

The State of North Dakota PDG B-5 Renewal Grant

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Project Title: North Dakota Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Renewal Grant

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Project Summary

North Dakota's initial Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5) allowed the State to develop a baseline of challenges and opportunities being faced by early childhood care and education providers (ECCE) serving children ages B-5, and to begin the layout of a coordinated statewide ECCE system. Since the initial grant, we have faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as significant change to North Dakota's ECCE system. Yet, the findings of the 2019 North Dakota PDG B-5 needs assessment ring true still today.

North Dakota remains committed to coordinating an effective, high-quality B-5 early childhood (EC) mixed delivery system, demonstrated by action of the 67th legislative assembly (2021), which created an early childhood section (HHS-EC) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The purpose of HHS-EC is to build greater access to quality ECCE experiences so children ages 0–5 from all backgrounds and circumstances, their families, and those who support them can reach their potential.

In mid-September 2022, Governor Doug Burgum unveiled a child care legislative proposal to support working families and address workforce challenges. The proposal is the result of more than 14 months of work and discussions with ECCE providers, business leaders, the Workforce Development Council, legislators, and key stakeholders. The proposal is meant to make a meaningful impact for children, parents, and businesses over the 2023-25 biennium, with a focus on three pillars for ECCE: affordability, availability, and quality of child care services.

As we anticipate an impact investment for ECCE during the 68th legislative assembly beginning January 2023, the PDG B-5 Renewal grant allows us to focus on additional priorities. North Dakota will embrace bold approaches to build sustainable ECCE infrastructure during the renewal phase, resulting in a comprehensive, cohesive system. We recognize that a competent and stable workforce is the foundation that makes all other strategies work. Therefore, grant activities focus on the workforce, to include updating and aligning ECCE practitioner competencies, establishing progressive career pathways, expanding professional development supports, and focusing on evidence-based training to grow the ECCE workforce from entry in the field to credentials and degrees. To ensure quality throughout the mixed delivery ECCE system, we will align quality standards to create a continuum that is inclusive, research-based, and useful to North Dakota's ECCE stakeholders. We will develop a system of data analysis and reporting to inform policy and decision making. As a result of these efforts, North Dakota will move from a fragmented to cohesive system that ensures all children and families in our state have access to top-quality early childhood care and services.

Expected Outcomes

In 2018, North Dakota was awarded the Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5) to establish a comprehensive, integrated early childhood system in the state. North Dakota's vision was *a coordinated B-5 ECCE system with shared data capabilities that prioritizes early relationships and quality services*. In this PDG B-5 Renewal grant application, North Dakota seeks to continue work toward those original goals while incorporating new realities and lessons learned over the past four years. This application focuses more specifically on the core issues that have emerged as the early childhood system has changed in North Dakota and as serious, long-standing weaknesses and gaps have been revealed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What is now so clearly apparent is that the goals of early relationships and quality ECCE described in the original PDG B-5 grant cannot be achieved without a focused, sustained effort to prepare and support a highly qualified early childhood workforce. The vision driving the grant activities described throughout the PDG B-5 Renewal grant application is that *every direct care provider in every setting in every area of the state is well prepared to support every child in their care*. The vision seeks to ensure that a child's family income, race, language, zip code or ability is not a determining factor in that child's access to high-quality early childhood experiences. North Dakota will achieve the following outcomes from the PDG B-5 Renewal grant:

- Aligned, coordinated structure for HHS-EC operations and service delivery;
- Engaged families with access to information they need to benefit their young children;
- Prepared early childhood workforce able to deliver quality ECCE care and services;
- Expanded infrastructure to support children's mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- Embedded continuum of quality across all state sponsored quality initiatives;
- Established data collection and reporting system that guides decision making and policy.

The Early Childhood Landscape in North Dakota Today

The current early childhood system in North Dakota looks very different than it did in 2018. Prior to the 2018 PDG B-5 award, a great deal of work had already been done toward building various components of an early childhood system, including implementation of a statewide early childhood workforce registry, an established Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and development of several robust data systems. However, components of the early childhood system were scattered between several state departments as well as with contracted partners, each with its own policies, procedures, and focus areas. The state child care licensing system was archaic and unable to provide reliable data. Early childhood systems and service delivery were not key priorities for policymakers. The award of PDG B-5 spurred a more focused approach to addressing the realities and challenges facing the field of early childhood in North Dakota and laid a path toward achieving a broader, more comprehensive system. Work toward the vision of PDG B-5 began with energy and enthusiasm: a needs assessment was conducted, and a strategic plan developed; initial design of an early childhood integrated data system was started; several professional development opportunities were made available to the early childhood workforce in partnership with higher education; and the words “early childhood” were included in policy discussions. However, several unanticipated events changed North Dakota’s early childhood landscape and resulted in the new early childhood state structure in place today.

When North Dakota received the initial PDG B-5 grant in 2018, early childhood administration was in two state agencies. The Department of Human Services had an Early Childhood Services administrator, and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Office of Early Learning included a director, the Part B 619 coordinator, and the Head Start State Collaboration administrator. As stated above, critical components of the early childhood system

were held and administered by contracted entities outside of the state agency administration, including the workforce registry, QRIS, and resource and referral services. As well, child care licensing was conducted at the county level, with licensers employed by the counties. In 2020, child care licensing was consolidated to the state level, under the direction of a CCDF Administrator. Then in 2021, the 67th Legislative Assembly established an Early Childhood section (HHS-EC) at the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This section brings together as one entity CCDF administration; child care licensing; the workforce registry; QRIS and quality initiatives; professional development approval and tracking; family and school engagement including Head Start Collaboration, Part C Early Intervention, Part B 619 Special Education, home visitation, child care assistance for lower income households, and consumer education. The director of the HHS-EC reports to the Human Services Division Director who reports to the Executive Director of DHHS.

The 67th Legislative Assembly (2021) also established *Best in Class*, a competitive grant program to serve children and families the year before children enter kindergarten. *Best in Class* is administered by HHS-EC and is designed to deliver high-quality services to families who may not otherwise be able to access early experiences.

Changes in the early childhood system also resulted in new opportunities for data collection and consolidation. Since 2018, the state has undertaken the development of a child care licensing data system, with public release anticipated by the end of 2022. In addition, the establishment of the HHS-EC section brought two key data systems under state management: the state's workforce registry/QRIS/workforce grants/stipends/incentives data system, which operates using the *Insight* data system from New World Now, Inc. (NWN) and child care referral system NDS 2.0 powered by *WorkLife Systems*. Together, these systems contain rich data that is already being shared between the systems to better facilitate delivery of services. These systems

will now serve as foundational data sources to be integrated as a practical step toward the establishment of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) in North Dakota. The state of North Dakota has adopted a Cloud First strategy for technology projects, which opens new possibilities for the creation of ECIDS and builds on the work completed as part of the original PDG B-5. A Request for Proposal (RFP) is currently pending release for the next step in the ECIDS development project.

Taken together, the changes to North Dakota's early childhood system since 2018 are significant and positive, greatly enhancing the state's ability to achieve ambitious goals for coordinated services and supports to the field of early childhood in our state. At the same time, these changes removed the cover from gaps and shortfalls in the system that had previously been hidden by the disjointed nature of service delivery. These issues were exacerbated by the stresses and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as it became clear that programs were hanging on by a thread, the workforce was pushed to the breaking point, and services were inadequate to address the needs.

To address some of the issues exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, North Dakota used ARPA funds to award grants designed to help programs offset operating costs and strengthen financial stability. The grants prioritized support for underserved areas of the state, infant and toddler care, and care during non-traditional hours. One-time grants were also available for health and safety-related facility improvement and technology upgrades so providers can access professional development, licensing and child care assistance databases. To assist parents in finding care for a child with special needs, one-time inclusion grants were available to help providers create and provide an inclusive environment for children with disabilities or developmental delays. Additional grant opportunities included start-up grants to assist newly licensed programs offset initial business costs as well as quality improvement grants to programs

that recently achieved a quality rating in the QRIS to support continued efforts to improve the overall program quality.

CRSSA and ARPA funds are also being used to award incentives and stipends to individual members of the workforce. One-time awards for Career Pathways placement in a professional qualification category and for completion of high-priority training are currently available. Ongoing stipends are available to individuals who have maintained consistent employment with one early childhood employer for the previous three months, aimed at stabilizing the workforce. To manage the delivery of individual incentives and stipends, HHS-EC purchased a significant upgrade to the *Insight* data system that allows a seamless automated process for application to payment, easily accessed and completed from an individual's registry account and integrated with the state's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for payment.

In mid-September 2022, Governor Doug Burgum unveiled a child care proposal to support working families and address workforce challenges, focused on affordability, availability, and quality of child care services. The proposal includes supports to address workforce issues, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including compensation and incentives to stabilize and grow the workforce. As we anticipate an impact investment being made during the 68th legislative assembly that begins in January 2023, North Dakota's PDG B-5 Renewal grant will focus on establishing a comprehensive early childhood system able to deliver on our vision of a well-prepared workforce and quality care for all children and families. The PDG B-5 Renewal grant activities are designed to support but not replicate the Governor's proposal.

With one year of operation under our belt, the HHS-EC section knows that to deliver on the ambitious vision presented in this grant application, the section must ensure that its internal structures, positions, and operations are ready to take the lead in this effort. As part of year one

North Dakota will hire a consultant to provide technical assistance and facilitation to support the state in systems thinking and policy development to deliver on the vision and strategies outlined throughout the PDG Renewal grant to ensure grant activities lead to a more effective and sustainable ECCE system. The consultant will help HHS-EC consider organizational and program development, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, marketing and outreach, and data collection, analysis, and reporting. With the support of the consultant, North Dakota is seeking to learn and understand how to A) reform existing statewide systems, B) strengthen local programs, C) test new models, D) pilot national projects, and E) strengthen commitment to diversity, equity, and cultural and linguistic inclusion across the mixed delivery ECCE system.

Challenges. According to the 2020 census, North Dakota was the fourth fastest growing state in the last decade. The state's racial and ethnic demographics have continued to shift, with the largest demographic groups identifying as White (82.9%), American Indian or Alaska Native (5.0%), Hispanic (4.4%), and Black (3.4%). Overall, the state's diversity index rose from 20.6% in 2010 to 32.6% in 2020. North Dakota also consistently ranks as one of the youngest states in the nation, with a median age of 35.2 years. More than 64,000 of North Dakota's 760,000 residents are age 5 or younger, living in more than 42,000 households across our largely rural state. These changes present challenges for building an equitable, accessible, and responsive ECCE system that addresses availability, affordability, and quality.

While the establishment of the HHS-EC section at North Dakota DHHS is a major advancement for early childhood services delivery in the state, the section is still very new and working to bring previously fragmented pieces of the ECCE system together as a unified entity. Current challenges for HHS-EC are embedding a shared vision and establishing strategic goals; improved internal and external communication; data sharing between programs and data systems; and funding capacity to expand resource and services. As well, restructuring and

realignment of roles and responsibilities is necessary. Many of the services now under one roof were previously contracted to outside entities, which had established roles, positions, and ways of doing business. HHS-EC initially incorporated those practices intact to ensure continuity of services, but a year of operation has shown that work is needed to position HHS-EC to achieve our goals and vision.

The integration of the Head Start State Collaboration Office and the QRIS at HHS-EC and the launch of the *Best in Class* grant program also made clear that North Dakota has a disjointed, confusing approach to quality across the mixed delivery system. A variety of quality standards, measures, and tools, as well as requirements for participation in quality initiatives, create inequity throughout the state's mixed delivery system. The 2019 PDG B-5 needs assessment showed that parents do not understand the components of quality programming or the QRIS. This reality highlights the need to establish an over-arching umbrella for quality improvement that lays out clear pathways beginning immediately at the point of program licensure.

