

GRANT APPLICATION (RFR)  
**Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments Grant - FUND CODE 391**  
GRANT APPLICATION (RFR) # IPLE Grant 391  
COMMBUYS Bid# BD-15-1037-1CEN0-C0000-00000003966

**Scope of Services:**

The work of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) is steeped in the notion that *brain building is in progress* for young children in enriching environments with caring adults and meaningful and engaging interactions. The latest science shows that these early experiences actually build the architecture of the developing brain much like a house is built from the bottom up.

When you understand the sequence and process by which brains are built, it's easy to understand why it's wiser to start every child out strong. Trying to change behavior or build new skills on a weak foundation requires more work and is less effective than providing brain building interactions and environments early in life. Brain building is an investment that yields high returns, an investment in the economic prosperity of everyone in Massachusetts as the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

We know that children's earliest experiences are especially important because building the human brain begins even before birth; a strong foundation in early years greatly increases the chance of positive outcomes. Massachusetts estimates that as many as 135,000 children from birth to age five face one or more risk factors each day that could lead to toxic stress, with as many as 20,000 (15%) facing three or more risk factors that without intervention are likely to lead to developmental delays.<sup>1</sup>

EEC is focused on strengthening the system of early education and care in Massachusetts as a critical element of the education pipeline from cradle to career. The system EEC is building includes all children, not just those who are subsidized or in formal care. To that end, EEC provides services for children in Massachusetts through a mixed delivery system which includes group and center based programs, out-of-school time programs, family child care homes, public preschool programs, private preschool programs, kindergarten, and Head Start programs.

EEC is also responsible for licensing over 9,556 early education and care and out of school time programs throughout Massachusetts and for providing financial assistance to eligible families seeking early education and care or out of school time programs that serve approximately 56,000 children, birth to fourteen (14) years of age, from low-income families.

EEC strives to bring together a growing community of early education and care providers, educators, academic researchers, business leaders, families and individuals to raise awareness of

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Children in Poverty. Young Child Risk Calculator. Retrieved from <http://www.nccp.org/tools/risk/>.

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the critical importance of fostering the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children. By giving a strong start to our youngest citizens we create a stronger, more prosperous future for all. Massachusetts is dedicated to increasing coordination in our system of early learning and development and aims to prepare children for school success, especially those with the highest needs.

**Priorities:**

Through this competitive grant, EEC seeks to:

- Support program capacity to offer inclusive preschool learning environments in EEC-licensed center-based programs, Head Start programs, and public school preschool programs;
- Support access to high-quality inclusive preschool learning environments for preschool-age children with and without disabilities that are responsive to the needs of children and families; and
- Increase the number of preschool-age children with disabilities and preschoolers with "high needs"<sup>2</sup> that are participating in high quality, inclusive preschool learning environments.

For the purposes of this grant, the defining features of a **high quality, inclusive preschool learning environment are access, participation, and supports.**<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this grant, the term "high needs children" is defined as children who have two or more of the following risk factors shown to be linked to poor outcomes in areas such as school performance, health, and mental health:

- i. Low-income households/children eligible for free or reduced priced meals;
- ii. Children with special needs/disability (IEP or 504 Plan);
- iii. Children and families who previously participated in Early Intervention services (IFSP)
- iv. Children who are homeless or move more than once per year, as defined under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001;
- v. Children who are Dual Language Learners whose home language is not English (DLL/ELL/LEP);
- vi. Parent(s) with education less than a high school diploma or GED;
- vii. Parent(s) with chronic illness or disability affecting care-giving ability;
- viii. Children who have experienced multiple traumas or losses;
- ix. Young children whose family recently immigrated to U.S. (parent(s) who came to the U.S. within the past 10 years);
- x. Families and children involved with multiple state agencies;
- xi. Children with parent(s) who are deployed and are not living on a military base.

<sup>3</sup> DEC/NAEYC (2009) *Early Childhood Inclusion: A Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.



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- **Access** – means providing a wide range of activities and environments for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.
- **Participation** – means using a range of instructional approaches to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every child.
- **Supports** – refers to broader aspects of the system such as professional development, incentives for inclusion and opportunities for communication and collaboration among families and professionals to assure high quality inclusion.

