

Report to the Legislature: Kindergarten Expansion Grants – Fiscal Year 2014

This Report to the Legislature on Kindergarten Expansion Grants pursuant to Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013 line item 7030-1002 provides information on kindergarten expansion grants across the Commonwealth.

March 2014

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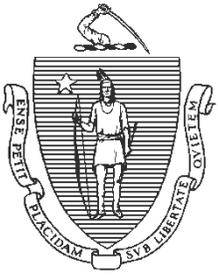
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March 2014

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to submit this Report to the Legislature: *Kindergarten Expansion Grants*, pursuant to Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2012 line item 7030-1002.

Between fiscal years 1999 and 2014 (FY99-14), the percentage of public school kindergarten children statewide attending full-day programs grew from 29 to 88 percent. This increase in full-day kindergarten enrollment, despite the difficult economic times, demonstrates districts' commitment to ensuring that students have the strongest foundation from which to build their learning. Although several factors contributed to the growth of full-day programs, support provided by the state's kindergarten grants and districts' commitment to expand their early education programs are primary among them.

In FY14, 169 funded entities receive Quality Full-Day Kindergarten grants. The number of students in full-day kindergarten across the state increased to more than 61,500 (out of the approximately 69,500 enrolled in part-day or full-day kindergarten classes). The 88 percent of kindergarten students in full-day programs is up from 86 percent in FY13. During this time period, the percent of students paying tuition for full-day in all districts decreased by 3 percent to 13 percent, and in grant-funded districts it decreased by 3 percent to 8 percent.

In July 2013, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) released the Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten Grant Funding Opportunity Request for Proposals (RFP). The purpose of these grants is to encourage the voluntary expansion of high-quality, full-day kindergarten classrooms across Massachusetts. The grants assist districts with the preparation needed during FY14 to be able to implement full-day kindergarten in FY15. Through this competitive process, seven public school districts were awarded Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten grants (Billerica, Chelmsford, Hopkinton, Mansfield, North Attleborough, Scituate and Stoneham). Awards are anticipated to create full-day kindergarten opportunities for approximately 375 students starting in September 2014. More information on these grant awards is posted to <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/grants14/awards/702.html> and can be found on the [Grants Funding Opportunities web site](#).

Universal, voluntary full-day kindergarten is a key component of an early care and education system for children from birth to third grade, and of the Commonwealth's efforts to address grade 3 proficiency in English language arts and mathematics. Kindergarten is the threshold year in children's lives and education; merging home, non-public, and public early education and care and preschool programs into the public education system. Funding for the Kindergarten Grant

Program in the last fifteen fiscal years (FY00-FY14) has supported school districts' voluntary transition from half-day to full-day kindergarten, and the ongoing quality enhancement of existing full-day programs.

The benefits of full-day kindergarten contribute to cost savings and improve educational outcomes, if the elements of quality are in place from preschool through third grade with strong leadership at every level. The Department is committed to full-day kindergarten programs, even during fiscally challenging times. In light of extensive research that documents the greater impact for students from lower versus higher income families, the Department is considering restructuring funding and targeting grant awards in future years to high need districts. The Department also supports Chapter 70 reimbursement policies that promote free full-day kindergarten and create incentives for maintaining existing full-day kindergarten programs.

I am available if you have questions or would like to discuss this further. You may also contact Associate Commissioner Cliff W. Chuang at cchuang@doe.mass.edu, 781-338-3222.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature: Kindergarten Expansion Grants – Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) pursuant to Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013, [line item 7030-1002](#) (see Appendix A for full line item text):

“...provided further, that not later than January 17, 2014, the department shall report to the house and senate committees on ways and means on the total number of grants requested and awarded; provided further that the report shall detail common factors associated with both successful and unsuccessful applications and shall include the total number of full day and half day kindergarten classrooms projected to be in operation in public schools in fiscal year 2015...”

