Office of Learning Supports and Early Learning

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is making strides to be more responsive in supporting the developmental and early learning needs of children by strengthening the coordination of early childhood efforts within and outside of our agency. As a part of these efforts, ESE has formalized the work of early childhood staff in the previously named Learning Support Services (LSS) Unit, and as of October 31, 2014, we are now referred to as the Early Learning team within the Office of Learning Supports and Early Learning (OLSEL). The Early Learning team is led by Donna Traynham, with strong contributions from Mary Jane Crotty, Min-hua Chen, and Emily Taylor. The OLSEL group (with initiatives that focus on academic support, out-of-school time, federally-funded Extended Learning Time, and service-learning) continues to be led by Rachelle Engler Bennett.
FY16 Quality Full-Day Grant (FC 701) Tuition Policy

ESE has revised its Tuition and Lottery Policies for Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grantees. This policy will be in effect in FY16 and should guide information that grant districts provide to families regarding tuition, if applicable. The policy is posted to our website, as are as the Assurance Statement and revised sliding fee scale documents. All grant districts planning to charge a tuition in FY16 must submit a signed Assurance Statement along with a completed sliding fee scale worksheet reflecting the district’s tuition amount for families earning up to 100% of State Median Income (SMI). Grant districts must submit this information to ESE no later than two weeks prior to providing the information to families. The forms can be sent to Emily Taylor, OLSEL Unit (see top of newsletter for mail, email, and fax information).

OLSEL staff will review the documents to ensure alignment with our policies and notify the district when approval has been granted. Districts should not provide the tuition or sliding fee information to families until approval has been granted. Any questions can be directed to Donna, Mary Jane, or Emily (781-338-3010).

FY15 Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant (FC 701) Update

The Governor and the Legislature approved a budget in July 2014 that included approximately $23.9M for the Kindergarten Expansion Grants for FY15. The budgets for all grant districts have been approved and processed and are posted to our Grants Management system.

Use of Funds

Many grant districts use the Quality Full-Day Grant funds to support salaries, including those of full-day kindergarten administrators, teachers and/or instructional assistants. As a reminder, if the grant pays for any salaries, the proportion of time covered by the grant must be spent on implementing the grant requirements and/or in supporting the delivery of instruction in the full-day kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, questions have come up about the use of instructional assistants’ time. If the grant pays a portion or all of the salary of instructional assistants, it is the expectation that those assistants are supporting the delivery of instruction in the full-day kindergarten classroom. Use of instructional assistants as substitutes in other grades, to cover lunch/recess duties of other grades and/or other assignments not related to full-day kindergarten during the time in which the grant pays the salary is not allowed.

Program Quality Workgroup

Staff from ESE, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), and thirteen Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant (Fund Code 701) coordinators have been meeting since September 2014 to make recommendations regarding the FC 701 grant requirement to pursue NAEYC accreditation. The group was charged with three tasks:

- Develop a working definition of high quality full-day kindergarten;
- Use the definition to review the NAEYC accreditation system and the grant’s approved alternative to accreditation systems and outline strengths and challenges; and
- Make recommendations to ESE on policies related to implementing high quality full-day kindergarten as part of the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant.
The workgroup has met twice as of the end of December 2014, vetted its definition of high quality full-day kindergarten with FC 701 grant districts, and will be meeting in January 2015 to begin drafting recommendations on policies related to implementing high quality full-day kindergarten programs. OLSEL staff will vet the recommendations as appropriate with all grantees and ESE senior staff.

Winter Kindergarten Networking Meetings

ESE hosted three winter kindergarten networking meetings on December 10th (in Shrewsbury), 11th (North Andover) and 15th (Springfield). The meetings were well attended and the agenda included updates from ESE, a review and discussion of the definition of high quality full-day kindergarten as described in the Program Quality Workgroup section above, a review and discussion of the draft preschool and kindergarten standards in the domains of Social-Emotional Development and Approaches to Play and Learning (see section New Initiatives from the Department of Early Education and Care), as well as an update and discussion regarding the Kindergarten Entry Assessment Initiative (see section below on the MKEA).

A number of articles were made available to attendees of the networking meetings. They are provided here as well:

1. Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do
2. Let’s Tell the Truth: High-Stakes Tests Damage Reading Instruction
3. The Primary Years Agenda: Strategies to Guide District Action

OLSEL staff plan to host another round of networking meetings in the spring. If you are interested in hosting the meeting in your district, please contact Donna, Mary Jane, or Emily (781-338-3010).

