Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards for Preschool (P-MELDS)

A Community-Based, Tribally Led Initiative Supporting Families with Young Children

Performance period 1/2025–10/2025

High-quality early learning standards serve as foundational infrastructure within early childhood systems. Nationally, states use early learning and development standards to articulate shared expectations for child development, guide curriculum and assessment decisions, and promote continuity across mixed-delivery[1] settings. When clearly communicated and consistently applied, standards help align educators, administrators, and family-serving professionals around a common understanding of children's developmental progressions—strengthening instructional coherence from birth through the early elementary years.

Through its Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R), Maine implemented a focused update and dissemination initiative centered on **Preschool Maine Early Learning and Development Standards (P-MELDS)**. The initiative aligned revised P-MELDS with Infant/Toddler MELDS (IT-MELDS), developed practical implementation tools, expanded translation of standards-related resources, and structured statewide dissemination through existing professional development and distribution networks. While MELDS itself is an ongoing state responsibility, PDG-R funding supported enhanced access and structured coordination across agencies. It expanded supports intended to facilitate consistent use across Maine's mixed-delivery early childhood system.

This report presents **findings from outcome-focused assessment activities** conducted in fall 2025 as part of Maine's Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R) program. Drawing on diverse data, the report examines the Preschool MELDS initiative with respect to the following PDG-R outcome areas:

- **Impact**, progress toward intended outcomes such as alignment across age bands, shared terminology, foundational knowledge of child development, and uptake of MELDS training and resources.
- **Communication and cross-sector coordination**, including collaboration among OCFS, DOE, MRTQ, Head Start partners, and educators to update, disseminate, and support MELDS use statewide.
- **System building**, including contributions to mixed-delivery alignment, integration with related initiatives (e.g., curriculum and credentialing systems), and infrastructure advanced through PDG-R.
- **Supports and access**, including translation, self-paced training, dissemination strategies, implementation adaptations, and identified participation barriers.

Data sources for this report include interviews conducted with Initiative Leads in fall 2025 and March 2025, monthly implementation updates, review of training participation data from MRTQ PDN, documentation of toolkit development and translation, and related PDG-R reporting materials.

[1]Maine defines mixed-delivery ECE as the coordinated effort to support early childhood services and programming across a range of settings to help meet the varied needs of children and families.

During the PDG-R performance period (July 2024–October 2025), the MELDS initiative concentrated on updating Preschool MELDS (P-MELDS), reinforcing alignment with Infant/Toddler MELDS (IT-MELDS), and strengthening statewide access and dissemination. While MELDS is an established component of Maine's early learning system, PDG-R funding enabled a more structured implementation phase that extended beyond document revision to include tool development, translation, and coordinated outreach.

In fall 2024, Initiative Leads convened a statewide Task Force of early childhood educators and stakeholders to develop practical supports for using P-MELDS in diverse settings. Over a concentrated period of work, the Task Force produced a suite of educator-facing resources and a companion document to support communication with families. Materials were reviewed by DOE and OCFS leadership before public release.

To improve accessibility, Initiative Leads conducted a statewide survey to identify priority languages spoken by staff and families, informing translation decisions. Dissemination efforts included targeted outreach through conferences, Head Start distribution sites, and other professional networks.

MELDS FEATURES

Updated Preschool MELDS (P-MELDS) **aligned with Infant/Toddler MELDS** and Maine Learning Results (K–12 standards)

Statewide Task Force convened (22 expressed interest; 10 formal participants) to develop practical implementation tools

38 educator-facing toolkit resources and **1 Family Companion Tool** created to support standards use

Toolkit materials **translated into four languages** (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic) based on statewide provider survey data

Centralized "one-stop" standards webpage to house IT-MELDS, P-MELDS, Maine Learning Results, and toolkit materials

Free, asynchronous P-MELDS training hosted through Maine Roads to Quality (MRTQ) Professional Development Network

Statewide dissemination through regional conferences, Head Start distribution sites, and targeted outreach events

What was the impact of P-MELDS?