Hiring and retaining qualified B-5 ECCE providers is one of the biggest barriers to quality across B-5 programs in North Dakota. Workforce registry data shows that 87% of the current workforce has no professional preparation for the job, even after several years of employment. Just 5.8% have completed some training to progress along the Career Pathways, and only 7% have a recognized early childhood professional qualification such as a CDA Credential or early childhood degree. Given this reality, it is clear the approach the state has taken to professional development is not effective and does not result in a well-prepared workforce. Many providers lack the knowledge to know what it is they need to be successful on the job, and struggle to find professional development that equips them to deliver best practices or coaching that helps them implement best practices in their programs. Currently available

professional development is limited and disjointed, often delivered by organizations and entities that have no expertise in the preparation of the early childhood workforce. Almost no professional development is available in languages other than English or designed to be responsive to the needs of diverse communities. B-5 ECCE providers need professional development advising, structured and accessible professional development and coaching to grow their knowledge and competencies, and a collaborative PD system, involving higher education, that supports their ability to advance their education and career opportunities.

There are also challenges in the collection and sharing of B-5 ECCE information. B-5 ECCE providers as well as parents struggle to access available ECCE supports and services. Policymakers struggle to find reliable, verified data to support decision making. B-5 ECCE providers are required to use several different systems to conduct and manage their work, including the licensing data system, workforce registry, and child care assistance system. A central “hub” with single sign-on to these data systems would greatly reduce the burden on ECCE providers and improve the data that is available to be shared.

At this time, no North Dakota data system connects early childhood systems at the state, although there are data sharing agreements in place and preliminary work was started on the ECIDS because of the 2018 PDG B-5. However, there continues to be an ongoing information gap for understanding duplication of services, child progress, and program impact across systems.

Approach

Activity 1: Update Comprehensive, Statewide, B-5 Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment sets the stage for the overall work of North Dakota’s PDG B-5 Renewal grant. The primary functions of the PDG B-5 Renewal needs assessment are to engage ECCE providers, families, stakeholders, and communities to gather and share data, and to

identify areas where our state ECCE system can better align and serve those who use and are impacted by the system. North Dakota conducted a comprehensive needs assessment in 2019 as part of the initial PDG B-5 grant. The assessment findings highlighted six areas of need: ECCE capacity and availability; barriers to access ECCE information and services for families; lack of understanding of quality, and low awareness of and participation in the state's QRIS; challenges for ECCE programs to hire and maintain quality staff; and issues with available data.

The results of the needs assessment underpin several actions that have been taken to bolster the state's ECCE system since 2019, including the consolidation of licensing at the state level and the establishment of the Early Childhood (HHS-EC) section at the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and were used to inform the stipends for workforce retention and incentives for workforce training and career pathways placement that the state is currently offering using CRRSA and ARPA funding.

As well, the needs assessment results are the basis for the proposals to support working families and the ECCE workforce that Governor Doug Burgum is presenting for legislative action in the upcoming 2023 legislative session. 2019 needs assessment responses indicate that ECCE programs struggle to deliver quality care while families of young children struggle to afford, access, and even define quality ECCE services. Though issues related to workforce conditions, such as compensation and incentives for career development, were not addressed as directly in the 2019 needs assessment, these issues have become increasingly apparent through the COVID-19 pandemic and are included in the Governor's proposal.

As one of the first actions that will be taken upon receipt of the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, North Dakota will revise and update the needs assessment to determine how needs have changed or not changed since the 2019 results, and to identify new needs and issues that have been revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, HHS-EC will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to

contract a vendor to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment, conduct iterative updates of the needs assessments throughout the PDG B-5 Renewal grant period, and provide updated assessment reports. The selected vendor will be required to seek input from key stakeholders, to include the ECCE workforce, parents of children in the B-5 age period, community members, and others impacted by the ECCE system. Stakeholder input will be required to be inclusive of tribal representatives, families, and providers for whom English is not the primary language, and families of children with special needs and/or health challenges. The vendor must gather state, regional, and local data from both urban and rural areas by conducting surveys, focus groups, and interviews with stakeholders, to help North Dakota understand the strengths, challenges, and perceptions of the ECCE system from all perspectives, and to guide alignment and collaboration to increase access to quality care.

North Dakota will require the selected vendor to conduct the first iteration of the revised needs assessment within three (3) months of receiving their contract. Knowing that there will be a lag between the time the PDG B-5 Renewal grant is awarded and the North Dakota Legislature's approval to begin expending funds, HHS-EC will begin preparing the needs assessment RFP upon notification of the PDG Renewal grant award and be ready to release a contract as soon as Legislative approval is given.

As stated throughout this PDG B-5 Renewal grant, North Dakota understands that quality early care is dependent on competent workforce. With the needs assessment, we seek to better understand the specific issues, concerns, and needs of the ECCE workforce and the factors that support or deter their ability to acquire professional skills and knowledge, and to build a successful career in the field of ECCE. The 2019 needs assessment noted the connection between workforce preparation and program quality but did not explore the state's approach to ECCE training, types of and availability of training to include languages and cultural relevance,

professional development supports and services, career preparation and guidance, and opportunities for meaningful career advancement. Additional input is needed to better understand the issues, barriers and challenges individuals face as they enter the field, prepare for their work, and attempt to grow a career or earn a degree. This feedback is essential to our efforts to develop, target, and deliver effective, accessible, equitable, and comprehensive services and supports for the ECCE workforce.

Specifically, HHS-EC seeks to hear from the ECCE workforce about their language needs, professional learning preferences and behaviors, the threshold for the cost of training, and considerations such as what they wish they had known in their first year of employment and what they need to know in their current position. Additionally, HHS-EC wants to understand what motivates individuals to enter and stay in the ECCE field, to include factors such as benefits, meaningful recognition, coaching, ability to earn qualification, and perceptions and barriers related to college degrees.

HHS-EC also seeks feedback on the impact and effectiveness of the program grants and the workforce stipends that were made available with CRRSA and ARPA funds. An assessment of these programs will be done in partnership with the Health Statistic and Performance section at North Dakota DHHS to determine the strategies that were helpful to the field and the issues that they encountered in attempting to apply for and utilize the funds. This new information will be included in the needs assessment review.

Information gathered through the needs assessment will help us best establish the Pyramid framework across the state's mixed delivery system, understand how to support ECCE providers training, and establish a coaching network. As described in Activities Four and Five of this application, North Dakota plans to implement the Pyramid Model to fidelity statewide to better prepare the workforce with knowledge and skills to support children's social and

emotional development, reduce expulsions, and facilitate parent’s ability to foster their child’s development.

HHS-EC is also curious to hear from parents to understand how they perceive “quality” in ECCE programs, and what information they would find most helpful in determining program quality. As well, we wish to discover the preparation and competencies that parents expect ECCE providers to possess to meet the needs of their young children and their families. We also seek to better understand the challenges families experience related to accessing ECCE care and service for their children, and methods and approaches parents are most likely to use to find information about ECCE programs and quality.

As North Dakota works to align quality standards, definitions, and approaches across the mixed delivery system, we also wish to hear from stakeholders across the state and from multiple levels of the system to gather their viewpoints regarding the strengths, challenges, barriers, and opportunities for increased collaboration and alignment for the ECCE system.

The revised needs assessment results will be used to update the strategic plan and to inform the state’s PDG B-5 Renewal activities. To ensure that feedback is open to the widest number of voices, HHS-EC will work with the North Dakota DHHS communication team to design a PDG B-5 information webpage that will include a feedback mechanism so that individuals can submit comments and views about the ECCE system at any time throughout the Renewal Grant period.

Activity 2: Update Statewide B-5 Strategic Plan

The *North Dakota Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 Strategic Plan* was developed in 2020, as part of the state’s original PDG B-5 grant. North Dakota has in place the Strategic Plan Framework, attached at the end of this section, however COVID-19 effectively halted implementation of the plan. With the information gathered through an updated needs

assessment, North Dakota will revise its PDG B-5 strategic plan to reflect current input from the ECCE workforce, families, and stakeholders across all sectors for the early childhood mixed delivery system. The updated strategic plan will describe the shared vision and goals for strengthening the system, and for improving the early childhood experiences of North Dakota's young children. As noted previously, North Dakota consistently ranks as one of the youngest states in the nation, with a fast-growing diverse population. More than 64,000 of North Dakota's 760,000 residents are age 5 or younger and live in more than 42,000 households across our largely rural state. This means that ECCE care and services are front and center for the state, and our updated strategic plan must position North Dakota to provide all children and their families, in all corners of the state, access to quality ECCE experiences that is responsive to family needs and supports children's healthy development.

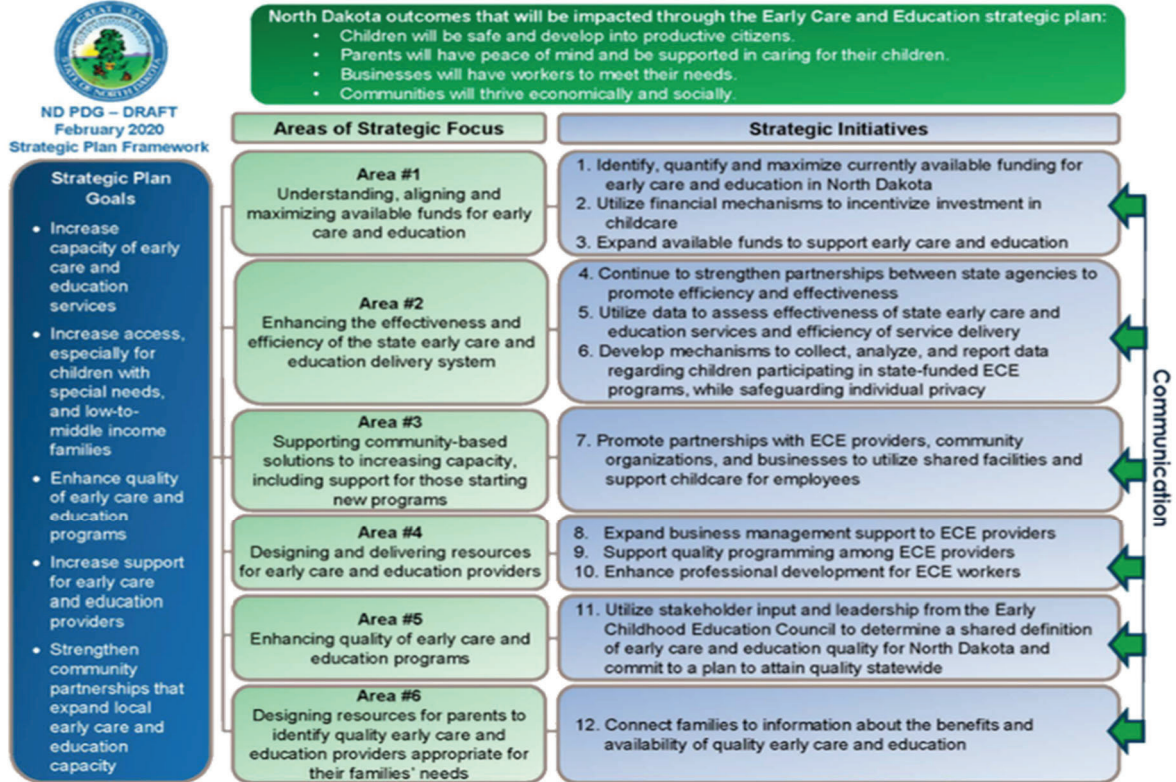
North Dakota's original PDG B-5 strategic plan identified six areas where the state could prioritize its efforts to improve ECCE care and services: capacity, barriers to access, quality, challenges for providers, challenges in the mixed delivery system, and issues with availability of data. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened these and additional issues we face going forward. The updated strategic plan will organize the identified needs into defined actionable goals, each with specific, measurable objectives and outcomes, and provide North Dakota and HHS-EC with a roadmap for building an effective, sustainable, responsive, and comprehensive ECCE system. The goals will include the Governor's legislative proposal to address access and availability of ECCE services and the quality of those services to include workforce preparation. The strategic plan will also include HHS-EC's goals of aligning quality standards across the mixed delivery system, collaboration across the mixed delivery system, and data driven approaches and decision making. As North Dakota seeks to create a more integrated early childhood system, the plan will

detail the interrelationship between the goals and how work in one area impacts and informs the other goals.

