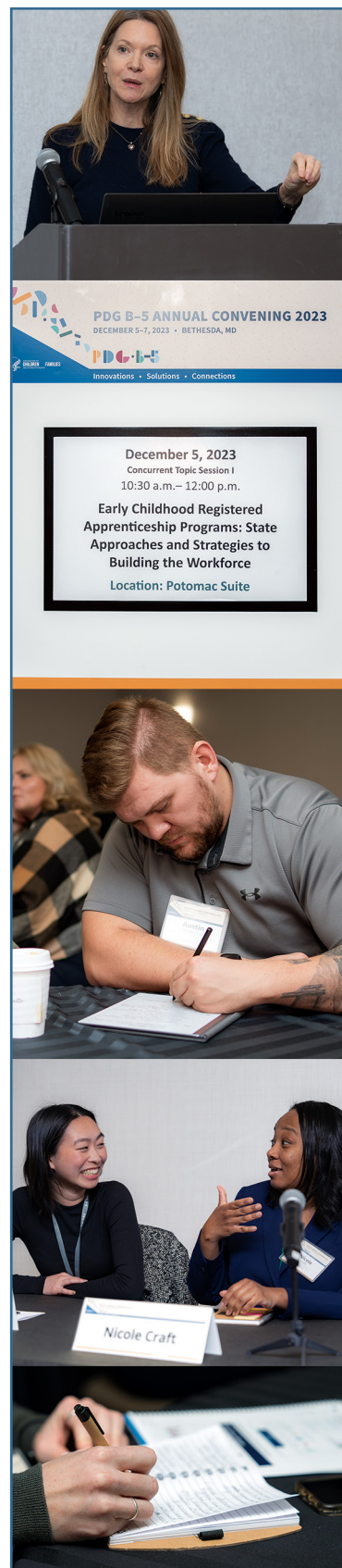
States have been innovative in identifying ways to support workforce professional development (PD) in the face of limited funding. For instance, Delaware worked with the University of Delaware to provide on-site trainings on working with children with autism and applied practice sessions at centers.

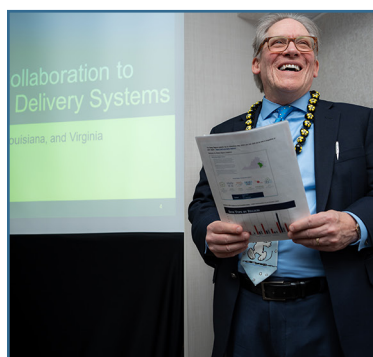
Multiple sessions touched on PD, and participants saw clear connections between adequate training and professional standing. On the "hope" board, one participant posted the following: "The value of infant/toddler workforce is recognized, and the work becomes respected and compensated appropriately." Given the lack of recognition professionals face, several participants responded positively to Puerto Rico's use of the local TV station to advertise PD opportunities; this strategy served a double purpose of educating the community.

Participants were interested in a range of potential topics related to PD, including:

- Tracking PD
- Measuring achievement and alignment between credentials and higher education
- Career ladders
- Prior learning assessment and credit for prior learning
- Working with children with special needs
- "How to utilize these [PD strategies] in a high-accountability, low-power position"
- Core competencies

Numerous challenges were noted in securing PD. For instance, one state noted that childcare centers cannot afford to let staff participate due to the costs to the program. Virtual and hybrid models may have better success. Another noted that funds that might support PD (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funding) are most often directed to support other priorities.





The lack of adequate training and certification results in too few staff to provide the needed services. In a discussion about IECMH certificates, no one in the session could articulate what might be a sufficient number of certified consultants to meet states' needs. Delaware shared that they issued subgrants for inclusion specialists but were facing challenges recruiting people.

Grant and Project Management

Sessions addressing different aspects of grant and project management included:

- Develop Your PDG B-5 Sustainability Plan
- Levers of Sustainability: State Examples
- State Innovations: Strengthening Local Collaboration to Support States' B-5 Mixed Delivery Systems