Grants Program Overview

A high quality education system for children from preschool (pre-K) through third grade includes universal, full-day kindergarten. Kindergarten is a pivotal year in children’s lives and education, bridging home or preschool programs provided in diverse settings—family child care, Head Start, private early education and care, or public preschool—and the public elementary education system. Kindergarten is the first experience of formal schooling for many children; on average 22 percent of children who enter kindergarten in grant districts come without preschool experience. Since FY00, the legislature and the governor have approved funding for the Kindergarten Expansion Grant Program as an ongoing program to accomplish two primary goals:

1. Increase the number of districts with high-quality full-day kindergarten by supporting selected districts’ preparations for implementing full-day kindergarten through the *Transition Planning for Full-Day Kindergarten Grant*; and
2. Support elements of high quality programs that provide children with optimal learning experiences in their first formal year of public education with the *Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant*.

Districts with kindergarten-age students must provide part-time kindergarten sessions for at least 425 hours per school year ([603 CMR 27.03\(5\)](#)). Districts are encouraged to offer full-day kindergarten programs. Funding guidelines define full-day programs as 5 hours per day and 5 days per week, or a minimum of 850 hours per school year.

Between FY99 and FY14 the percentage of public school kindergarten children statewide attending full-day programs grew from 29 to 88 percent. Although several factors contributed to the growth of full-day programs, support provided by the state’s Kindergarten Expansion Grants and the commitment by districts to expand their early education programs are primary among them.

District Kindergarten Programs

Due to differing district budgeting and priorities, full-day kindergarten is offered in a variety of configurations. Districts have the option of offering a full-day program that has the capacity to serve all or some of their kindergarten-age children, and districts may charge tuition for the hours beyond the mandated part-time program. If a district offers a limited number of full-day classes, it may place children by lottery or parent request, or offer full-day classes in particular neighborhood schools. In FY14, 314 districts serve kindergarten students, of which 305 provide at least some full-day classes.

One hundred and sixty-nine (169) entities, including 6 charter schools, receive the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten grants in FY14. There are five districts that are new recipients for FY14 (Bourne, Hudson, Mansfield, Mendon-Upton Regional, and Scituate). These districts opened new full-day kindergarten classes in FY14, and received the FY13 Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten grant. Of the approximately 61,500 students enrolled in full-day kindergarten across the Commonwealth in FY14, a total of approximately 47,400 (77 percent) are served by grantee districts. A list of grant recipients can be found on the Department's website on: http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/grants14/rfp/doc/701_c.xlsx.

Uses of Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant Funds

Quality Full-Day Kindergarten (Quality) grants support the ongoing improvement of full-day programs and in most years have been continuation grants, meaning that eligible districts receive funding if they are in compliance with program requirements. In FY14, nearly \$23.8 million has been awarded to the 169 funded entities through the Quality grants. (See above section for a link to the list of grantees.) Grant funding priorities and activities include:

- Developing/implementing a full-day curriculum using the Department's [Kindergarten Learning Experiences](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ess/reports/0408kle.doc) (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ess/reports/0408kle.doc>, April 2008), based on the revised 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, for planning curriculum;
- Seeking accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or an alternative to accreditation approved by the Department;¹
- Supporting paraprofessionals in each classroom to maintain appropriate adult-child ratios and appropriate class sizes;
- Implementing the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA);
- Offering effective professional development for administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals;
- Working on continuity of curriculum and assessment, from preschool to grade 3;

¹ Approximately thirty-five (35) districts are approved to use one of the alternatives to accreditation, which include: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); Ready School Assessment (High/Scope); New England Association of Schools and Colleges Accreditation; Work Sampling System (Pearson Learning); and the Tools of the Mind Curriculum (Bodrova and Leong).

- Promoting family involvement and improving the transition of children and their families from preschool into kindergarten, and from kindergarten into first grade;
- Increasing the number of children with disabilities included in the general education classroom, improving the quality of inclusion, and improving the quality of classes and services for children with disabilities; and
- Improving the education of English language learners.

All districts with Quality grants maintain ongoing School Readiness and Early Childhood/Early Elementary Curriculum committees that may operate separately, jointly, or as a subcommittee to another council (such as Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Councils). Required members include representatives of private preschools and kindergartens; Head Start; teachers from public preschools, kindergartens, grades 1 to 3, and special education; school administrators and curriculum coordinators; after-school programs and other relevant programs; parents; and interested community members.