To update the strategic plan, HHS-EC will work with the contracted consultant (see page 7) to revise the strategic plan, and to develop the plan objectives, outcomes, assessment tools, processes for data analysis, and ongoing decision-making process to refine the goals and evolve action steps. The consultant will help HHS-EC develop stakeholder review and feedback of the strategic plan to ensure that the plan is inclusive, responsive, and realistic. The consultant will also provide technical assistance to align the HHS-EC section, including its vision, goals, staffing, communications, and so on to be positioned to deliver on the strategic plan. This work will be done concurrently and is expected to begin in spring 2023.

As noted above in Activity One, HHS-EC knows there will be a lag time between the award of the PDG B-5 Renewal grant and legislative approval to accept and expend the funds. Once notice of the grant award has been received, HHS-EC will immediately begin to prepare and issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) and will contract a consultant as soon as state authority has been granted.

2020 Strategic Plan Framework



Activity 3: Maximizing Parent and Family Engagement in the B-5 System

Family engagement supports the parent-child relationship and child development, which are critical for children being ready to learn. North Dakota agrees with Colorado’s family engagement system, which states that when “families are actively engaged as respected partners in their children’s learning and development, it promotes children’s healthy growth and development, builds learning and education environments that are safe, welcoming, and trusting, and supports family member’s confidence and skills.” While several family engagement strategies exist in North Dakota, the current reality is a fragmented system that often creates barriers to families being engaged in the ECCE system.

North Dakota seeks to ensure that all children and families have access to quality early care and services, and that parents are heard, included, and supported as their children’s first and most important teacher. The HHS-EC Family and School Engagement Administrator position

was established to strengthen collaboration and coordination of early childhood service and to facilitate family access to information and services and transitions from IDEA Part C to Part B and from Pre-K into kindergarten.

To ensure children have access to inclusive early learning programs, North Dakota contracts with USpireND for inclusive child care technical assistance. USpireND provides support, information, resources, and coaching for child care providers caring for children with unique needs. North Dakota's Right Track program is the Child Find activity and main referral source for IDEA Part C Early Intervention services. Right Track is a free developmental screening and follow-along program for families with children birth to three years of age. Families learn about Right Track upon the birth of each child. Right Track consultants meet with families in the privacy of their own home and in addition to developmental screening, provide ideas to support children's special needs, information on child growth and development and various childhood concerns, as well as referrals to local, state and national organizations. Local Education Agencies have Child Find obligations for IDEA Part B which often involves the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support process. Both IDEA Part C and Part B state coordinators elicit parent input at the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) quarterly meetings. The ICC has eight spots for parents. Contact information is available on the North Dakota DHHS website to connect families with concerns and questions to the HHS-EC team as well as our contracted partner for inclusive child care technical assistance.

As part of the 2018 PDG B-5 grant, North Dakota began to examine its parent engagement strategies and North Dakota State University (NDSU) was engaged to conduct a study that identified issues, barriers, challenges, and opportunities for family engagement, called the *Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota* study. The study recommended facilitation of parent-to-parent connections; consistent opportunities for parents to

meet and connect to sources of support; and utilizing a transition experience to engage children and families to ease the transition between child care and school and identified top information and community support sources for parents. However, the study was released just as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted service delivery and subsequently, as changes occurred in the North Dakota early childhood system structure. Work to develop a full family engagement framework was never completed.

With the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, North Dakota will reengage with NDSU to update the family engagement study. North Dakota will also contract with a project manager to develop a family engagement framework, which will include conducting a comprehensive review and analysis of national and local family engagement frameworks. To ensure the North Dakota family engagement framework is comprehensive, the contractor will engage parents and other stakeholders to include HHS-EC and intra agency sections, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, and ECCE programs, to share perspectives and refine the structure. A family engagement framework will provide the foundation for all future family engagement efforts, and will define, align, and identify important family engagement concepts to be applied across early childhood sectors and agencies.

The 2019 Needs Assessment highlighted that families find the current ECCE system difficult to navigate, with multiple agencies delivering duplicative services. Additionally, the PDG B-5 Family Engagement study indicated that 44% of parents and early childhood professionals were unaware of family engagement opportunities. Currently North Dakota DHHS is working to create a website that includes a section specifically designed for families. The goal is to provide a user-friendly family engagement hub with easy access to multi-lingual consumer education and family engagement resources as well as direct access to services. The site will highlight options for families, keeping in mind the choices for individual families. As part of

year one PDG B-5 Renewal grant activities, HHS-EC will engage families to gather input into the content and structure of the website, family engagement resources and information, and ease of accessibility and user-friendly formats and sources. North Dakota will use PDG funds to translate pdf's such as brochures and guides into languages other than English.

To assist families in identifying ECCE options for their children, North Dakota will expand and market the child care referral system. Currently, North Dakota's child care referral data system is limited to state licensed child care programs. The referral system, powered by *WorkLife Systems*, was transferred to the HHS-EC section. In year one of PDG B-5 Renewal, North Dakota will expand the child care referral system to include four-year-old approved program sites, unlicensed Head Start programs, and tribal programs. In year two, HHS-EC will reconfigure *WorkLife Systems* to allow families to see the qualifications of program staff by integrating data between the referral and professional development systems and will provide information to parents to better understand what the professional preparation of staff means to a quality early childhood experience. It should be noted that the referral system already includes a translation feature to make referrals more accessible to all families.

Additional grant activities will focus on supporting smooth transitions and alignment of services for children and families across early childhood, kindergarten, and the early grades, and to increase parent, ECCE provider, and kindergarten teacher knowledge of *North Dakota Birth to Kindergarten Early Learning Standards*, including alignment with the state kindergarten standards and the creation of developmentally appropriate goals. To encourage and promote mixed delivery service provider collaboration, HHS-EC will pilot competitive mini grants to six small and six large local education agencies (LEAs) to host events to engage ECCE providers and families of children in the year before kindergarten about kindergarten expectations and transition from pre-k to kindergarten. LEAs will be required to ensure ECCE providers and all

families, including tribal families, families with limited English proficiency, families experiencing homelessness and families who have young children with a disability, are informed about and connected in meaningful ways to schools and be able to identify developmentally appropriate goals in the year before kindergarten. Together at these events, LEA's and ECCE programs will raise awareness of additional resources and services to help families reach their full potential. HHS-EC will collect data to determine if ECCE curriculum changes because of ECCE programs' new understanding of kindergarten expectations along with pre and post family school readiness awareness and if the goals they have for their child(ren) have changed because of attending these events.

North Dakota values the involvement and leadership of parents in the state's ECCE system and recognizes the correlation between early family engagement and positive, long-term outcomes for children. Parental engagement and influence are present in North Dakota's current B-5 ECCE system through established boards and committees. Two examples that directly influence the delivery of the B-5 ECCE system are the Governor-appointed Early Childhood Council (ECC) and the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC). Parents included in the ECC and ICC are selected based upon geographic location, diversity of lived experience, and community. On the two councils, parents involved have equal voting rights for decision-making.

The ECC serves as a venue to foster collaboration and conversation that informs state early childhood policy and practice. Members serve as an advisory resource to HHS-EC, providing feedback on early childhood related initiatives and activities that involve young children and their families. ECC seats are appointed by the Governor and include a parent of a child not yet enrolled in school and a parent of a child with a disability not yet enrolled in school. The council provides a venue for members to offer feedback on early childhood models and approaches, focusing on opportunities to increase affordability, access, and quality of early

childhood experiences along with the infrastructure that makes quality early experiences possible.

North Dakota Early Childhood Council (ND ECC)	
Member Name	Role
Andrew Jordan	Supt. of Small School District
Brent Sanford, Lt. Gov.	Office of the Governor
Carmelita Bear Ribs	Reservation-based Head Start Program
Carolyn Kueber	Head Start State Collaboration Administrator
Chris Jones	Executive Director of DHHS
David Sjol	Supt. of Reservation-Based School District
Donald Schaible	Chair of Senate Education Committee
Jessica Dargis	Parent Rep. of a Child with Disabilities Not Yet Enrolled in Elem. School
Judy Lee	Chair of the Senate Human Service Committee or Designee
Kari Kapp	Home-Based Licensed Child Care Provider
Katie Ralston	Commissioner of Commerce or their Designee
Kelli Odden	Commissioner of Higher Education or their Designee
Kim Mertz	State Health Officer or their designee
Kirsten Baesler	Department of Public Instruction or their Designee
Marcus Lewton	Supt. of Large School District
Mark Owens	Chair of House Education Committee
Melissa Vollmer	Special Education Director
Mike Beltz	Chair of the House Human Service Committee or Designee
Rita Johner	Parent Rep. of a Child Not Yet Enrolled in Elementary School
Stephanie Yellow Hammer	Individual Representing Children with Disabilities
Tammy Mewes	Non-Religious-Based Provider of Early Childhood Education
Tanya Steckler	Religious-Based Preschool Provider
Tessa Moberg	Center-Based Licensed Child Care Provider
[Vacant]	Elected Member of a School Board

The purpose of the ICC is to provide a vehicle for assuring the coordination of planning, development, and implementation activities across those public and private agencies whose services deal with children, families, or individuals, including children birth through five with disabilities. The bylaws of the ICC state that “at least 30 percent of the members shall be parents, including minority parents, of infants and toddlers with disabilities or children with disabilities aged 12 or younger, with knowledge of, or experience with, programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities. At least one such member shall be a parent of an infant or toddler with a

disability or a child with a disability aged 6 or younger.” The intent of the Council is to a) promote development of quality early intervention services and prevention awareness for infants and toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities and their families, b) assure compliance with regulations specified in Public Law 99-457 in the development of birth through five services, c) prevent unnecessary duplication of services, and d) facilitate efficient use of resources.

Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)	
Member Name	Role
Amanda Peterson	Homeless Program
Amy Casavant	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region II)
Angela McSweyn	Part B 619 Coordinator
Brandy Pyle	Legislator
Carolyn Kueber	Head Start State Collab. Office
Eric Gault	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region V)
Janakate Walker	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region VII)
Jill Staudinger	Public or private provider of early education services
Jodi Hulm	Medicaid
Karri Volk	Insurance Department
Kelli Ulberg	Mental Health
Kimberly Hruby	DHHS – Healthy & Safe Communities
Lisa Piche	Foster Care
Louise Greff	Public or private provider of early education services
Mariah Hill	Child Care
Matthew Nelson	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region IV)
Michelle Ragan	Public or private provider of early education services
Missi Baranko	Public or private provider of early education services
Sarah Carlson	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region VIII)
Shannon Grave	Higher Education
Shantelle Petroff	Public or private provider of early education services
Tina Bay	DHHS – Developmental Disabilities
[Vacant]	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region VI)
[Vacant]	Parent of a handicapped infant, toddler, or child aged 3-6 (Region I)

In addition, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction created its first-ever Family Engagement Cabinet in the Spring 2019. The HHS-EC Part B 619 coordinator serves on the Core Family Engagement Leadership team for the Family Engagement Cabinet, which is a diverse stakeholder group of 32 community leaders and families of children, ages birth through grade twelve, across the state. The Family Engagement Cabinet convenes regularly and has been

responsible for providing parent and family input on the current state of education, policies and initiatives, such as literacy, school safety and educational standards. The cabinet has established a variety of activities, including a family tool kit, innovative family engagement grants, PK-12 Alliance Playbook, and statewide virtual Family Coffee Chats.