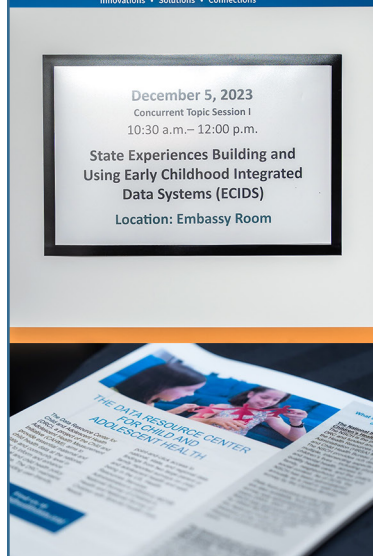
Through the breakout sessions, grantees showcased the different ways grant funds are being used, from supporting transitions to kindergarten to workforce development to starting IECMH programs. Concerns about sustainability surfaced since grant funding inevitably ends. As one participant shared, "Sustainability planning [is a place where we need help]. Our state is behind on this piece and wish we would have started sooner." Several participants requested access to sustainability plans developed by grantees further along in the process. The impact of frequent leadership changes on continuity and sustainability was also mentioned, reflecting awareness that funding alone does not solve all challenges in shifting policy landscapes. In a meeting with the federal project officer, one state noted that they had to redirect funds away from activities devoted to equity due to changes in state priorities.

One participant recommended a "Funding 101" to help states understand all funding sources that can be braided and where and what TA is available.

Data

Sessions specifically addressing data included:

- State Experiences Building and Using Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS)
- Plenary Session II: Using Data to Build Equitable Systems: System Transformation for Equitable Preschools (STEP Forward with Data) Framework
- Continuing the Discussion on Using Data to Build Equitable Systems: System Transformation for Equitable Preschools (STEP Forward with Data) Framework



Multiple participants mentioned the STEP Forward with Data Framework and how they wanted to better understand how to benefit from it. As one participant wrote, “I would love a deep dive into STEP Forward.” Another noted that the framework “seems very promising and [we] hope to use this moving forward.” The framework is designed to help preschool systems leaders use data to promote greater equity at every step of their system. One participant in this session wrote that they need “help in our state explaining this back home.” Another indicated interest in receiving updates on states that decide to pilot the framework.

Comments from multiple discussions surfaced around data needs, including:

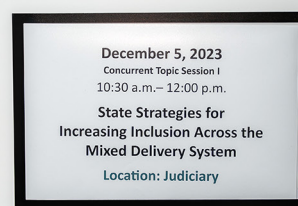
- The need for access to more data from state agencies
- How to achieve broader measures of data and distribution for sustainability
- Ways to “be more impactful with data”
- Needing more information on state-level data collection states are using to inform wage scales
- Identifying data to best demonstrate outcomes
- Ensuring data quality and overcoming data-sharing roadblocks

Kansas shared their work developing a data dashboard that has quality metrics, including the ASQ Statewide Enterprise account. They have added Part C providers and are also talking to pediatricians about joining. They have all services for children 0–5 listed on the data dashboard.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

Sessions addressing IECMH and inclusion of children with disabilities into settings with their peers without disabilities included:

- State Strategies for Increasing Inclusion Across the Mixed Delivery System
- Including All Children: State Innovations in Promoting Inclusion of Children with Disabilities
- State Innovations: IECMH Systems to Meet Mental Health Needs Across Mixed Delivery Systems
- State Innovations: Meeting Diverse IECMH Personnel Needs in Mixed Delivery Systems





The participants attending these sessions tended to focus on questions of collaboration and partnership to achieve inclusion. As one participant asked: “What does this [increasing inclusion] look like in partners with Part B and C?” Concerns about collaboration were reflected in needs other participants identified, such as more transparency from state departments/agencies and more information on measuring collaboration.

The complexity of cultivating the needed partnerships to achieve successful collaboration informed the multiple requests for access to the resources of other states. One participant noted that they “would love access to professional learning content and materials lists for the inclusion toolkits.” One participant wondered whether there was a template to use with “other groups we work with to use their language to bridge gaps,” giving voice to a challenge many states face when trying to collaborate with diverse groups. One requested a webinar so they could invite a partner. Several wanted more time to go through the resources that presenters made available or referenced, indicating a desire to process and absorb the guidance the resources could offer.

Additional Innovations and Solutions

Most of the convening breakout sessions included examples of innovations and solutions from current PDG B-5 grantees. Additional sessions were provided on specific initiatives or resources that may benefit grantees as they continue to support enhancement of mixed delivery systems. Those not tied specifically to the themes above included:

- Telling Your PDG B-5 Story
- Home Visiting Innovations Using PDG B-5 Funds
- Meeting the Needs of the Littlest Ones: PDG B-5 Infant/Toddler Initiatives
- Smoothing Out the Bumps: State Strategies for Children’s Transition to Kindergarten and the Primary Grades
- State Innovations in Addressing Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Systems
- Streamlining the Application, Eligibility, and Enrollment Process for Families
- Using the EnAct! Framework for a Statewide Integrated Early Childhood Health System
- Voices of Collaboration: Federal Partnerships to Strengthen the Early Childhood System

Participants approached the convening as an opportunity to learn from their peers and the work being funded under PDG B-5 across the nation. All planned formal and informal sessions promoted this

peer-to-peer learning. Some sessions were broad and theoretical (e.g., Using the EnAct! Framework for a Statewide Integrated Early Childhood Health System); others focused on targeted work on a much narrower topic (e.g., Smoothing Out the Bumps: State Strategies for Children's Transition to Kindergarten and the Primary Grades).

