Purpose: The purpose of this memo is to notify stakeholders of a recent decision to make a change in the plans for future cohorts of Virginia’s PDG B-5 communities. PDG lead partners VDOE, VECF, and UVA have established and carefully considered key values in assessing and finalizing decisions for the implementation plans for the recognition program and study. In order to maximize the resources and learnings from the associated study to benefit Virginia’s early education workforce in the future, the recognition grant program and study will proceed only for the initial cohort of PDG pilots. There will not be an educator incentive for the second cohort in 2020-2021.

Background: In 2019, Virginia received a federal PDG B-5 award to strengthen its early childhood care and education (ECCE) system. As an initial component of PDG B-5 supported by a partnership among the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), and University of Virginia (UVA), Virginia piloted a unique recognition grant program in 10 competitively-selected regions/communities (Cohort 1). A study designed by researchers at UVA supports the program’s opportunity to not only recognize the efforts of the pioneering early childhood sites and professionals in Cohort 1 but also understand the conditions and well-being of the workforce and the effects a financial incentive could have on workforce retention and stability. The intention of the partner agencies for this program and study is to honor early educators’ integral role in ensuring high quality experiences for young learners and sheds light on the effects of financial supports on a set of important outcomes such as teacher financial and personal stress, job satisfaction and commitment to their positions, and ultimately the likelihood of staying in their positions.

Strengthening the early childhood system starts at the classroom level, whether in a family day home, child care, Head Start or school setting. Teachers should be supported to improve and recognized as the primary contributor to high quality early education experiences for young learners. Early childhood teachers who serve Virginia’s most vulnerable children provide an essential service yet work for low wages, often without benefits. As Virginia strives to increase access to ECCE experiences for at-risk children as well as support the continuous improvement of these publicly-funded ECCE sites, identifying strategies to most effectively support, retain, and reward talented early educators is a top priority. Virginia has lacked a comprehensive model for recognizing, rewarding, and retaining teachers for strengthening ECCE; the recognition grant pilot and UVA study is filling that significant void and we hope will help build a compelling case for more equitable compensation and conditions for the ECCE workforce.

Rationale: While lead agency partners believe that every participating teacher deserves to be recognized with better compensation and/or supplemental incentives, we face the dilemma of limit in resources. Rather than proceed in a way that would significantly reduce the incentive amount per professional, we’ve determined that it would be most prudent to proceed with the scientific study of the effect of an incentive that is enough to be impactful for each participating teacher. To that end, the recognition grant program and study will be limited to teachers (working 30+ hours/week directly with children 0-5) in publicly-funded child care centers and family day homes in the PDG B-5 Cohort 1 communities. This decision will utilize and prioritize the available funds to deepen and broaden engagement for robust study learnings to inform potential levers to impact the early childhood workforce more broadly, with special emphasis on those who receive lowest wages and often serve the most vulnerable children within communities across the Commonwealth.