Understanding the impact of PDG-R–supported initiatives requires assessing whether investments advanced their intended purposes. For P-MELDS, impact is understood primarily at the infrastructure and systems levels rather than as measured changes in classroom practice.

Initiative Leads identified the following **intended outcomes** for this work:

- **Aligned** IT-MELDS and P-MELDS across the birth-through-Grade 3 continuum
- **Increased foundational knowledge** and shared language of child development across early childhood educators
- **Increase practical use of P-MELDS in** curriculum planning and assessment.
- **Expanded access to standards-related resources** across mixed-delivery settings

At this stage, documented impact is reflected primarily in structural and engagement indicators. Findings are organized around these intended outcomes.

Advancing Alignment Across Birth–Grade 3

The following actions represent structural alignment efforts rather than direct measures of classroom change. Structural actions during the grant period included:

- Updating Preschool MELDS to align with IT-MELDS
- Creating a centralized standards webpage housing IT-MELDS, P-MELDS, and Maine Learning Results
- Initiating crosswalk updates between P-MELDS and commonly used assessment tools
- Identifying needed updates linking For ME lesson plans to revised P-MELDS standards

> **Initiative Leads described the preschool space as "the epicenter of the two worlds colliding," referencing the alignment between OCFS (birth–3) and DOE (Pre-K–Grade 2).**

Strengthening Foundational Knowledge and Shared Language

P-MELDS training is hosted through the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) as a free, self-paced module.

Training Participation (July 2024 – October 2025)

Training	Format	Completions
P-MELDS	Asynchronous, free	2,404
IT-MELDS	Facilitated, synchronous	482

Completion numbers reflect participation in standards-related professional learning during the grant period. Initiative Leads noted that the asynchronous format expanded access, while also acknowledging that facilitated training historically allowed more in-depth discussion of distinctions among standards, curriculum, and assessment.

> **As one Lead reflected, the on-demand format increases reach, but "some of the deeper understanding and deeper conversations get lost because there's no opportunity for that."**

Encouraging Practical Use of Standards in Planning

Initiative Leads described the development of a practical toolkit as an unanticipated outcome of the initiative. Rather than translating the full standards document alone, Initiative Leads convened a Task Force to develop: 38 educator-facing tools and 1 Family Companion Tool. Responses to a fall provider survey indicated that several educators described P-MELDS as a curriculum rather than a standards

framework. This finding reflects continued confusion regarding the distinction between standards, curriculum, and assessment.

Expanding Access Across Mixed-Delivery Settings

Maine's early childhood system operates through a mixed-delivery model—center-based programs, family child care homes, Head Start programs, and school-based pre-kindergarten—each serving diverse staff and family populations. Translation decisions were guided by statewide survey data identifying priority languages spoken by staff and families. Toolkit materials were translated into four languages beyond English.

Conference-based dissemination also generated anecdotal feedback from providers serving multilingual communities, including one educator who noted that translated materials addressed a longstanding barrier to using MELDS in programs serving migrant families.

Initiative Leads also reported that the P-MELDS training module remains in English only. In communities with significant Spanish-speaking staff populations, educators have completed training with informal translation support from colleagues.

How did MELDS strengthen communication and cross-sector coordination?

Updating P-MELDS required coordination across child care programs, Head Start, public pre-K and elementary schools, and state agencies. Multiple stakeholder groups—including a Steering Committee, Writing Team, Targeted Review Team, and an ad hoc Task Force—contributed to the update and development of practical implementation tools.

Continued collaboration between the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and the Department of Education (DOE) was central to aligning birth–3 and pre-K–grade 2 systems. Head Start programs served as regional distribution sites, and the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) hosted the P-MELDS training module within its system. Educator participation in the Task Force informed resource design and translation priorities.