**Required Services:**

Applicants must provide the following services with the grant funds they are awarded:

- I. Provide grant oversight that supports program capacity to offer high quality, inclusive preschool learning environments in EEC-licensed center-based programs, Head Start programs, or public school preschool programs.**
  - A. The Lead Agency must meet all requirements set forth in Lead Agency role and responsibilities and subcontracting requirements (Appendix I).
  - B. The Required Services may be provided by the Lead Agency and/or through subcontracts with other providers (public school preschools, EEC-licensed center-based programs, and Head Start programs) within designated towns and cities (subject to EEC approval).
  - C. Lead Agency must ensure that there is a system in place to conduct screenings for three and four year olds and for children who are of age to enter kindergarten, within the communities to be served (with parental consent).
    1. Such screenings shall be designed to review a child's development and to assist in identification of those children who are to be referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services and/or potential participation in the IPLE-funded programs.
    2. Screening materials and strategies that are evidenced-based and appropriate for the child's age and level of development must accommodate the child's sensory, physical, communication, cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional skills.
    3. Materials should include all areas of development and behavior to learn about the child's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests.

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**II. Provide an inclusive preschool learning environment that serves preschool-age children with and without disabilities.**

The following requirements and criteria must be met by each preschool site and each preschool session(s)<sup>4</sup> to be considered eligible for funding through this grant. These settings are referred to as IPLE-funded settings.

A. Settings:

1. Services must be provided in public schools, Head Start programs, and/or EEC licensed EEC licensed group and school age programs. For the purpose of the grant, these early learning settings will be referred to as IPLE-funded programs or sites.

B. Composition of Children Enrolled:

1. At least 15% of the children enrolled in each IPLE-funded classroom or IPLE preschool session must have a documented disability for the session to be considered an inclusive preschool learning environment.
2. For each child who is enrolled in an IPLE-funded session as a “child with a disability”, the IPLE program is required to have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP) in place that documents the child’s special education needs and describes the services that are being provided to meet those needs.

C. Class Size and Teacher-Child Ratio:

For the purposes of the grant, these classrooms/sessions are referred to as IPLE-funded sessions or IPLE sessions<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this grant, **IPLE sessions** refers to the group of preschool-aged children who are enrolled and participating in an IPLE-funded setting at the same time and are assigned to the same educators for early education and care, instruction and supervision. For example, when IPLE-funds are used to provide an AM session as well as PM session, each session is counted as one (1) session for a total of two (2) IPLE preschool sessions. Alternatively, a full-day, full-year program that uses IPLE funds to provided services for a full-day in **one classroom** is counted as one (1) IPLE session.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this grant, **IPLE sessions** refers to the group of preschool-aged children who are enrolled and participating in an IPLE-funded setting at the same time and are assigned to the same educators for early education and care, instruction and supervision. For example, when IPLE-funds are used to provide an AM session as well as PM session, each session is counted as one (1) session for a total of two (2) IPLE preschool sessions. Alternatively, a full-day, full-year program that uses IPLE funds to provided services for a full-day in **one classroom** is counted as one (1) IPLE session.



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1. The maximum class size for each IPLE-funded session must not exceed twenty (20) children.
2. When the IPLE session has up to five (5) children with disabilities, the total class size shall not exceed twenty (20) children with a minimum of one (1) Lead Teacher and one (1) Paraprofessional/Assistant Teacher.
3. When the IPLE session has six (6) or seven (7) children with disabilities, the total class size may not exceed fifteen (15) children with a minimum of one (1) Lead Teacher and one (1) Paraprofessional/Assistant Teacher.

D. Educator Qualifications:

Funding provided through this grant must support the cost of salaries and fringe benefits of preschool lead teachers and preschool paraprofessional/assistant teachers who provide direct program services within designated IPLE sessions.

1. Preschool Lead Teachers funded through this grant must hold a Bachelor's degree or an advanced degree in Early Childhood Education or a related field of study<sup>6</sup>, hold appropriate certification/licensure as required by EEC and/or The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (as applicable), and have experience or coursework in working with diverse learners and/or young children with disabilities.
2. Paraprofessionals/Assistant Teachers funded through this grant must hold a high school diploma and be at least 18 years old.

**III. Support the development and early learning of children with and without disabilities in inclusive preschool settings through the implementation of a developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate early childhood curriculum.**

- A. All preschool settings that receive IPLE grant funds must implement a well-balanced curriculum that supports the development of all children socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. This early childhood curriculum must be aligned with:
1. The Massachusetts Preschool Early Learning Guidelines;
  2. The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Preschool and Kindergarten;
  3. Pre-K Science/Technology and Engineering (STE) Standards;

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<sup>6</sup> **Related field of study:** A program at an accredited institution of higher learning, which includes the study of care giving, development, education, health care, or psychology of children, birth to eight years of age, or provision of direct services to children and their families. See 606 CMR 7.09(18)(a)(3).