Family Engagement Cabinet	
Family Members	
Amanda Davis	Joy Sparks
Angie Waletzko	Kara Kniert
Anne Williamson	Katherine Schmit
Chantel Southam	Kristi Engelstad
Courtney Davis Souvannasacd	Maxine Thunder Hawk
Danielle Trottier	Melissa Sagness
DeAnn Bjornson	Mike McHugh
Donna Epperson	Molly Johnson
Heather Chatham	Richard Smith
Heidi Domier	Sarah Gackle
Jacqueline Frost-Hodney	Sheila Hoffman
Jason Rohr	Stacy Kilwein
Jayce Schumacher	Suzanne Kilichowski
Jennifer Wallender	
State Staff	Role
Kirsten Baesler	State Superintendent
Cami Bauman	Administrative Staff Officer
Lucy Fredericks	Director, Indian/Multicultural Education
Angela McSweyn	Part B 619 Coordinator, HHS-EC
Sara Mitzel	Assistant Director, Assessment
Taylor Olsen	Program Administrator
Rachel Tabler	Assistant Director, Educational Improvement & Support

Using available federal funds, North Dakota made the Waterford Upstart program available at no cost to families of four-year-olds across the state. Waterford Upstart is a low cost/high return at-home school-readiness program that teaches basic skills in reading and math and encourages parent involvement in the child’s learning. HHS-EC will seek legislative funding during the upcoming legislative session to sustain the project. With the PDG B-5 Renewal grant HHS-EC proposes identifying and targeting low socioeconomic schools as partners to promote Waterford Upstart to families in the year before their child enters

kindergarten. With this concentrated focus we would make Waterford Reading Academy available in year 2 to school kindergarten teachers who have 50% or more Waterford Upstart graduates. Waterford Reading Academy has a scope and sequence to grade 3 and offers the potential to collect data to measure program effectiveness and compare student outcomes against students that have not participated in the program. This work bridges early childhood experiences and the public-school in a unified approach that will provide rich data that will be collected by Waterford. This data will then allow the state to identify if scaling to other areas of the state is an effective strategy moving forward.

The strategies identified in Activity 3 will position North Dakota with a well-defined parent engagement framework and activities that can be monitored, evaluated, measured, and adjusted to meet the needs of parent and families in the state.

Activity 4: Support the B-5 Workforce and Disseminate Best Practices

North Dakota recognizes that quality is the result of a well prepared, competent workforce. The workforce is the heart and soul of early childhood services. Indeed, everything that happens in a child care program - from setting up the space to business practices to interactions with children and families - is determined by the individuals who work in the program. North Dakota will use PDG B-5 Renewal to improve the quality of ECCE care and services through restructure and alignment of the early childhood professional development system to include revised standards and career pathways, professional development supports, progressive intentional training, expanded training options, and opportunities for professional advancement as outlined in this section.

Several critical pieces of the ECCE professional development infrastructure are already fully implemented including a workforce registry and a Career Pathway. Since 2012, the registry has been the state system for approval of all training accepted toward annual child care licensing

requirements and state initiative projects such as the QRIS. In addition to serving as the system of record for training approval and completion, the registry also tracks, verifies, and reports the Career Pathways placement, education levels, professional qualifications, and employment history of individual members of the workforce. The Career Pathway is designed to support individuals toward completing the national CDA Credentialing requirements of 120 hours of informal non-credit training and includes formal preparatory tracks for individuals completing for-credit coursework or who hold degrees in early childhood and related fields.

The Registry hosts an online training calendar that shows all currently available training approved for child care licensing and ongoing professional development in North Dakota. Individuals who have completed approved training can access a report designed for child care licensing renewal. Individuals who have taken the extra step of becoming a registry member and providing their education, qualifications, and employment data can access their full learning record going back to 2012 as well as special reports accepted by the national CDA Council to verify that CDA education requirements, and are able to participate in quality initiatives, stipends, incentives, and grants offered by the state.

The registry operates using the *Insight* data system from New World Now, Inc. (NWN), which is also used by ten other state registry systems. While the *Insight* data system is customized for each state, the states form a consortium to continually share system upgrades and address issues. This is a huge advantage for a small state such as North Dakota and helps our state stay on the leading edge of registry technology and development.

Because all training accepted for child care licensing must be approved and tracked by the registry, all individuals working in state licensed or regulated programs must access the registry system to find and complete training. As well, registry participation is required to access additional services and supports, as noted above. As a result, registry participation is high across

the state. Current membership is 7069 individuals, of whom 4941 have verified employment as a director, teacher, assistant teacher, aide, or family/group caregiver in an early childhood program.

However, despite the registry training approval process, training promotion, and the Career Pathways, registry data shows that 66.3% of registry members have met only the minimum requirements for child care licensing. Just 5.4% have completed some informal clock hour training beyond the minimum requirements but not enough to meet the 120 hours of training needed to earn the national CDA Credential, and only 3% have an early childhood professional credential such as the CDA Credential or Aim4Excellence Center Director Credential and just 5.9% have an associate degree or higher in early childhood or a related field with an early childhood minor. Moreover, registry data suggests that turnover of the workforce may be as high as 40% annually. The data makes clear that a great deal more must be done to prepare and retain a competent early childhood workforce. With the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, HHS-EC will undertake the following activities to establish a cohesive continuum of professional development, aimed at increasing the competency of the ECCE workforce:

Standards: HHS-EC will convene a Professional Development Working Group (PDWG) made up of knowledge experts, early childhood professionals, parents, and stakeholders to rewrite the existing *Core Competencies for Practitioners* and align them to *NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*. The PDWG will also complete a crosswalk of the revised core competencies with the state's Early Learning Standards (e.g. if children are expected to know/do this, then ECCE providers have to know how to do this to support the expected learning outcome). North Dakota's current core competencies have not been revised for more than ten years. HHS-EC recognizes that establishing a strong professional development system and assuring quality care in all settings requires a shared understanding

across the mixed delivery system of the core body of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions early childhood practitioners are expected to demonstrate every day on the job. All other professional development activities across the delivery spectrum must be designed to ensure that individuals acquire and can perform to the standards defined by the core competencies.

HHS-EC will partner with the North Dakota Higher Education Consortium to work with the early childhood degree programs in the state to ensure that degree standards are also aligned to the NAEYC standards, thus establishing consistency between the informal and formal preparatory approaches and enabling articulation of informal training to formal degree programs.

Additional standards will be implemented for support and specialist roles in the ECCE system. HHS-EC will adopt *Key Competencies for Licensers of Child Care Programs*, from the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance. The PDWG will review and make recommendations on adopting core competencies for coaches and consultants, to establish a foundation for these services across the mixed delivery system.

Career Pathways: The existing Career Pathways will be revised to reflect the updated core competencies and to align with NAEYC *Power to the Profession* and will be expanded to establish paraprofessional categories. The basic structure of the current Career Pathways remains sound; however, the revised pathways will incorporate more clearly defined training paths, and alternate pathways such as one-year early childhood certificates and MCATE Montessori teacher certification. Revisions will be released in three phases. Phase one will include general updates, clarified structure, alternate pathway options, and alignment with NAEYC *Power to the Profession*. Phase two will incorporate changes to the core competencies and include expanded training options for basic licensing and paraprofessional categories. The third phase will include additional enhanced opportunities for workforce skills development and recognition, as well as professional development advising. Changes will be made to the registry

Insight data system as well, to update the automated Career Pathways calculations that determine individual registry member's pathways placement designation.

Professional Development Support: HHS-EC will establish a CDA/Professional Development (PD) advisor within the HHS-EC professional development team to help individuals assess their own skills, training needs, and career objectives and to develop a personal training plan. This individual will be trained to have in-depth understanding of ECCE training, credentialing processes, and instate early childhood degree programs as well as the spectrum of ECCE career options and the required preparation. The PD Advisor will assist individuals to access appropriate training, and if applicable, complete the CDA credentialing process. To further support personalized PD advising, HHS-EC will purchase and customize a professional development module available from NWN. The professional development module will integrate with North Dakota's existing *Insight* data system and will expand the HHS-EC's capability to offer customized, personalized professional development planning and support to individuals, accessed directly from the individual's registry account, to include a new designation to acknowledge foreign equivalency for high school completion. The registry already uses the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to assess post-secondary credits and degrees earned outside of the United States.

Progressive Intentional Training: The PDWG will establish a framework of guided intentional training beginning as soon as an individual enters the ECCE workforce. To ensure individuals enter the workforce with essential knowledge, HHS-EC will convene a team of content experts, including the CCDF oversight team at HHS-EC, child care licensing, health experts from North Dakota DHHS Health Sections, and health consultants serving under a state contract to refine and enhance the current 15-hour CCDF pre-service health and safety training course, to ensure it meets all CCDF requirements and that it embeds adult learning principles.

The course is required for all newly employed staff within three months of employment and is offered online 24/7 as a self-study course. The team will also review the existing *Sudden Infant Death Syndrome* (SIDS) course that is required annually for individuals caring for infants and toddlers to revise and update the course as needed. Additionally, the team will create licensing orientation training to ensure that individuals enter the field with a solid understanding of the rules that govern their work. The 15-hour pre-service training, SIDS course, and the licensing orientation training will be offered at no cost to attendees. To expand access to this training, HHS-EC will collaborate with the state's Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) English Learner and Multiple Language section and review needs assessment findings to identify languages other than English in which to make these courses available. Once additional languages are identified, HHS-EC will RPF instructional design of the courses.

In addition to robust entry-level training, HHS-EC will award a subgrant to develop a program of supports and resources for recently licensed child care programs, modeled on the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative licensing toolkit program. The support and toolkits will be aligned to the entry-level training.

It should be noted that currently there is no formalized training plan for licensing specialists who monitor licensed programs. The HHS-EC CCDF Administrator will convene a working group to review available training options and establish a training plan for licensing specialists. This plan will include training on using the tools of the system, such as the licensing data system and the registry from the administrative perspective, as well as content specific to licensing in North Dakota and training on working with adults using an accepted coaching framework.

Individuals who enter the field with no prior preparation will be assisted to develop a training plan that could lead to competency recognition, professional qualifications, and

advancement on the Career Pathways. In addition to expanding the availability of applicable training, explained in greater detail below, HHS-EC will build out the infrastructure to support completion of a CDA Credential. Currently, the availability of CDA endorsed Professional Development (PD) Specialists throughout the state creates a barrier for individuals seeking to complete the CDA Credential. At this time, there is a critical shortage of CDA PD Specialists available to conduct the onsite visits required to complete the CDA process, particularly in rural areas. To build a network of CDA PD Specialists, HHS-EC will contract NWN to build new functionality in the registry *Insight* data system to verify, promote, and incentivize individuals to become CDA PD Specialists. HHS-EC will work with cross-sector ECCE partners, reaching out to individuals who may be qualified to become CDA PD Specialist for help in developing this network across the state and will create outreach materials for interested individuals and those looking for a CDA PD Specialist.

HHS-EC will also work with North Dakota Career and Technical Education (CTE) to pilot a high-school to CDA pathway, as a recruitment strategy. A cross-sector team including HHS-EC, CTE, ECCE programs, and higher education will be convened to develop the requirements and align high school curriculum to the CDA education requirements for the pilot and will request technical assistance from the national CDA Council to ensure a strong and sustainable approach. As well, the team will explore options for a field experience component for CTE CDA students in multiple school districts that could be scaled to other districts.

Additionally, HHS-EC will partner with an institutional member of the North Dakota Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium to develop an articulation plan for those who have obtained a CDA and wish to receive credit toward an early childhood degree program. Currently, North Dakota higher education institutions have separate policies regarding acceptance of the CDA Credential toward college credit, which creates a barrier for individuals

to progress from informal to formal education. HHS-EC supports and will advocate for a formal articulation agreement that will recognize a valid CDA Credential as meeting the requirements for three early childhood degree common numbered courses offered throughout the North Dakota higher education system, for a total of nine semester credits toward an early childhood degree.

Expanded Training Opportunities: HHS-EC will develop orientation and data privacy courses for trainers, training sponsors, and Relationship Based Professional Development (RBPD) Specialists to help them understand the registry system, and better align the training and RBPD documentation they submit for approval with core competencies and professional standards. North Dakota will use the PDG B-5 Renewal grant to implement the Pyramid Model to fidelity statewide and to offer additional Pyramid training, explained in greater detail in Activity Five. The 18-hour e-Pyramid Birth to Five foundations course is already approved by the North Dakota Registry, available online via the statewide training calendar, and completion of the training is currently incentivized using ARPA funding. North Dakota will expand and embed the Pyramid Model statewide in a cross-sector approach to address children’s emotional well-being, address challenging behaviors, and reduce expulsions, more fully described in Activity Five. HHS-EC will also work with the Pyramid Consortium to make two new courses, *“Trauma Informed Care & the Pyramid Model”* and *“Culturally Responsive Practices to Reduce Implicit Bias, Disproportionality, Suspension & Expulsion”* available for registration on the online statewide training calendar.