The primary tasks of the committees are to: improve the readiness of children and the readiness of schools; assist with developing and aligning an interdisciplinary and inclusive full-day curriculum addressing all domains of development, using the aforementioned *Kindergarten Learning Experiences*; align assessments from preschool up to grade 3; and improve transitions for children and families from preschool into kindergarten and from kindergarten into first grade.

Uses of Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten Grant Funds

Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten (Transition) grants assist districts planning to convert part-time sessions to full-day programs. During years the Transition grant program has been funded, requests from eligible high-need districts were given priority, but grants have also been awarded to all types of communities. The Transition grants, along with the potential for the Quality grants in succeeding years to help support a full-day program, provide a significant incentive for districts to adopt and expand full-day kindergarten.

In July 2013, the Department released the Funding Opportunity for the competitive Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten grant program (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/grants14/rfp/702.html>). The purpose of these grants is to encourage the voluntary expansion of high-quality, full-day kindergarten classrooms across Massachusetts. The grants assist districts with the preparation needed during FY14, to enable them to implement new full-day kindergarten classes in FY15. Eight public school districts applied for this competitive funding. Successful applications detailed the planning process for districts converting current part-day kindergarten classrooms to full-day kindergarten classrooms for FY15. The unsuccessful application had no part-time kindergarten classrooms to transition to full-day in FY15. Through this competitive process, seven public school districts were awarded Transition grants (Billerica, Chelmsford, Hopkinton, Mansfield, North Attleborough, Scituate and Stoneham). The seven districts that were awarded funding are anticipated to create full-day kindergarten opportunities for approximately 375 students starting in September 2014. More information on these grant awards is posted to <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/awards.html> on the [Grants Funding Opportunities web site](#).

As noted early in this report, FY14 is the fifteenth year that the state funded Kindergarten Grant Program has supported school districts' voluntary transition from half-day to full-day kindergarten, and the ongoing quality enhancement of existing full-day programs. It is anticipated that in FY15 there will be nearly 3,100 full-day kindergarten classes across the state, and approximately 400 half-day classes.

The state's commitment to this program stems from the benefits of full-day kindergarten, which includes improved educational outcomes if the elements of quality are in place from preschool through third grade with strong leadership at every level. Research has shown that full-day kindergarten programs help to improve attendance, reduce student retention, and reduce the need for special education and Title 1 services, thus contributing to cost savings for school districts.

Department leadership and staff understand the value of full-day kindergarten programs and will continue to look for ways to promote free full-day kindergarten and create disincentives for eliminating existing full-day kindergarten programs.

Appendix A: Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013, Line 7030-1002, FY14 State Budget

7030-1002

For kindergarten expansion grants to provide grant awards to continue quality enhancement of existing full-day kindergarten classrooms; provided, that the department shall administer a grant program to encourage the voluntary expansion of high quality, full-day kindergarten education throughout the commonwealth; provided further, that grants funded through this appropriation shall not annualize to more than \$18,000 per classroom in subsequent fiscal years; provided further, that preference shall be given to grant applicants with high percentages of students scoring in levels 1 or 2 on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam and school districts which serve free or reduced lunch to at least 35 per cent of its students, as determined by the department based on available data; provided further, that any grant funds distributed from this item shall be deposited with the treasurer of such city, town or regional school district and held in a separate account and, notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, shall be expended by the school committee of such city, town or regional school district without further appropriation; provided further, that such program shall supplement and shall not supplant currently funded local, state and federal programs at the school or district; provided further, that not later than January 17, 2014, the department shall report to the house and senate committees on ways and means on the total number of grants requested and awarded; provided further that the report shall detail common factors associated with both successful and unsuccessful applications and shall include the total number of full day and half day kindergarten classrooms projected to be in operation in public schools in fiscal year 2015; provided further, that all kindergarten programs previously funded through community partnership councils at the department of early education and care may receive grants from this item in amounts equal to the amounts they received in fiscal year 2013, reduced in proportion to the overall reduction of this item from fiscal year 2013 to fiscal year 2014; and provided further, that no funds shall be expended for personnel costs.....\$23,948,947