FY15 Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten Grant (FC 702)

Based on the FY15 state budget language, ESE offered districts with part-day kindergarten the opportunity to apply for funding to support the transition of one or more part-day classes to full-day kindergarten with support from the Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten Grant (FC 702). ESE released the FY15 competitive grant this past summer. The grant is intended to help districts with preparation needed during fiscal year 2014-2015 (FY15) to open full-day classes in fiscal year 2015-2016 (FY16). Seven districts were awarded the Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten grant: Avon, Chelmsford, Hingham, Norton, Sandwich, Tewksbury, and Wakefield. Award details can be found on ESE’s Grant Awards and Kindergarten Grants web pages.

FC 701 and 702 Grant Amendments

If, between now and June 30, 2015, the district needs to amend its grant budget, amendments will be accepted through the end of May 2015, as needed. Details about ESE’s amendment process can be found on the Grants’ website (under Grants for Schools: Getting Them and Using Them).

The following two forms are necessary when submitting the amendment request:

- Amendment Request Form
  In section III, put your original budget items in Column A, the previously approved budget amendment amounts in Column B (if applicable), the proposed amount to increase or decrease each line in Column C, and the totals (revised budget amounts) for each line in Column D.
Budget Pages

Be sure of the following when working on the revision of the budget pages:

- Reflect the new amounts as listed in section III Column D of the Amendment Form
- Revise the budget narrative to reflect the changes in the budget (including descriptions of the proposed changes).
- Provide number of staff and FTEs in Lines 1-3, and rates if used for stipends.
- Provide rates for consultants, etc. in Line 5.

Send three sets of the forms (at least one set having an original signature) to ESE, ATTN: Emily Taylor, OLSEL Unit (see top of newsletter for mail, email, and fax information). Once OSEL approves the amendment, an original set is required for the grants office; one set gets mailed back to the district, and one set is kept in the program file.

Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA)

ESE is collaborating with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) through EEC’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant funds, on the development and implementation of a Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA). This initiative is focused on producing a common statewide measure to better understand the skills and competencies that children bring with them to kindergarten, and helping teachers to use the assessment data to guide curriculum and instruction in order to implement the state learning standards.

From the experience of the two years of the project, state agency partners and local districts see the MKEA as an important opportunity for teachers’ professional development on the importance of formative assessment and observation as critical elements of early childhood teaching. The data collected address all developmental domains, including social-emotional development and physical development, and provides teachers with a comprehensive understanding of the child’s development and learning. The results of the assessment are intended to guide better curriculum planning and instructional practices to implement the state curriculum standards, meet children’s needs, and to have better communication with parents.

Given the importance of formative assessment in the early years, in FY14, ESE made participation in the MKEA a requirement of the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant. In FY15, the focus has been on collecting data in Social-Emotional Development and the Cognitive domains. There are over 170 districts participating, representing nearly 2,000 full-day kindergarten teachers and yielding data on over 36,000 full-day kindergarten children.

In the upcoming months several steps will be taken to gather information about MKEA and how it is being used. As part of this effort a documentation specialist will analyze the ways in which school districts are using MKEA data to inform and support other district initiatives (e.g. report cards, monitoring IEP progress, Response to Intervention, etc). The aggregate data will be reviewed to determine areas for future professional development around formative assessment and determine what the data reveal about MA kindergarten students as a group. A researcher will conduct an alignment analysis to determine which assessment indicators are salient. The researcher will consider which indicators are most closely aligned with MA standards and other policy documents. This information will be used to share professional development and policy for MKEA in the upcoming academic years.

We will keep districts updated on this initiative, particularly as decisions are made regarding implementation requirements in FY16.
Formative Assessment in the Early Childhood Classroom

On November 14th, EEC and ESE jointly sponsored a one-day conference on *Formative Assessment in the Early Childhood Classroom*. As part of the MKEA initiative, this conference was intended to engage administrators, kindergarten teachers, and instructional assistants in a dialogue about the importance of observation being a part of early childhood teaching and using observational data to inform instruction.

Judy Jablon, educational consultant and author, was the plenary speaker. Judy has co-authored many books on observation, including the *Power of Observation* (second edition). Colleagues from school districts, ESE, EEC and the Readiness Centers facilitated workshops to further the dialogue about how to conduct observation and use observation data to understand children’s development and learning, inform instructional supports, and engage families. The presentations and other resources on observation can be found at the Collaborative for Educational Services MKEA Conference website.

We look forward to continuing this dialogue through future professional development.