North Dakota recognizes that children, families, and our own B-5 workforce are often struggling with issues related to adverse, traumatic situations, and that these issues can lead to challenging behaviors, expulsions, and inappropriate care. We consider training around these issues to be a necessity as we expand training availability. HHS-EC will work with partners and

subgrantees to make trauma awareness training more widely available to ECCE programs in each of the eight regions of the state.

In subsequent PDG B-5 Renewal grant years, HHS-EC will undertake a feasibility study with Virtual Lab School (VLS) at Ohio State University to explore embedding VLS in the North Dakota professional development system. VLS Foundational Courses are comprehensive, aligned across functional roles, and organized into distinct role-based tracks. Tracks address direct care and leadership staff in both center-based and family child care programs. The fifteen VLS Foundational courses align with the CDA competencies as well as NAEYC and NAFCC standards. The courses also integrate and align with the Pyramid Model.

Ongoing Recognition and Professional Advancement: HHS-EC recognizes that not every individual will want to pursue a CDA Credential or degree, or may already have professional qualifications. Still, every individual working in the field needs ongoing training and professional development to continually improve their skills and competencies. HHS-EC will issue a subgrant to an institutional member of the North Dakota Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium or other highly qualified entity with expertise in the preparation of early childhood professionals to create role-specific badges to identify and recognize specific skills, competencies, and achievements of early childhood providers. Badging demonstrated skills and competencies is a way to recognize individuals even if they are not pursuing a credential or degree. HHS-EC will also explore options to sponsor communities of practice for individuals in specific roles, such as center directors, and to provide targeted coaching and onsite support. The 2019 PDG B-5 needs assessment indicated that business management issues are a predominant concern for early care providers. As well, there is a strong need to support the business operations and sustainability of child care programs, many of which play an essential role as the only provider in rural communities. Therefore, HHS-EC has identified business skills as one of

the first badges to be developed. HHS-EC will require the sub-granted entity to conduct focus groups and review sessions with stakeholders to develop the content and technical assistance that will comprise the badge.

As a further tool to support professional growth, HHS-EC will subgrant an institutional member of the North Dakota Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium to study the feasibility of distance-delivered micro credentials leading to an early childhood associates degree and linked to progression along the Career Pathways, as an option for individuals to complete and be recognized for work toward a degree in manageable steps. HHS-EC will explore incorporation of badges and micro credentials for display in a digital wallet and the *Insight Data System*.

HHS-EC anticipates that issues related to the early childhood workforce will be a focus of the upcoming 2023 legislative session. North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum has issued a 2023-2025 proposal to support working families and address workforce challenges. The proposal calls for incentivizing providers to deliver child care for infants and toddlers by increasing the rate paid by the state for those families who receive child care assistance; partnering with career and technical education programs, K-12 and higher education to offer students interested in early childhood careers more on-the-job training and certification opportunities; supporting a more sustainable, stable child care sector through grants, incentives, training and share services resources; providing child care business solutions, facility grants and resources to create environments for children with special needs; providing incentives for child care providers who take the necessary steps to meet quality standards; and offer scholarships and grants for additional learning/training opportunities to individuals already in the early childhood profession. It is our intention to focus grant activities on the infrastructure, supports, and

services that are required to deliver on the Governor’s proposal as well as other workforce needs that may be identified through the state’s PDG B-5 needs assessment.

Activity 5: Support Program Quality Improvement

While a competent, effective, and stable ECCE workforce is the foundation on which a quality B-5 system depends, the steps to build a progressive workforce professional development system, described in Activity Four, can only be successful if they are embedded in a comprehensive system-wide continuum of quality. Many years of research tell us that high-quality ECCE can help narrow the opportunity gap for underserved children and support children’s development, learning, and success in school and beyond. Yet, to a large extent, the B-5 sector and the Pre-K and K-12 worlds are viewed and supported very differently in North Dakota. With the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, North Dakota seeks to bridge gaps and connect opportunities to improve quality and effectiveness of birth to Grade 3 services.

Like many states, North Dakota has struggled to deliver a clearly articulated vision for quality in early childhood programs. The 2019 PDG B-5 needs assessment found that providers and parents were not able to define quality. Few respondents knew about or understood the state’s voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), *Bright & Early*. Despite these hazy responses, respondents reported that quality child care is a critical issue for North Dakota. Indeed, the need for high-quality early childhood programs has never been greater. North Dakota ranks as a state with one of the highest rates of working parents and too many of our children are growing up in families where all available caregivers are working, out of necessity as well as choice. Parents struggle to find care that meets their family’s needs and quality standards.

North Dakota recognizes that to improve quality overall, we must begin by addressing the issues in our current system that include a fragmented and disjointed delivery of quality services;

poorly defined approaches to improving quality, and lack of public awareness and access. As part of our PDG B-5 Renewal grant activities, North Dakota will undertake a full evaluation, alignment, and redesign of current systems that support program quality improvement to include the state's QRIS, four-year-old approved programs, Head Start, and Early Head Start. The redesign will develop a cohesive, clear continuum for the delivery and evaluation of all state ECCE quality initiatives.

The QRIS was launched statewide on July 1, 2016, as a key strategy for quality improvement. The QRIS operates as an integrated functionality in the New World Now (NWN) *Insight* data system that also powers the North Dakota early childhood workforce registry. This means that all data related to QRIS participation and service delivery is tracked, verified, and aligned with registry data. *Best in Class* data is being collected and not yet integrated within the *Insight* data system.

Since the inception, there has been limited participation, and little investment in or revisions to the QRIS. In addition, participation in the QRIS is currently limited to DHHS licensed programs which excludes the majority of Head Start, Early Head Start and school-based preschool programs. *Best in Class* participation has also been limited and has struggled to include DHHS licensed child care programs.

North Dakota seeks to implement a universal Quality Improvement System (QIS). This universal system will create a shared understanding and commitment to quality across all early childhood settings, inclusive of all federally, publicly, and privately funded programs. The universal system will be grounded in continuous quality improvement ensuring that each program is systematically and intentionally improving the following key components; 1) ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of children, 2) providing stable, skilled, and well-

trained caregivers, 3) creating an engaging and developmentally appropriate learning environment, and 4) building and strengthening interpersonal interactions.

HHS-EC has established a Quality Administrator within the HHS-EC section to oversee all quality improvement services, ensure continuity, and oversee data collection and integration. HHS-EC will also convene a work group of early childhood stakeholders to review needs assessment responses related to the delivery of quality services; complete a crosswalk of the quality frameworks, standards, and indicators currently used in the QRIS, four-year-old approved programs, Early Head Start, and Head Start to align and create a unified QIS across the state's mixed delivery system. To ensure that early childhood programs can achieve and maintain success along the QIS continuum, new and expanded supports must be implemented.

As noted in Activity Four, North Dakota will implement the Pyramid model to fidelity statewide. Pyramid Model utilizes a public health approach to provide universal supports to all children in a structured framework that promotes teachers and other service providers to implement the practices. The approach is both data-driven and scalable.

North Dakota will contract the Pyramid Consortium, based in Missoula Montana, for technical assistance to implement the Pyramid Model statewide to fidelity, to increase social and emotional supports for all children and reduce the number of expulsions due to behaviors. Our implementation approach will encompass four crucial structures of success: a cross-sector leadership team; a professional development network of program coaches; high fidelity demonstration sites; and data driven decision making.

The multi-year phased approach to implementation will bring together partners from across the early childhood services spectrum: licensed child care, Early Head Start and Head Start, four-year-old approved programs, IDEA Part C/Early Intervention and Part B/Preschool, DHHS Maternal and Child Health Section, HHS-EC section staff, HHS-EC contracted partners,

higher education, evaluators, and family members. This team will be led by a Pyramid Model Coordinator, housed within the HHS-EC section. Year 1 grant activities will include designating a statewide coordinator, convening a cross-sector leadership team, and establishing shared objectives and outcomes. Year 2 grant activities will include recruiting a statewide network of program coaches to include those serving diverse populations, delivering initial training to prepare coaches to deliver practice-based culturally responsive coaching with fidelity, and defining data collection and reporting structure.

Successful implementation of both a QIS redesign and the Pyramid Model require a strong network for coaching, consultation, and other technical assistance. HHS-EC will lead an effort to develop a statewide Coaching Consortium. Together with the Coaching Consortium, HHS-EC will develop and adopt a standardized set of coaching competencies and will review the current requirements for coaching endorsements through the workforce registry. The Consortium will organize standardized training for all coaches and improve coordination among partners. HHS-EC will designate a Coaching Administrator, housed within the HHS-EC section.

North Dakota will use the PDG B-5 Renewal funds to reconfigure the NWN *Insight* data system to facilitate revised delivery of coaching and other relationship based professional development. HHS-EC will purchase additional functionality from NWN to better manage all forms of coaching and will configure the new functionality to align with revised QIS as well as NAEYC definitions of coaching, consultation, and peer mentoring. The NWN *Insight* data system offers a feature that allows for translation of the entire registry system into additional languages. HHS-EC will work with NWN to update the state *Insight* registry system to incorporate the translation feature, making the system more accessible.

Consolidation of a QIS together with Pyramid Model implementation support North Dakota's progress toward data-driven decision-making across the mixed delivery system.

Currently, North Dakota is working toward a comprehensive data collection, evaluation and sharing approach by building an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS). North Dakota already has a robust state longitudinal data system (SLDS) to provide data on the outcomes of K-12 education and workforce training programs. As part of the 2018 PDG B-5 grant, North Dakota began work to expand the SLDS to include an ECIDS. Initial work toward ECIDS included development of a strategic plan, data governance policies, and initial case study questions. Data sharing agreements were achieved with North Dakota Vital Records and several Head Start programs that used Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment.

Unfortunately, due to changes in the State early childhood system, work on ECIDS development temporarily halted. In 2022, work on the ECIDS project was resumed under the direction of HHS-EC, with phase one of the re-energized project funded with ARPA and state general dollars. A request for proposal (RFP) will be released by the end of 2022 to select a vendor to develop a technical strategy for ECIDS to include determining ECIDS data lake information requirements, identifying core data elements needed to complete required reporting and analysis, developing a strategy for linking child-level information between ECIDS-connected datasets, and updating data governance practices and tools for ECIDS implementation, and to carry forward additional phases of the project as needed. The resulting data will be housed within North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT) managed systems on state infrastructure or designated cloud environment.

Phase 1 data integration will begin with the data systems already under HHS-EC control, including the registry data system, which also contains QRIS and continuous quality improvement data management and the family support/referral data system. Additional data sets to be integrated in phase one of the ECIDS project include North Dakota Vital Records data and Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment data. HHS-EC has renegotiated data sharing agreements

with the six Head Start sites that were part of the original ECIDS PDG B-5 work, to share Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment data. This is being combined with Teaching Strategies GOLD data from all QRIS Step 3 and 4 programs as well as *Best in Class* programs that are using Teaching Strategies GOLD.

PDG B-5 grant activities related to the development of North Dakota's ECIDS include expanding the ECIDS phase one work to development of initial views, dashboards, and reports; completing technical integration of data; and defining and assembling metrics needed to support the project's objectives into dynamic user interface utilizing Power BI. Stakeholders will be involved in testing the system to ensure that it is accessible, and that views, dashboards, and reports are easy to understand and navigate. Additional PDG B-5 Renewal grant activities will support subsequent phases of the ECIDS project to accelerate the number of data systems and sets integrated in the ECIDS data lake. Phase 2 will integrate data sets from the child care licensing data system (CCL), North Dakota State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), and North Dakota Department of Public Instruction STARS, the state automated reporting systems for K-12 and TIENET. Phase 3 of the ECIDS work will integrate North Dakota Early Childhood Dataset to DHHS Social Determinant of Health datasets including MMIS (EPSDT) and SPACES, which includes the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid.