Table 2. Cross-Sector Coordination in the MELDS Initiative

Sector / Partner	Coordination Function	Structural Implication
OCFS & DOE	Joint oversight and review of revised standards and toolkit materials	Alignment across birth–3 and pre-K–grade 2 systems
MRTQ PDN	Hosted and disseminated P-MELDS training through the registry platform	Embedded MELDS within existing professional development infrastructure
Head Start programs	Regional distribution sites for standards and toolkit materials	Extended access into community-based early learning settings
Task Force educators	Mixed-delivery practitioner participation in tool development	Resources reflect classroom application across settings
ESOL / equity advisors	Consultation on language access and dissemination	Translation priorities informed by field and community needs

How has MELDS contributed to building a strong statewide early childhood service system?

MELDS operates as a shared standards infrastructure within Maine's early learning system. During the PDG-R period, system-level contributions were reflected in coordinated updates, consolidated access to standards, and integration into existing professional development structures.

These changes represent structural adjustments in how standards are accessed, aligned, and supported rather than direct measures of classroom practice. Table 3 summarizes the primary infrastructure shifts that occurred during the grant period.

Table 3. System-Level Infrastructure Strengthened Through MELDS

System Area	Pre-PDG Context	PDG-Enabled Structural Action
Standards Access	Separate documents across age bands	Centralized webpage housing IT-MELDS, P-MELDS, and K–12 standards
Professional Learning	Facilitated training model only	Free, asynchronous P-MELDS training embedded in MRTQ PDN registry
Practical Application	Standards document as primary reference	Toolkit of educator-facing tools and Family Companion resource
Language Access	English-only standards	Toolkit translated into four priority languages

In what ways did the P-MELDS initiative support accessibility and participation for early childhood education programs?

Because MELDS operates as a shared standards infrastructure, access to materials and professional learning was central to the initiative's design. As described earlier, translation priorities were informed by statewide survey data, and practical toolkit resources were developed to support everyday application across mixed-delivery settings.

P-MELDS training is available at no cost through the MRTQ PDN registry platform, reducing financial barriers to participation. However, while the toolkit materials are available in multiple languages, the training module itself remains in English. In some communities, educators have relied on informal translation support to complete the training.

Sustainability

The core components of the MELDS initiative are now embedded in existing state systems. Updated standards and toolkit materials are publicly housed on a centralized standards webpage alongside IT-MELDS and Maine Learning Results. P-MELDS training continues to be delivered through the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) registry platform, integrating standards-related learning into Maine's established professional development infrastructure. Head Start distribution sites and established dissemination practices remain in place.

Activities supported directly by PDG-R funding—including compensated Task Force participation and translation development—were time-limited. Continued expansion of translated training materials or facilitated delivery formats would require additional resources.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons emerged during implementation of the MELDS initiative:

- **Practical tools support standards use more effectively than document translation alone.** Convening a Task Force to develop adaptable, educator-facing resources responded directly to practitioner feedback and provided structured supports for applying standards in daily practice.
- **Access and depth operate in tension within professional learning design.** Transitioning to asynchronous, no-cost training expanded participation, while reducing opportunities for facilitated discussion about distinctions among standards, curriculum, and assessment.
- **Language access extends beyond written materials.** While toolkit resources were translated into four priority languages, the P-MELDS training module remains in English only, creating uneven accessibility for multilingual staff.
- **Inclusive stakeholder engagement requires intentional outreach.** Although multiple educator groups participated in the update and toolkit development process, Initiative Leads identified the need for stronger tribal, CTE, and parent representation in future efforts.

Summary

The MELDS initiative focused on updating and disseminating Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards as shared infrastructure across the state's mixed-delivery early childhood system. During the PDG-R period, the initiative advanced alignment between Infant/Toddler MELDS and Preschool MELDS, expanded access through translation and structured dissemination, and embedded standards-related professional learning within the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN). The development of practical implementation tools responded to practitioner feedback and provided structured supports for applying standards in daily practice.

At the same time, the initiative identified areas for continued attention, including balancing access and depth in professional learning, strengthening language accessibility in training delivery, and broadening stakeholder representation in future updates. Core standards infrastructure and access mechanisms are now embedded within existing state systems, positioning MELDS as a shared reference point across child care, Head Start, and public school settings.