Updates on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Initiatives (ESE)

*Revisions to Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences and Kindergarten Learning Experiences*

In FY14, ESE, in collaboration with EEC, began the process of revising the *Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences* (adopted by then Department of Education, 2003) and *Kindergarten Learning Experiences* (ESE, 2008) documents in order to bring them into alignment with the revisions to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The resources have guided districts, programs, and early childhood educators in the development and implementation of curriculum and instructional supports that are developmentally appropriate and aligned with our state’s Curriculum Frameworks. The joint effort to align these guides is part of EEC and ESE’s work to develop a continuum of educational practice from birth through kindergarten.

A workgroup consisting of agency staff, faculty from Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), district and community-based administrators, as well as preschool and kindergarten teachers convened over the course of the 2013-2014 school year to propose revisions to the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics sections of the documents. In Fall 2014, a new workgroup convened to propose revisions revise the Science and Technology/Engineering section of the document.

ESE staff are in the process of reviewing and editing the revisions. We will keep you posted on the progress of these two documents and notify you when they are finalized and posted.
New Initiatives from the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC)

**Development of Standards in Social-Emotional Development and Approaches to Play and Learning**

EEC, in partnership with ESE, has contracted with the University of Massachusetts/Boston to create a comprehensive set of preschool and kindergarten standards in the domains of Social-Emotional Development and Approaches to Play and Learning. Due to be completed by the spring of 2015, these standards are being informed by and vetted with local, regional, and state early childhood practitioners; with researchers including Sharon Lynn Kagan (Teachers College, Columbia University) and Stephanie Jones (Graduate School of Education, Harvard University); and with the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

It is anticipated that, if approved, these standards would provide a much needed resource for the field as it relates to curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices of young children and ongoing professional development related to early childhood education as well as make the critical link for administrators, educators, and families to the acquisition of academic competencies.

**Federal Preschool Expansion Grant**

Massachusetts is one of 13 grant award winners in the federal Preschool Development Grant: Expansion Grant competition, and will receive significant funding to expand high quality preschool programs in five high-needs communities across the state. These communities are Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, and Springfield.

Massachusetts applied for up to $60 million over four years under the federal Preschool Development Grant: Expansion Grant program. The U.S. Department of Education announced today that Massachusetts will receive its full request for $15 million in the first year of the grant.

The federal Preschool Development Grants competition supports states in building and expanding the delivery of high-quality voluntary preschool programs. The Expansion Grant funds are focused on increasing the availability of high-quality preschool programs in targeted communities within a state that will serve as models for expanding preschool to all 4-year-olds from low-income families in that state.

The five communities, partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care for this program, will develop public school district and community-based provider partnerships for expanded preschool programming. Together, these partnerships will provide a year of high-quality preschool programming for approximately 750 four-year-old children in each of the participating communities during the first year of the grant. The funding will also support quality improvements in outreach and coordination of comprehensive services, helping to ensure that young children's development is supported and advanced in their home environments as well as in preschool settings.
State Preschool Expansion Grant

In the FY15 state budget, the Governor and Legislature allocated $1M to an initiative focused on expanding preschool services for four year old children in the Commonwealth, through line-item 3000-5025. The purpose of this state-funded grant program is to support the expansion of high quality preschool opportunities for children, including children with disabilities and children who are English language learners, in an effort to provide them with a strong foundation for learning, and ultimately improve their opportunities for educational success.

In response to a projected budgetary shortfall and section 9C of Chapter 29 of the Massachusetts General Laws, this line-item was reduced to $750,000. The funds will be procured by EEC in a competitive grant award. At the time of this writing, it is anticipated that the competitive RFR will be posted some time in January with awards to be made in late February. The grant funds must be expended by June 30, 2015. We will notify school districts when this RFR is posted.

New Initiatives from the Executive Office of Education (EOE)

National Governor’s Association (NGA) Early Childhood Policy Academy

As part of our state’s work with the National Governor’s Association (NGA) Early Learning Policy Academy we have drafted the Building the Foundation document, which identifies essential competencies across five developmental domains as well as the foundational experiences that will lead to the development of these competencies. For the first time in the Commonwealth’s history, we have identified the competencies that all children from birth through grade 3 should demonstrate in order to be on the path to college and career success. This document is directly aligned with the 2013 Definition of College and Career Readiness that was approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BSE) and the Board of Higher Education (BHE). This document, once it is approved, is intended to serve as the anchor for the development and implementation of all birth through grade 3 initiatives in Massachusetts.