In conjunction with the ECIDS data dashboard, HHS-EC seeks to build a one-stop access "hub" for providers, families, and policy makers. The 2018 PDG B-5 needs assessment identified access as a major barrier for providers attempting to find early childhood services and support. Providers reported frustration with having to access multiple system, each with separate logins and requirements. Utilizing PDG B-5 Renewal grant, HHS-EC will work with NDIT to extend the State's single sign-on currently used with the child care licensing and child care

assistance data systems to include the workforce registry, QIS, professional development, and grants/incentives.

In year 2 North Dakota will utilize the PDG B-5 Renewal grant to rebrand the NWN *Insight* data system offering a range of services under the HHS-EC section. Currently, the data system retains the branding and title of the workforce registry, which was the original service delivered using the NWN *Insight* system. It is North Dakota's goal to rebrand the system with HHS-EC colors, logos, and verbiage as well as to retitle the entire system as the North Dakota Professional Development Information System (PDIS) to better reflect all the professional development information available to ECCE providers in our integrated *Insight* data system. The PDIS Rebranding will also give HHS-EC the opportunity to extend use of the data system to other partners who would not want registry branding on their services and emails, such as foster care, the developmental disability unit, and expand the connections with tribally licensed programs.

Activity 6: Subgrants to Enhance Quality and Expand Access to Existing and New Programs and/or System Enhancements

North Dakota intends to transfer program work to others for direct services and benefits to the ECCE community at large. In year one, North Dakota will dedicate \$521,730 or 8% of the state's renewal grant and projections for year two and year three will increase as activities scale.

As part of Subgrant Option A, North Dakota will continue expansion of access to Inclusion Specialists as outlined in the Bonus Area: Increasing Access to Inclusive Settings. Having a third Inclusion Specialist available offers early childhood services providers more support, improving services and outcomes for young children with challenging behavior, disabilities and/or developmental delays. Both the previous needs assessment and the *Include North Dakota Study* indicate a demand for child care for children with special needs and note

that children with special needs face obstacles in accessing early care and education. The state is positioned to offer an amendment to the UspireND contract ending June 30, 2023 to continue implementation of inclusive child care support services across the state which will include this additional specialist.

As part of Subgrant Option C, North Dakota will expand access to Inclusion Support Grants in support of inclusive ECCE settings as outlined in the Bonus Area: Increasing Access to Inclusive Settings. Grants to LEA special education units will allow more programs across the state to access resources necessary to serve children with challenging behaviors, disabilities, and/or developmental delays and to increase family engagement. This strategy will help North Dakota address the need for more support for special needs children and dual language learners as identified by key informants, providers, and parents in the previous needs assessment. New Inclusion Support Grants will be made available in the fall of 2023 for activities concluding no later than December 15, 2023.

According to the 2019 Needs Assessment a number of transition supports were listed; however, there were no methods to collect data on transition supports and it was unclear what specific types of transition supports providers are offering. To strengthen the state's integrated ECCE system to prepare low-income and disadvantaged children to enter kindergarten and have a seamless and high-quality early childhood experiences into the early grades, North Dakota will pilot subgrants to LEAs to host transition events as described in activity three. In year one, this strategy will be piloted with a dozen schools of various sizes and expanded to other communities across the state in subsequent years.

Based on the lack of opportunities for progressive professional development and an ill-prepared workforce as identified in North Dakota's Early Childhood Landscape Today, North Dakota will also subgrant with a member institution to lead the Early Childhood Higher

Education Consortium. The Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium has expressed interest in planning for and developing a series of micro credentials which will articulate between North Dakota institutions and let individuals complete and be recognized for work toward a degree in manageable steps. HHS-EC will also need their help in creating competency-based assessments for badges. This work will begin in year one and continue in the renewal period.

2019 Needs Assessment data indicated limitations regarding ECCE enrollment and capacity which have been exasperated by COVID-19. Child care providers mentioned difficulties with licensing regulations, too much paperwork, and the high costs of running a business. Almost 80% of respondents said program equipment and supplies would be beneficial to them. North Dakota currently supports start up services, but there are no measurable outcomes for those services.

In an effort to build the supply of licensed child care, North Dakota will create and make available tools and resources to support new providers. New standardized state supported training and technical assistance will help providers fulfill state licensing requirements, meet health and safety standards, and prepare for their role in providing quality early experiences for young children. The HHS-EC Licensing Administrator will convene a stakeholder group to create licensing orientation and a series of initial licensing supports modeled after Nebraska's licensing toolkits and determine measurable outcomes for this new model. A subgrant will be made to a contracted partner to purchase the toolkit materials that align with the training and coaching.

Obstacles and barriers that may present themselves in subgrants include attracting and retaining current Inclusion Support Specialists. For Subgrant Option C, LEA's may have a challenge collaborating with ECCE providers serving children within their school district

boundary as not all children receive pre-k services within their school district catchment area or with the same provider. HHS-EC also understands that warehousing materials to support the licensing toolkit project may create some obstacles in purchasing and distribution; considerations for the contracted partners to resolve.

Bonus Area

North Dakota recognizes that all children benefit from high quality inclusive ECCE programming, yet many of our most vulnerable children are underserved. Our state is faced with unique challenges including our geographic location, rural population, severe lack of early childhood workforce, the need for improved tribal partnerships in addition to various policy and funding barriers. In 2019 North Dakota conducted a statewide needs assessment, hosted diverse focus groups, and examined the resounding need for increased inclusive services and supports across the birth-five landscape. In 2022, the *Include North Dakota Study* focused on inclusive child care and indicated that providers across the state are aware of inclusive child care for children with disabilities and support its development. There is strong belief that children with disabilities ought to be included with their peers and experienced providers have seen the benefits for both children with and without disabilities; however, barriers do exist. Child care directors worry about staffing and funding issues as well as appropriate access to and time for training. If they are going to provide inclusive child care, providers want to do it right.

Recommendations from this study include enhancing the Inclusion Support Program by expanding the number of inclusion specialists, establishing a more robust training system for child care providers, which includes leveraging opportunities across the mixed delivery system, and adding training for special health care needs. Including child care providers as part of collaborative intervention and participating when developing care plans were also identified as

important so ECCE staff have a full picture of the services a child receives outside of their care setting and what goals exist for children they are serving.

HHS-EC currently has a contracted partner, USpireND, that provides inclusion support outreach and technical assistance services for early childhood service providers who are caring for children with special needs and/or children who require additional help or support because of behavioral, health, or developmental issues. The North Dakota Developmental Disabilities Council helped to support this under resourced service for the 2022-23 contract year allowing the contracted partner to hire a third specialist. Along with supporting child care providers in offering inclusive child care settings, we know Inclusion Specialists work to ensure all early childhood service providers are at the table when considering the needs and goals the family has for their children. As such and with PDG B-5 Renewal, North Dakota will continue funding of a third Inclusion Specialist in each of the three years. In year one, Inclusion Specialists will help the state prioritize special health care training needs for all ECCE programs. In years two and three, Inclusion Specialists will be utilized to support Pyramid Model implementation fidelity in inclusive ECCE programs.

Families of children with significant health care needs and/or behavioral needs want access to inclusive early experiences when choosing to work and support their families. The state has a small allocation for Inclusive Child Care grants available only to licensed child care programs for staffing, environment modifications, and equipment and materials to support programs caring for children with disabilities and developmental delays. North Dakota also dedicated \$1M in ARPA stabilization to provide these inclusive child care supports. Over 88% of the funding went to staffing providing the second pair of hands many ECCE programs need to care for children with special needs. These current strategies will not sustain staffing for children with special needs. North Dakota is committed to figuring out how to supply the needed 1:1

support to ensure children with significant needs can attend an inclusive ECCE program and not be segregated in their home. During PDG B-5 Renewal, HHS-EC will meet quarterly with the Developmental Disabilities and Medical Services intra agency teams to explore solutions. North Dakota will also conduct focus groups or interviews with ECCE providers who have turned away children with special needs to determine what additional supports might be needed so families have access to inclusive settings. In addition, North Dakota will retool the inclusive child care grant application used for APRA to ease burden by utilizing the Insights grant module for future state inclusion grants.

With PDG B-5 Renewal, North Dakota will also create an Inclusion Support Grant opportunity for our 32 special education units making inclusion grants more widely available across the mixed delivery settings to support young children with special needs. Eligible programs will demonstrate the individual community needs, partnering with local licensed child care, Head Start and Early Head Start where applicable and provide a detailed plan, outlining proposed projects, targeting improved access for children of all abilities, increased meaningful family engagement opportunities and the use of evidence-based approaches such as universal design for learning (UDL).

To assist ECCE providers’ and families’ access to resources and services, HHS-EC Part B 619 will continue to partner with North Dakota DPI Office of Specialized Learning Services, Early Intervention (IDEA Part C), and our contracted partner for inclusion support services.

Project Timeline and Milestones

PDG B-5 Renewal Grant Activity Timeline -Year One		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	Hire a Consultant to support North Dakota systems thinking and policy development		X		
Activity 1	PDG B-5 Statewide Needs Assessment				

1.1	Needs Assessment Project Management – Hire evaluation contractor and community engagement facilitator		X		
1.2	Needs Assessment Project Management – Scan available data to inform needs assessment and conduct at least one additional assessment			X	
1.3	Need Assessment Project Management – Publish and disseminate the results				X
Activity 2	PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan				
2.1	PDG Strategic Plan Update – Convene stakeholder group to review the needs assessment			X	
2.2	PDG Strategic Plan Update – Work with PDG Consultant to update the strategic plan				X
2.3	Publish and disseminate the updated Strategic Plan				X
Activity 3	Maximize Parent and Family Engagement in the B-5 System				
3.1	Re-engage with NDSU to update the Family Engagement Study conducted prior to COVID-19		X		
3.2	Contract a Family Engagement Framework project manager		X		
3.3	Family Engagement project manager will engage parents and other stakeholder to share perspectives and provide input to create North Dakota’s Family Engagement Framework			X	X
3.4	Facilitate focus groups to engage family input regarding content and structure of the website, use tracking analytics and data to improve accessibility including multiple languages		X	X	X
3.5	Expand and market child care referral system to programs not currently included	X	X		
3.6	Pilot LEA grants to host events with ECCE providers and families aimed at informing and connecting families to transition from the early learning setting to kindergarten			X	X
3.7	Identify and target low socio-economic schools as partners to promote Waterford Upstart	X	X	X	
Activity 4	Support the B-5 Workforce and Disseminate Best Practices				

4.1	Engage ECCE providers to update core competencies for practitioners, aligned with NAEYC standards and crosswalk practitioner competencies with state Early Learning Guidelines			X	X
4.2	North Dakota higher education early childhood degree standards aligned with NAEYC standards and practitioner competencies			X	X
4.3	Licensing specialist core competencies developed and in use to guide licenser training		X	X	X
4.4	Revised Career Pathways, aligned to NAEYC Power to the Profession to include alternative Career Pathways		X		
4.5	Professional development advisor in place at HHS-EC	X	X	X	X
4.6	System upgrade to embed professional development advising module in the <i>Insight</i> system, available from individual registry accounts			X	X
4.7	Contract to revise the pre-licensing CCDF training and a newly created licensing orientation course			X	X
4.8	HHS-EC Licensing Administrator will collaborate with partners to plan an approach to model Nebraska's licensing toolkits			X	X
4.9	CDA PD Specialist infrastructure in place to include data system configuration, outreach activities and incentive strategies				X
4.10	Convene a planning committee to define and pilot field experience for high school CTE CDA credentialing				X
4.11	Expanded training availability			X	X
Activity 5	Support Program Quality				
5.1	Evaluation and alignment of QRIS to include all state quality initiatives implementing a universal QIS			X	X
5.2	Best in Class integration into <i>Insight</i> data system			X	
5.3	Pyramid Model to fidelity implementation technical assistance			X	X
5.4	Consultant begins stakeholder work to help HHS-EC develop a Coaching Framework which includes a Coaching				X