Multiple comments and requests made in sessions and the evaluation highlighted the deep investment of grantee professionals in learning from the work of others. Many noted their desire to access the resources presented. In response to the Voices of Collaboration breakout, one attendee stated, "I want all of the outlines/organizers/things that were used to build this"—a sentiment reiterated in several evaluation responses. Another participant noted that it was helpful "hearing from other states and their successes, challenges, and strategies." The Meeting the Needs of the Littlest Ones session prompted a desire to "learn more about Colorado's 'mini-grants' for local planning, including what the next steps are." Another requested "further research on the strategies presented by Colorado! So many interesting things happening." Following the Voices of Collaboration presentation, one requested "examples from states successful in this level coordination and streamlining program services."

Comments suggested that attendees wanted to not only share but put these new tools and frameworks into use to maximize their own work. One suggested they would appreciate the "PDG contact for each grantee to be able to contact with questions on their work wins/barriers/ahas" (something grantees can do using Whova). One grantee planned "further discussion with presenters and review[ing] shared information." One participant in the EnAct! session noted "such rich information that I would like to have additional time for TA on this topic." This comment shows participants are eager to put new learnings into action. A pre-convening workshop on "Telling Your PDG B-5 Story" attracted nearly 50 participants who came to the meeting early and worked in teams to create plans to share the accomplishments of their PDG B-5 grants for audiences ranging from parents to policymakers.

Session notes emphasized that the learning was bidirectional: both attendees and presenters learned from others who shared information or resources during the sessions and discussions following the presentations. Multiple comments noted appreciation and interest in the slide decks of the presenters, which were available through the event website. Additionally, states were generous in their willingness to share materials they had developed. For instance, Virginia described resources available to any interested party at their ECE Resource Hub website.

"Continuing the Discussion" Sessions

On the final day of the convening, participants were invited to continue the discussions begun over the prior 2 days by joining an open



discussion session on the primary topics of the meeting (family engagement, workforce, IECMH and inclusion, and grant and project management). Speakers from these sessions were present, and attendees asked additional questions, processed information, and considered next steps for their own grants. For participants who wanted to discuss other topics, an “unconference” session was available for any topic proposed by participants. Topics for these discussions included contracting processes, home visiting models, data sharing, evaluation, and fiscal challenges.

Networking

Attendees valued the ample opportunities to network with peers, as breaks were built into the agenda for that purpose. Additionally, grantees were encouraged to utilize Whova to connect with others by planning impromptu meet-ups and messaging new contacts. The space of the meeting hotel was set up with areas for relaxation and play to encourage informal networking and support well-being activities (the program guide even included stretch break suggestions!).

Recipients clearly appreciated attention to this aspect of the convening. As one noted, “having more time to network was so helpful. I made many meaningful connections.” Another grantee expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to build and renew connections: the meeting “was really comprehensive and allowed me to make new connections and reconnect with old friends and co-workers.” Several reported leaving the meeting “feeling positive and energized.”



To wrap up the event, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Early Childhood Development Katie Hamm led a panel of presentations on federal priorities and forecasts. Jamila Smith, Director of the Office of Innovation and Early Learning in the U.S. Department of Education gave a presentation about the Kindergarten Sturdy Bridge project. Andrew Williams from the Office of Child Care and Lindsey Hutchinson from the Office of Head Start presented information about the recent Notices of Proposed Rulemaking for each Office.

Overall, the event was very well received and provided ample opportunity for participants to explore *innovations, solutions, and connections*, as well as begin planning for use of the information gained in their own states and territories. Comments that reflected this in the evaluation survey included:

“As the first back [in person] meeting, I think the team knocked it out of the park!”

“The agenda was great with long enough breaks to have energy to engage all day.”

“I loved the state strategy sessions.”

“I loved the convening! I met so many people and left with so many wonderful ideas.”

“The information shared during the convening provided me with the tools to help us move forward with our grant.”

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