



## **Keystones to Opportunity Initiative (Striving Readers Discretionary Grant) Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is the Keystones to Opportunity (KtO) Initiative?**

The Keystones to Opportunity initiative is a federal grant Pennsylvania has received to improve literacy outcomes for students from birth through grade 12. Pennsylvania is one of 6 states, out of the thirty-five states that applied, to be awarded these discretionary dollars. The following 6 states have received funding:

- . Georgia, \$25.65 million
- . Louisiana, \$28.5 million
- . Montana, \$7.6 million
- . Nevada, \$14.25 million
- . Pennsylvania, \$38 million
- . Texas, \$66.5 million

### **2. How will school districts and early childhood programs benefit from this grant?**

Legislation requires that 95% of the dollars go directly to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to improve student literacy outcomes, birth through grade 12. In addition to improving classroom environments and developing a local literacy plan, LEAs will be able to purchase training from intermediate units (IUs) and other approved vendors.

### **3. Are school districts required to participate in the Keystones to Opportunity initiative?**

No. Keystones to Opportunity is a voluntary initiative.

### **4. Will this be a one-year initiative or a 5 year initiative?**

Pennsylvania was awarded \$38.6 million for one year. The Keystones to Opportunity Grant (Striving Readers) was presented by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) as a 5-year Project. Funding for years 2-5 is contingent on continued funding by the USDOE.

### **5. How does this project relate to Pennsylvania's Comprehensive Literacy Plan?**

The PA Comprehensive Literacy Plan (PaCLP) was funded through a formula grant awarded to all states that applied with an expectation that each state develop a birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade literacy plan. The PaCLP served as the framework for Pennsylvania's Keystones to Opportunity grant application. The PaCLP will be an essential tool in developing a successful sub-grant application.

### **6. Who may apply for Keystones to Opportunity funds?**

The Keystones to Opportunity initiative is available to all Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). All applications will require a completed birth through grade 12 needs assessment and a birth through grade 12 literacy plan. An LEA may need to partner with early childhood providers to be able to meet the grant requirements

### **7. Are early childhood providers able to apply for funding separately from their local school district?**

No. Early childhood providers must partner with an LEA. While 15% of dollars must go to early childhood providers to improve literacy outcomes birth through age 5, early childhood programs will need to partner with their LEAs to present a comprehensive literacy program that begins at birth and culminates with the student graduating from high school.



### **8. When will LEAs be able to apply for Keystones to Opportunity funds?**

Pre-application forms will be available in December 1, 2011. Please go to SAS ([www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org))

Keystones to Opportunity Professional Learning Community (PLC) for updated timelines.

This will be a very rigorous sub-grant process and districts will need to develop a comprehensive literacy plan with evidence-based strategies for improving their literacy outcomes birth through grade 12.

### **9. How many awards does PDE anticipate making?**

PDE will award \$36.6 million in sub-grants this year. The exact number of awards will depend upon the number of applicants, the strength of the local needs assessments, and the quality of the final applications. Preliminary projections by the PDE suggest between 50 and 75 applications will be funded. More information about funding parameters will be included with the sub-grant application.

### **10. For purposes of this grant, what is Pennsylvania's definition of a disadvantaged student?**

The term "disadvantaged students" means children and students at risk of educational failure, such as children and students who are living in poverty, who are limited-English-proficient, who are far below grade level or who are not on track to becoming college- or career-ready by graduation.

### **11. Does an LEA need to apply for funds in all of the statutory areas (birth to age 5, grades K-5, middle school and high school)?**

No. The LEA will need to assess the literacy needs of students in each of these areas to determine where to target literacy improvement strategies for the greatest return on investment. Accurate local data and a thorough understanding of literacy research will be keys to submitting a successful application.

### **12. What is a "comprehensive approach" to literacy development?**

A comprehensive approach to literacy development requires an integrated, aligned and inclusive set of literacy experiences throughout a child's school career. Activities align to an evidence-based learning framework that specifies the **content** of literacy as well as the **processes** by which all stakeholders involved in literacy instruction can facilitate that learning in a coherent and consistent manner. A comprehensive approach begins at birth and crosses all disciplinary boundaries. It includes instructional techniques, methods, approaches and strategies to promote literacy learning and addresses the quality of classroom instruction and the need for intervention for learners who require support beyond core instruction.

### **13. What are the funding pre-requisites?**

In order to receive Keystones to Opportunity funding:

- The applicant must be a Local Education Agency (LEA), or partner with an LEA.
- The application must address literacy needs birth through grade 12.
- The applicant must demonstrate the capacity to successfully implement a comprehensive literacy program.
- The applicant must use valid and reliable data to document significant educational need in the targeted improvement areas.
- The applicant must employ evidence-based literacy strategies.

### **14. What are the scoring criteria?**

Application scoring criteria will be available with the sub-grant application.