	Administrator, Coaching Competencies, and alignment to the <i>Insight</i> data system				
5.5	Planning for rebranding of NWN <i>Insight</i> data system to include single sign on log in		X	X	X
5.6	Preparation to have the <i>Insight</i> data system translated to multiple languages		X	X	X
Activity 6	Subgrants to Enhance Quality and Expand Access to Existing and New Programs				
6.1	Inclusion subgrant for a third specialist			X	
6.2	Inclusion support grants provide to the 32 ECSE units			X	X
6.3	Micro credential and badges development subgrants				X
6.4	Pre-K to K transition subgrants			X	X
6.5	Licensing tool kit subgrants				X
Bonus	Increasing Access to Inclusive Settings				
B.1	EC Systems Thinking to support 1:1 in EC for children with special health care needs or significant behaviors		X	X	X
B.2	Focus Groups/Child Trends facilitated interviews with providers who haven't been able to care for children with special needs			X	
B.3	Inclusion Subgrant for a third specialist (see subgrant 6.1 timeline)				
B.4	Inclusion support grants provide to the 32 ECSE units (see subgrant 6.2 timeline)				

Organizational Capacity/Monitoring

DHHS was designated by the Governor to be the lead agency for this grant. When North Dakota received the initial PDG B-5 grant in 2018, early childhood administration was in two state agencies. The Department of Human Services had an Early Childhood Services administrator, and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Office of Early Learning included a director, the Part B 619 coordinator, and the Head Start State Collaboration administrator. Since then, legislative action called for the integration of the Department of Health and the

Department of Human Services and created an Early Childhood section (HHS-EC) in the Human Services Division at the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Together with our state and local partners, the Human Services Division provides resources that help North Dakotans avoid crisis and experience great stability. Among the key priorities for the Division is help to assure that young families have access to high quality experiences for their children by supporting the people and programs who provide early childhood services. The director of the HHS-EC reports to the Human Services Division Director who reports to the Executive Director of DHHS. The HHS-EC director meets weekly with the Executive Director of DHHS and the DPI's State Superintendent of Schools. HHS-EC is responsible for child care licensing, four-year-old program approval, professional development and quality initiatives for those providing early childhood experiences, Best in Class, and family and school engagement including Head Start Collaboration, Part C Early Intervention, Part B 619 Special Education, home visitation, child care assistance for lower income households, and consumer education.

DHHS has extensive experience in administering programs, leading initiatives, implementing program changes, evaluating systems change, and managing agencies. The key partners identified have program expertise to support the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant goals, objectives, and evaluation of the work. These partners already lead state government programs and have experience with the fiscal, administrative, and management capacity to effectively administer federal grant funds.

HHS-EC has been responsible for distributing federal relief funding to the child care sector. North Dakota chose several policies to pilot with these relief funding streams.

1. Stabilization with special consideration for infants and toddlers, underserved communities, and non-traditional hours.
2. Health and Safety facility grants

3. Technology Grants
4. Inclusive Child Care Grants for staffing, environmental modifications, equipment/materials
5. Start Up Grants with special consideration for underserved communities
6. Quality Grants for programs that receive a Bright and Early Rating
7. Increasing eligibility for child care assistance to 85% state median income, paying max state rate for eligible child care assistance recipients, and eliminating co-pays
8. Workforce Retention Stipends
9. Career path and training incentives

As the lead agency, DHHS will administer the implementation of the PDG B-5 Renewal grant, including assigning a Fiscal Grant Manager, who will assist the key staff to oversee the budget and allowability of grant expenditures, submit financial reports, and participate in fiscal monitoring.

Having all early childhood administration at North Dakota DHHS promotes collaboration and continuity across the mixed delivery system. HHS-EC staff are required to participate in cross sector collaboration and embrace the Plan Do Study Act framework for continuous quality improvement. DHHS policies and procedures govern our collective work. These strategies lend to our accountability across the mixed delivery system.

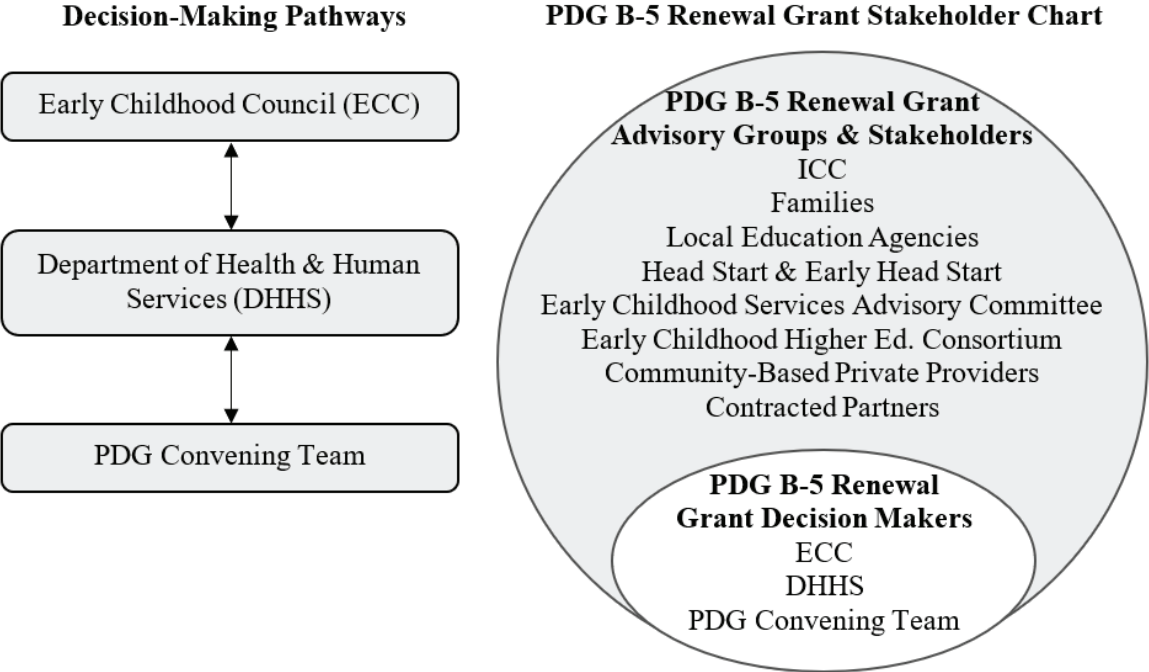
Key Staff also known as the PDG Convening Group	
HHS-EC Director	Kay Larson is the HHS-EC Director. Ms. Larson has a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education, along with thirty years of ECCE experience. Ms. Larson was the team lead for Child Care Aware of North Dakota from 2016 to 2021. Prior to that, Ms. Larson also has experience working in teaching and administrative positions in Head Start, Early Head Start, child care and the nonprofit sector. During her career, she has also been involved in program quality improvement, child care provider training and consultation. Ms. Larson’s PDG responsibilities will include regular meetings with HHS-EC team

	members leading PDG B-5 Renewal Activities to ensure North Dakota is accountable to the PDG B-5 application.
HHS-EC Systems Administrator	Ellen Anderson is the HHS-EC Systems Administrator. Ms. Anderson has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Services and a master's degree in Child Development. Ms. Anderson has over thirty years of experience in the ECCE field, including serving as Professional Development Coordinator for CCRR; coordinating North Dakota's Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship project; designing and delivering CDA programming; and administrating North Dakota workforce registry. Since 2021, she has served as Systems Coordinator at HHS-EC where she is currently working on the development of North Dakota ECIDS as well as integration of early childhood systems at the state level. Ms. Anderson will serve as the PDG Coordinator.
HHS-EC Family and School Engagement Administrator	Janelle Wiedrich is the HHS-EC Family and School Engagement Administrator. Ms. Wiedrich has a bachelor's degree in Home Economics Education and a master's degree in Child Development and Family Science and over thirty years of experience in ECCE and related work. Ms. Wiedrich has served as a Family and Consumer Science teacher, Career and Technical Education State Supervisor for Family and Consumer Science Education, Early Childhood Education post-secondary instructor and as a trainer for ECCE providers. Ms. Wiedrich's PDG responsibilities include leading, coordinating, and oversight of activities in section three as well as the bonus area.
HHS-EC Professional Development Administrator	Jennifer Prince is the HHS-EC Professional Development Administrator. Ms. Prince has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, along with over thirty years of service in the field. Ms. Prince was the QRIS Continuous Quality Improvement Coordinator from 2016 – 2021. Prior to that, Ms. Prince also has experience working in teaching and administrative positions in child care and the nonprofit sector. Ms. Prince's PDG responsibilities will include leading, coordinating, and oversight of activities in sections four and five.
HHS-EC Quality Administrator	Tara Wateland is the HHS-EC Quality Administrator. Ms. Wateland has a bachelor's degree in Child Development and Family Science, along with over twenty years of service in the field. Ms. Wateland's responsibilities include, administering, monitoring, and supporting the development of <i>Bright & Early</i> , North Dakota's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). In addition, she oversees other quality activities in North Dakota that utilize funding from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Ms. Wateland's PDG responsibilities include leading the QRIS redesign and support of quality activities in sections four and five.
HHS-EC Licensing Administrator	Carmen Traeholt serves as the state's CCDF administrator as well as the licensing administrator. Ms. Traeholt has a Child Development and Family Science degree and over 25 years of experience in ECCE. Ms. Traeholt's PDG responsibilities include leading, coordinating, and oversight of the adoption of licensing competencies and training for licensing specialists as well as the development of a licensing

	orientation course and a series of initial licensing supports. Ms. Tracholt will also participate in activities in sections four and six.
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Additional Stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is valued in North Dakota and relationships have been built with partners that can support elevating the quality of the B-5 mixed delivery system and support the advancement of a well-prepared workforce. As applicable, the PDG Convening Group will bring those stakeholders to the table.



Advisory Group/Stakeholders	Contact
ND Early Childhood Council	Lt. Governor Brent Sanford See membership on page 21
ND Department of Public Instruction/ Local Education Agencies	Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent Mary Mc Carvel O’Connor, Office of Specialized Learning
Career and Technical Education	Wayde Sick, Ann Dietchman, and Alyssa Martin
ND Higher Education Early Childhood Consortium	Dr. Kelli Odden, chair
ND Head Start Association	Allison Driessen, chair

DHHS- Developmental Disabilities Section	Tina Bay, Director
DHHS – Healthy and Safe Communities Section	Kim Mertz, Director
Interagency Coordinating Council	Carolyn Kueber, chair
Community Based Private Providers - Early Childhood Services Advisory Board	See membership on page 54
Family Engagement Cabinet	See membership on page 23
HHS-EC Contracted Partners	Community Action Program Lakes and Prairies – Maria Steen Southeast Education Cooperative – Keely Ihry USpireND – Missi Baranko

The North Dakota Early Childhood Council (ECC) serves as a venue to foster collaboration and conversation that informs state early childhood policy and practice (see page 21 for membership). North Dakota’s ECC, chaired by Lt. Governor Brent Sanford, was rebooted in 2022 with HHS-EC providing support including drafting agendas, identifying subject matter experts to speak, and running technical assistance for hybrid meetings. This council has met twice and is scheduled to meet again in November. The ECC meets approximately quarterly, but no less than twice per year and the 2023 schedule is being set now. North Dakota’s ECC includes the voices of parents and providers with seats appointed by the Governor, these include a parent of a child not yet enrolled in school, a parent of a child with a disability not yet enrolled in school, an individual representing children with disabilities, a special education director, and individuals representing a non-religious-based provider of a four-year-old program, religious-based provider of a four-year old program, center-based licensed child care provider, home-based licensed child care provider, and a reservation-based head start program.

The HHS-EC team has sketched out opportunities to bring elements of the state’s Child Care Development Fund Plan to the North Dakota ECC ensuring their participation in the plan. HHS-EC depends on the North Dakota ECC to provide feedback on early childhood-related

initiatives, discuss trends and key performance indicators related to early childhood, as well as offer feedback on models and approaches, focusing on opportunities to increase affordability, access, and quality of early childhood experiences along with the infrastructure that makes quality early experiences possible. Likewise, the council would receive information about and discuss activities funded by a PDG B-5 grant.

