



Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Pilot Classroom Quality Grant Recipient Q & A:

Diana Makhoulf, Director, Malden Early Education and Learning Program

What does UPK mean to the Malden Early Education and Learning Program?

“UPK has presented us with an opportunity to expand our vision of what quality should be within our program. In ECE, we so seldom have the funding to dream our dreams and then implement them. The funding has allowed us to not only dream dreams of what we can do to stimulate children’s curiosity and learning and enrich our partnership with parents, but also given us resources to actually have this happen in all our classrooms. UPK funds have given us the capacity to obtain the resources we need to run a high quality program.”

Why is it important to continue to advocate for UPK?

“As we continue to pursue our professional development, a relationship based on trust has developed with consultants over the past year. Teachers need to build upon that trust to expand their educational opportunities. Children’s assessment needs to be evaluated and worked into the curriculum. This process takes time and commitment to follow through with these measures. Also, as we continue to expect more and more from programs and teachers, they need to be respected for their level of professionalism within the field and therefore compensated at a rate which is indicative of that.”

What has the grant allowed your Malden Early Education and Learning Program to accomplish that you would not have been able to accomplish otherwise?

“UPK has allowed us the opportunity to access research based professional development through Tufts University and their Applied Center for Teaching. They have provided a model of reflection and mentoring to our teachers with ongoing coaching that helps us to understand how preschoolers learn. Individual mentoring meets teachers’ individual needs and helps them reach their potential. The funding permits the program to offer teachers concrete enhancements for achieving advanced degrees supporting teacher retention and even more important it has created a learning community whose goal is to enhance the ongoing learning of young children.”

How have your children and families at the Malden Early Education and Learning Program benefited from UPK?

"All the children in our program have benefited from having increased resources and materials that help provide a diverse and multi-faceted curriculum. One preschool classroom has been working on creating books based upon the theories of shared reading. The children have become very excited about creating their own books using pictures from their own environment, and therefore continuously try to read. Literacy has been broken down into oral language and concepts about print. The children now do a lot of interactive writing as a group. They have gained a sense that writing is a powerful tool and are proud that their writing is displayed in all areas of the classroom. Instead of teachers labeling and writing signs it is the children's own work."

"Within the past year we have also been able to provide enrichment opportunities through fieldtrips and specialists that came into the classrooms to provide movement and rhythm. A trip to the Museum of Fine Arts, while acknowledging the culture of many of our children, exposed the children to forms of expression that were then incorporated into the classroom."

How has the early education providers benefited from UPK?

"Teachers have learned the value of reflecting on children's interests and developmental skills, as the initial process in promoting learning and building a curriculum. As the process of mentoring takes place so have teachers' styles in teaching - thereby creating a parallel between individual learning within a classroom and teachers' individual learning taking place. Teachers are excited to be a part of an expanding culture of professionalism within our field. Being able to recognize teachers as the professionals they are and compensate them for their commitment to the field of early childhood education has been an integral part of this grant. Early education teachers are feeling more valued as UPK funds emphasize that early learning lays the foundation for education through a lifetime."