**15. How may LEAs use sub-grant funds?**

LEAs will be required to use grant funds to support the goals and objectives outlined in their approved application. The budget must be reasonable and consistent with their local literacy plan. Resources requested must be adequate but not excessive. Funds should align with the LEA's use of other state and federal dollars that are designed to improve literacy outcomes. Expenditures may include, but are not limited to: salary and benefits for staff to implement the local literacy plan, approved training and technical assistance, assessment tools, and materials and supplies for creating 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy learning environments.

**16. What is an approved training provider?**

An approved training provider, as per the grant parameters, is an intermediate unit that has participated in the train-the-trainer certification process coordinated through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Intermediate units that elect to complete the Keystones to Opportunity Training Certification will be approved by the PDE, based on their demonstrated competency in the specified content area. If the support required to accomplish the goals of a district's literacy plan is not available through these providers, other providers may be employed if they meet the PDE's requirements. However, every effort has been made to ensure that PDE-approved service providers have the resources and expertise to provide the required professional development and technical assistance.

**17. What is the anticipated length of this USDOE award?**

Pending legislative approval, the grant will continue to support sub-grantees for 5 years: School year 2011-2012 through September 30, 2016. The PA Department of Education reserves the right to discontinue funding to sub-grantees that fail to make progress toward achieving their approved goals and objectives.

**18. Will sub-grantees be expected to sustain the program beyond the grant funding window?**

Yes. The LEA will be expected to make a good faith effort to sustain their literacy program beyond the grant's end. The local literacy plan should be rigorous, relevant and sustainable. Districts are expected to align these dollars with other state and federal funds that are available for literacy instruction. When these grant funds are expended, it is important that LEAs have a solid sustainability plan for continuing to support rigorous and relevant literacy activities birth through grade 12.

**19. Who should be involved in the development of the sub-grant application?**

Literacy is everyone's business. Successful applicants will involve a variety of stakeholders, each of whom has a direct or indirect role in supporting student literacy outcomes. This may include district administration, faculty members, parents and community members.

**20. What is the process for applying for funds and the date the application is due?**

Go to [www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org) for the most current application information. A letter of intent could be submitted prior to the application process. The first piece of the application is the completion of a pre-application Needs Assessment. The criteria for the pre-application, including submission guidelines and requirements, will be posted on the SAS portal. This pre-application will be available in December, 2011.

**21. How will the Pre-application and Full Application be submitted?**

Submission requirements of the grant will be announced on SAS as soon as they are available

**22. What will be included in the Pre-application and Full Application?**



The Pre-application is a self-assessment of district literacy needs birth through grade 12. Applicants will be scored on the accuracy and thoroughness of their data, needs assessment information, and reflection. The needs assessment will help the applicant identify priority areas for literacy improvement in each of the 6 SAS categories: Clear Standards, Fair Assessment, Curriculum, Instruction, Materials and Resources and Interventions as well as Literacy Leadership, Data Analysis, and Transition.

**23. Must applicants submit a letter of intent?**

No. Letters of intent are encouraged but not required. The purpose of the letter of intent is to help PDE determine how many readers will be needed to review grant applications in a timely manner. It will also allow PDE to prepopulate some of the achievement and growth data required on the application. Ultimately, those LEAs that submit a letter of intent will have less work to do as they prepare their grant applications.

**24. What can applicants do now to prepare for this grant competition?**

A series of webinars will be provided in December to help applicants better understand grant requirements. Applicants can also explore the resources related to Keystones to Opportunity on SAS, familiarize themselves with the PA Comprehensive Literacy Plan, and begin analyzing their local literacy data.

**25. What is the distribution of the funds across the grade spans?**

Birth – age five:	approximately \$5.8 million
Kindergarten – grade 5:	approximately \$15.4 million
Middle School	approximately \$7.7 million
High School	approximately \$7.7 million

**26. Can districts form consortia to apply for grant funding?**

No. These funds are intended to support the development and implementation of local literacy plans and strategies, birth through grade 12. While school districts may have similar needs, data will be evaluated at the district, school and early childhood level.

**27. How will sub-grantees be evaluated and monitored?**

The University of Pittsburgh and SAS EVAAS, Inc. are the statewide evaluators for this project. In addition, each sub-grantee will be monitored both fiscally and programmatically to assess fidelity with their approved application and local progress toward attainment of specified goals and objectives. A monitoring protocol will be available to each sub-grantee prior to the monitoring visit.

**28. If an LEA is not funded in year 1, or does not apply in year 1, may they apply or reapply in subsequent years?**

Yes, based on the availability of federal funds. There is no guarantee that funds will be available beyond year 1.

**29. If an LEA is funded in year 1 of the grant, must they reapply for subsequent years or are they automatically funded for continuing years?**

No grantee will be automatically refunded. In years 2 through 5, based on the availability of federal funds, grantees will be required to submit a continuation application. Continuation applications will focus on the grantees progress toward approved goals and objectives. PDE and the technical assistance team will provide sub-grantees with support, but it is ultimately up to the sub-grantee to demonstrate an appropriate return on investment.