Families have the opportunity to participate in the Family Engagement Cabinet convened by the Department of Public Instruction (see page 23 for membership) and providers are appointed to an Early Childhood Services Advisory Board that advises HHS-EC each time the department reviews early childhood services rules; assisting in analysis and making recommendations to the department on an ongoing basis.

Early Childhood Services Advisory Board	
Member Name	Role
Beth Heyne	Center Child Care Provider – West
Catherine Heyd	Preschool Provider
Chelsey Steinlicht	Center Child Care Provider – East
Jessica Reile	Group Child Care Provider – East
Kathaleen Busche	Group Child Care Provider – West
Linda Schroeder	Family Child Care Provider
Tania Zerr	School Age Provider

Program Performance Evaluation Plan (PPEP)

Quality evaluation is critical to show short-term and long-term impact, including stewardship of resources and opportunity for long-term sustainability. To support an objective and quality evaluation, HHS-EC will RFP to contract with a vendor annually to outline the PPEP and complete the program performance evaluation. Together with a research partner, HHS-EC will refine, enhance, and implement the PPEP to align with the most current needs assessment findings and strategic plan.

North Dakota is working towards development an early childhood integrated data system to provide information that can be used to improve our ability to make data driven decisions and

establish external-facing dashboards using Power BI as the platform. North Dakota will have data from HHS-Health Statistics and Performance on the impact and effectiveness of ECCE program grants and workforce stipends data along with available in the following data systems.

- *Insight Data System*: North Dakota uses this platform for Registry, QRIS and other quality initiatives, and grants administration. Data reports are inclusive of membership accounts and illustrate workforce demographics, workforce participation, professional qualifications and employment, training availability, and job preparation.
- *CCAoA NDS 2.0 Worklife Systems (WLS)*: WLS powers child care referrals for families searching for child care, holds provider data and contact information and informs child care data reports. HHS-EC just approved the development of a system enhancement that will add real-time generated cost of care data and will create dashboards that illustrate the status of child care supply and demand across a single county or the whole state, users will find information about the different types of care available, rates for part-time and full-time care, census data, and more.
- *SPACES*: *SPACES* is North Dakota's multi-eligibility system that determines eligibility for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), SNAP, TANF, LIHEAP, and Medicaid. CCAP helps income-eligible families pay for child care while they work or attend school or training. North Dakota is currently in the process of updating the CCAP client application and self-service portal (SSP) to make them more friendly. CCAP is also improving the way payments are made, making it easier to request payment. The new SSP will automate certification and billing services, so providers and families are able to receive payments faster. CCAP will pay based on the enrollment of a child, not the attendance of a child and will participate in prospective payments by the end of the year. This means if a child is enrolled for care in the month of November, payment for those

services can be billed for at the beginning of November instead of waiting until December. All providers will be paid via direct deposit. Training is available for child care providers to learn how to use the new SSP.

- *Child Care Licensing Data System (CCL)*: CCL is anticipated to go live before the end of the year. This modern, online system will move child care licensing applications, renewals, and other activities to an easy to use web-based system.
- *Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)*: North Dakota's SLDS leverages stakeholders and partners of education, training, and employment programs to create a system which provides data to support the research and evaluation of programs to improve the outcomes of individuals provided service. The SLDS is a series of secured data warehouses comprised of historical education and workforce training data. The objective of the SLDS is to provide data on the outcomes of North Dakota education and workforce training programs.

Using data from these systems it is still hard to tie the data together to tell a story; for that reason, North Dakota has a goal to provide unique identifiers within the ECIDS system and to add ECCE programs to the Master Person Index System (MPI) that NDIT maintains.

In addition, HHS-EC is committed to continuous quality improvement and utilizes the Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) model. The PDSA model is a cyclical process for planning, implementing, studying the success of projects and refining the plan. The PDG B-5 Renewal Grant work will cycle throughout the PDSA framework several times in the three proposed years and help our team conduct important conversations, promote capitalizing on resources, and make data-driven decisions to affect systems change in the North Dakota B-5 ECCE system.

Logic Model

Vision: All children and families have access to high quality inclusive care and services across the ECCE mixed delivery system

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes - Impacts	
			Short	Long
PDG Grant Funds Collaboration Partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services Advisory Groups and Stakeholders 	Needs Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise, update the needs assessment Establish process for continual assessment 	PDG web presence with feedback mechanism; new systems for keeping info updated and for sharing with stakeholders	HHS-EC, partners, and EC communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share an understanding of needs and strengths in mixed-delivery system Align quality definition and standards State QRIS is updated Improved data sharing Increased use of data Families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are engaged and informed about community services, child's development, kindergarten transition, and access to available services Increased access to high-quality ECCE across all settings ECCE workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported with quality training, defined role competencies, career pathways, and individualized support 	HHS-EC Positioned to Lead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared vision and plan Policies, practices, roles to support quality Integrated systems Empowered Families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledgeable Access to quality ECCE Positive parent-child interactions supported Effective ECCE workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated skill and competency Career progression Healthy Children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend quality ECE Positive transition to kindergarten Quality ECCE programs across mixed delivery system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligned quality standards Quality child interactions Stable, efficient operation Functional ECIDS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data is used to determine ongoing service needs
	Strategic Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise, update the Strategic Plan based on Needs Assessment and stakeholder input 	Established process for periodic plan review and updates to activities and/or system as needed		
	Family Engagement Projects to improve family outreach and improve family access to information and services	Easy to use and responsive hub for families to find and access the services they want and need		
	Workforce Development Projects to improve PD and grow a skilled workforce	Improved professional development system and supports; aligned competencies		
	Quality Improvement Projects to align and strengthen quality	Continuum of quality across the mixed delivery system		
	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Use Build data infrastructure and promote data use	Sustainable integrated system to collect, analyze, access, and learn from program and system data		

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities

HHS-EC works closely with Mr. Eric Haas, Mr. Michael Lindbo, and Ms. Char Olson, (Fiscal Administration) who will oversee the fiscal implementation and reporting of the grant. The Fiscal Administration team provides budget preparation, grant revenue and expenditure monitoring, federal financial reporting, statewide financial reporting, maintenance of the cost allocation plan, voucher payments, purchase orders and requisitions, cash receipting, mailroom and centralized billing activities.

The State Procurement Office provides comprehensive purchasing services based upon sound purchasing and principles, and has authority for the procurement of commodities, services, printing, and information technology. HHS-EC team members who have completed Procurement Officer Certification training and with delegated purchase authority will work closely with the State Procurement Officer, Ms. Amy Jangula Johnson, regarding alternate procurement and contracts to subgrant for services aligned with the state's PDG activities.

State Procurement Office Policy 106-Subrecipient Monitoring spells out the procedures to be followed to ensure the appropriate use of federal and state funds by ensuring subrecipient grant awards are monitored, used for authorized purposes in compliance with applicable laws, regulation and provision, and that audit findings are resolved. Subrecipients are notified of their responsibility to comply with 2 CFR 200 which is standard language in all HHS Federal grant agreements in a section on audit responsibility and expense allowability. Subrecipients are required to sign the "Certification of the 2 CFR Part 200 Informational Guide" as a condition of their award. Subrecipients of Federal awards are notified of the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number and name, Federal Award Identification Number (FAIN), federal award date, subaward period of performance, indirect cost rate, and all other applicable required information, as defined in 2 CFR 200.331(a). When contracts are finalized, Ms. Angie Meidinger

conducts a risk assessment to determine the contract monitoring schedule per Policy 106 mentioned above. At minimum, HHS-EC administration plus Fiscal Administration reviews each reimbursement request to ensure correct reporting prior to payments being entered into Peoplesoft. HHS-EC also completes a program checklist designed to document the programmatic monitoring process six months from the grant origination date and conducts contract closure assessments. If there are any issues or concerns, the team assesses if it is a one-time or reoccurring issue. Subrecipients subject to a single audit will have their audit reviewed and if issues are identified a corrective action plan is considered and/or a determination of overpayment and request for funds to be paid back to the department is made. The State Auditor's office audits agency contracts as well to hold us accountable.

ND DHHS Manual Service Chapter 248-01, Records Management Policies and Procedures, establishes the principles, responsibilities, and requirements for managing Department records and provides the framework for records management program guidance and operating procedures. Fiscal Administration along with Compliance Officer, Mr. David Becker, serve as the records coordinators and administer the records management program for the entire Department. HHS-EC maintains records in Sharepoint and Data Systems according to the established State Record Management Program. Retention schedules are determined by the function and content of the records, regardless of physical form and access to records is appropriately monitored and controlled to safeguard Department Records.

Protection of Sensitive and/or Confidential Information

North Dakota requires a Business Associate Agreement when sharing sensitive and/or confidential information with vendors. HHS-EC has a secure system in place to protect sensitive data and maintain the integrity of the *Insight* Data system. A privacy policy also governs the way information is collected, used, maintained, and disclosed. HHS-EC will maintain PDG grant

activity program records according to the established State Record Management Program and follow state records destruction protocols based on records schedules identified for these records.

Project Sustainability Plan

It is not an overstatement to say that every PDG B-5 Renewal activity North Dakota has outlined has been considered with an eye to sustainability. With the PDG B-5 Renewal, we seek to establish the infrastructure and system tools to address our currently identified needs as well as to position the ECCE system to be adaptable and flexible as needs change. For example, we plan to expand, connect, and better utilize existing data systems with new development and configuration that, once done, will continue to support our work going forward. Wherever possible, North Dakota plans to automate data systems functionality to ensure that ongoing operations are not dependent on a person or other limited resources, but rather embedded in the systems themselves. We seek to continue and strengthen partnerships outlined on page 52 and build cohesion across the mixed delivery system by establishing shared standards to align currently fragmented approaches to building a quality ECCE system, such as core competencies for practitioners, licensers, and coaches as well as quality program standards. This work will become the foundation for cross-sector approaches to training and professional preparation going forward. We will embed the Pyramid Model in a statewide collaborative effort and to build the infrastructure to sustain and grow training delivery, coaching competency, and shared goals across ECCE service delivery systems that will have ramifications across the ECCE spectrum. Indeed, every PDG B-5 Renewal activity detailed in this application is targeted to helping achieve and sustain our overarching vision that all children and all families in all areas of the state have access to and are supported by quality early childhood care and services.

To ensure that HHS-EC has the capacity and leadership to deliver on the PDG B-5 Renewal grant vision and activities, we will undertake a restructuring to position North Dakota

DHHS and HHS-EC to take the lead for ECCE in North Dakota into the future. We will seek outside technical assistance to help us in this process. The work of the HHS-EC section includes activities and system components funded with CCDF dollars, as well as systems developed with state funds and ARPA dollars. We plan to continue to build on and blend our funding streams to enhance the PDG B-5 Renewal activities. The internal structures that are developed and implemented as a result will remain in place long after the PDG B-5 Renewal grant has ended, leading to a stronger, more cohesive team with a shared vision and defined roles in achieving the vision.

Dissemination Plan

HHS-EC can email, host virtual and in-person stakeholder meetings, communicate through contracted partner agencies that can add information to websites and messaging as well as DHHS Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Knowtify Blog and LinkedIn social media platforms, and Gov Delivery which allows us to disseminate focused messages/announcements/newsletters to email lists of stakeholders and allows people to subscribe to receive updates.

HHS-EC has contact information for licensed child care programs, head start and early head start programs, the early childhood workforce, early intervention providers, local education agencies providing Part B 619 services, as well as approved schools.

HHS-EC team members coordinate or participate on a numerous boards including the Early Childhood Services Advisory Board, Interagency Coordinating Committee, North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium Advisory Board, North Dakota Home Visitation Coalition, Higher Education Early Childhood Consortium, Family Engagement Cabinet, North Dakota Social Emotional Learning Network, North Dakota Head Start Association and can bring information to those groups.