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March 26, 2014

**TO:** Superintendents of School Districts with Priority Prekindergarten  
Priority Prekindergarten Contact Persons

**FROM:** Dee Dwyer, Program Contact

**SUBJECT:** Required Actions: Conducting a Program Quality Self-Assessment and  
Developing an Action Plan for Improvement of Program Quality

### **Overview of Required Actions**

Chapter 53, Section 1 of the Laws of 2013 establishes several requirements that school districts must meet to be eligible to receive a Priority Full-day Prekindergarten and Expanded Half-day Prekindergarten for High Need Students Grant (Priority Pre-K). One of these requirements is that the school district must agree to adopt approved program quality standards within two years, including, but not limited to, valid and reliable measures of environmental quality, the quality of teacher-student interactions and student outcomes. The State's approved quality standards are set forth in the NYS Prekindergarten Program Quality Self-Assessment (Attachment 1). These high quality program standards address the following categories:

- Classroom Environment (3 standards)
- Teaching Staff Qualifications (6 standards)
- Curriculum Planning and Implementation (5 standards)
- Child Screening and Assessment (5 standards)
- Professional Development (6 standards)
- Family Engagement and Supports (4 standards)
- Transitions to Kindergarten (8 standards)

Districts receiving Priority Pre-K grants must complete and submit to the State Education Department (SED) the Program Quality Self-Assessment tool, including the evidence used to support any rating of (5) – Totally Implemented. Based on the results of the Self-Assessment, the district must develop an Action Plan for Improvement of Program Quality (Attachment 2). The Action Plan must provide strategies and activities that will put the district in "Totally Implemented" status with all program quality standards by June 30, 2016. One Self-Assessment and one Action Plan must be submitted for the district's entire Priority Pre-K program. Please do not submit an individual assessment and plan for each classroom or site that comprises the district's Priority Pre-K program.

Actions plans must be submitted to SED no later than **May 16, 2014** for review and approval. One Self-Assessment and one Action Plan must be submitted for the

district's entire Priority Pre-K program. Please do not submit an individual assessment and plan for each classroom or site that comprises the district's Priority Pre-K program.

Districts with an approved Action Plan will be considered to have attained the performance targets for the 2013-2014 school year, meaning the district will be eligible for continued funding in 2014-2015, subject to an appropriation for this purpose in the State budget. For 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, achievement of the goals and objectives set forth in the approved Action Plan will constitute attainment of the performance targets and will qualify the district for continued funding in the subsequent year, subject to a budget appropriation.

### **Conducting the NYS Prekindergarten Program Quality Self-Assessment**

All districts with Priority Pre-K programs are required to complete the Program Quality Self-Assessment. The purposes of the Prekindergarten Program Quality Self-Assessment are:

1. To assess status of Pre-K program by looking at standards in seven areas of program quality;
2. To identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement; and
3. To establish priorities for program implementation and improvement.

It is recommended that districts use a team approach when conducting the self-assessment. The number and type of team members will vary by district, dependent on the size and design of the district's Pre-K program. Possible participants include:

- District and community-based organization (CBO) administrators
- Pre-K teachers – district and CBO
- Kindergarten teachers
- Family/parent workers; social workers
- Parents

When using the NYS Prekindergarten Program Quality Self-Assessment tool, read each standard carefully and rate the status of your district's implementation of the standard for prekindergarten services offered directly by the district and/or its collaborating CBOs. Place a checkmark in the box that best describes the level of implementation of each standard for your overall program – "(1) not at all implemented" through "(5) totally implemented." In the evidence column, list the supporting documentation the district has that informs and supports its rating. For standards rated "(5) totally implemented," attach a copy of the supporting documentation to the self-assessment tool. Be sure to clearly label the supporting documentation with the standard number to which it corresponds.

### **Developing the Prekindergarten Action Plan for Improvement of Program Quality**

A district operating a Priority Pre-K program must develop a Two-year Action Plan based on the results of its Self-Assessment. The Action Plan must provide strategies

and activities that will put the district in “Totally Implemented” status with all program quality standards by the end of the 2015-2016 school year. An Action Plan template is provided as Attachment 2 to this memo.

The chart on page one (1) of the Action Plan template will assist districts in summarizing the results of the Program Quality Self-Assessment. Complete the chart by sorting the standards into Areas of Strength and Areas Needing Improvement by listing the specific standard numbers in the appropriate box. For each standard identified as needing improvement, complete the corresponding worksheet describing how each standard will be totally implemented by June 30, 2016.

The steps below are provided as guidance to help you develop goals and objectives, action steps, key persons responsible, and timeframes for completion.

### **STEP 1: REFLECT**

Develop a clear understanding of the rating of each standard and the program practices that contribute to the rating or that may hinder the attainment of specific standards. Go deeper by examining underlying problems/root causes of factors contributing to the rating.

### **STEP 2: COMMIT TO GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Set goals that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

Participant goal statements must be clear and succinct. Establish ambitious, but realistic improvements that are measurable and achievable by the end of the program year.

### **STEP 3: EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR ACTIONS**

In this step it is important to learn more about the specific goals that the district and its collaborating CBOs will work on. To learn more about other approaches:

- review relevant research and best practice
- confer with colleagues
- focus on “what” and “how”: What specific actions? How often? With what intensity? With what level of expertise?

### **STEP 4: COMPLETE THE PLAN**

With the completion of these three steps planners should have the necessary information to commit a plan to paper. This step requires the district to develop goals and objectives and work out the details by identifying action steps, key responsibilities, and a timeline for completion. It also is important to hold a resource discussion to determine how the time and money necessary to implement the desired actions and strategies will be accessed.

## **STEP 5: WORK YOUR PLAN**

Now that you have planned your work, it is time to work your plan. Keep in mind that the plan is not set in concrete. The action plan is a living, breathing document. The goals are used for continuous improvement. It is recommended that the goals and objectives be reviewed on a regular basis – perhaps monthly or quarterly. Districts should make adjustments and changes as needed to address issues that might impede their success or to make a course correction when it becomes obvious that a specific approach is not working as hoped.

### **Submitting the Self-Assessment and Action Plan**

The below-listed documents must be submitted to SED for review and approval **no later than May 16, 2014.**

- The completed Program Quality Self-Assessment (Attachment 1), including a copy of the supporting documentation the district has that informs and supports its rating for all standards rated Totally Implemented
- The completed Action Plan for Improvement of Program Quality (Attachment 2)

Completed submissions should be mailed to:

New York State Education Department  
Office of Early Learning  
89 Washington Avenue, Room 320 EB  
Albany, New York 12234  
Attn: Priority Pre-K

### **Questions?**

Questions regarding this memo or any aspect of your Priority Pre-K program may be directed to me at [ddwyer@mail.nysed.gov](mailto:ddwyer@mail.nysed.gov) or by phone at (518) 474-5807.