In July 2014, with support from the Executive Office of Education, the Birth through Grade 3 website was launched. The website has been designed to achieve two goals: first, it will serve as a resource for key stakeholders regarding the development and implementation of exciting strategies in Massachusetts; and second, it will serve as an important tool for sharing information about this work and highlighting upcoming activities and events. The website currently presents information about the team’s participation in the NGA policy academy, the Building the Foundation document, and the statewide policy forum. The content on the website will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Additional information on the outcomes from the NGA Early Childhood Policy Academy can be found on the state’s Birth through Grade 3 website.

Joint EEC-ESE Special Board Meeting – December 15, 2014

On Monday evening, December 15, 2014, members from the Boards of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Early Education and Care, met jointly to discuss early childhood policy and initiatives. The agenda and materials from the Board meeting can be found on the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s website.
Board members heard a presentation from Dr. Ralph Smith from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Amy O’Leary from Strategies for Children that addressed the critical developmental milestone of reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Following the discussion with Dr. Smith, the Board was joined by Governor Patrick, who thanked the Board members for their service to the Commonwealth. In addition, the Board members heard from members of the NGA Early Childhood Policy Academy State Team. The Board members ended their meeting by voting to approve the development of a joint board subcommittee focused on early childhood. We will send more information on this new joint board subcommittee as it becomes available.

**Professional Resources**

**Center on the Developing Child**

The mission of the Center on the Developing Child is to drive science-based innovation that achieves breakthrough outcomes for children facing adversity. Their website has many resources on topics including executive function, brain architecture and toxic stress.

**Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO)**

One of 22 Comprehensive Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) has been funded to strengthen the capacity of State Education Agencies (SEAs) to lead sustained improvements in early learning opportunities and outcomes. CEELO will work in partnership with SEAs, state and local early childhood leaders, and other federal and national technical assistance (TA) providers to promote innovation and accountability. Their website contains early childhood resources related to: Assessment, Child Outcomes, Data, Birth to Grade 3, Workforce, and Systems Development.

**National Associate for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**

NAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. They recently published a statement addressing the Common Core and early childhood education, *Common Core State Standards: Caution and Opportunity for Early Childhood Education*.

**National Institute for Early Education Research**

NIEER is a great resource for both research and national efforts to strengthen the delivery and quality of early childhood education programs and services. The website provides the latest research in addition to policy briefs, presentations and other useful resources.

**Framework for Planning, Implementing and Evaluating Pre-K Grade Approaches**

Kristie Kauerz and Julia Coffman recently published an evaluation framework for PreK-3rd grade initiatives in 2013. This framework helps to address key questions facing those who are developing PreK-3rd grade approaches in their schools, districts, and communities:

- What does a comprehensive PreK-3rd grade approach include?
- The word 'alignment' is used often; but what needs to be aligned?
- What kinds of changes need to take hold in adults' behaviors before we can expect to see improvements in child outcomes?
- What kinds of responsibilities need to be shared among 0-5 programs, grades K-3, families, and communities?
In addition, the tool provides a clear and comprehensive framework in the following areas:

- Governance
- Strategic Plans
- Funding
- Visible Leadership
- Foster Teamwork
- Instructional Leadership
- Focus on Instruction
- Visible Practice
- Work as Teams
- Standards
- Curricula
- Assessments
- Culturally Inclusive
- Promote Relationships
- Structure to Support Diverse Learners
- Child-Based Data
- School/program-Based Data
- Core Priorities
- 2-way Communication
- Shared Leadership/Decision-Making
- Access and Continuity of Services
- PreK-3rd Grade Pathway

The framework not only provides what these indicators might look like at an implementation level (Example Implementation Indicators) but also provides programs and state level organizations with Self-Assessment/Depth of Implementation and Alignment Indicators by which communities can self-reflect on their PreK-3rd systems. Lastly, the framework provides examples of evaluation approaches that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the communities’ PreK-3rd Infrastructure.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health
This website contains some useful information on playground safety. In addition to NAEYC Accreditation criteria for Outdoor Playground Equipment, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) also has a website on Playground Safety with some useful information.

Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD)
The inclusion of social-emotional learning in state’s standards framework is gaining increasing attention. Stephanie Jones and Suzanne Bouffard (Harvard Education Graduate School of Education, 2012) published an article in SRCD on the importance of these social and emotional learning in schools. The article is called, Social and Emotional Learning in Schools: From Programs to Strategies and can be found on the SRCD website.