



Primary Project Application for Funds 2026-2027

This guide is meant to support New York State schools, districts, and non-profit agencies in their understanding of the Primary Project intervention and the process to apply for funding for the 2026-2027 school year. Key stakeholders should review these materials prior to completing the initial Application for Funds.

What is Primary Project?

Primary Project is a tier two prevention program developed by Children's Institute to help children in grades pre-K to 3rd adjust to the school community using a child-centered play approach.

How does it work?

BUILT ON STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Students work with a "child associate" whose role is to establish a positive relationship through play. Child associates are supervised by a school mental health professional.

PLAY-BASED

Child associates are trained to use a child-centered therapeutic play approach and meet with children in a playroom weekly for 12-15 sessions. Pre-K students meet twice a week in a combination of individual, play pair and classroom sessions.

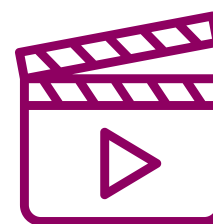
DATA-DRIVEN

Children are screened by teachers using a standardized SEL tool (T-CRS or other). Results are analyzed and help to inform student selection for the program. Data is collected after the child's time in Primary Project is complete.

Proven Results

Primary Project was built on decades of research conducted by Children's Institute. Children who participate in Primary Project have been shown to:

- have more confidence
- have increased attendance
- be better able to connect to school
- more successfully interact with peers and adults



Visit
bit.ly/primaryprojectvideo
to watch the Primary Project
video and learn more!

Why Play?

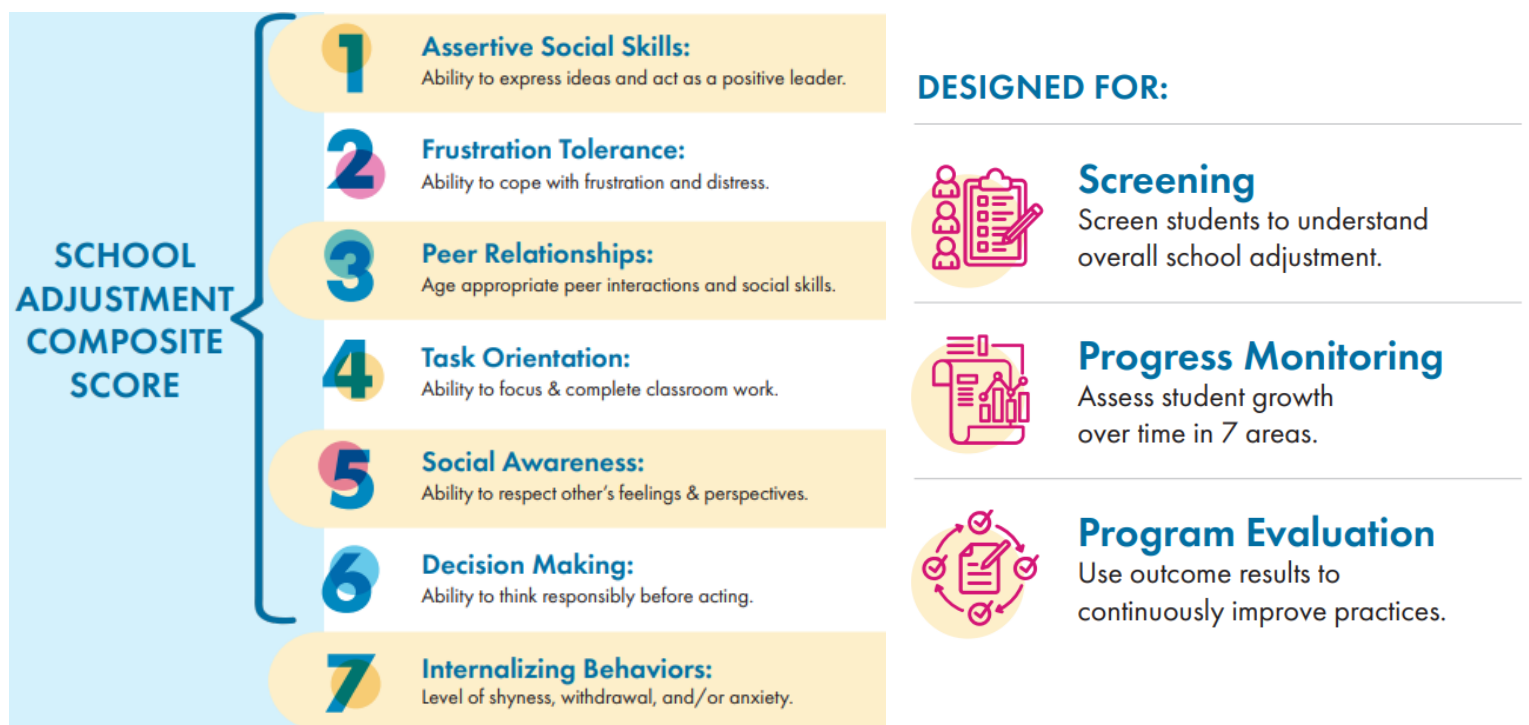
Primary Project is based on the theoretical model of child-centered play, where the responsibility to make decisions and change are up to the child. The child associate is trained to use child-centered skills in the playroom to foster a positive relationship, promote decision-making, and build confidence.

Research demonstrates that play promotes a child's social-emotional health and wellbeing. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, play is critical to support executive function in a growing child's brain. This includes the development of social-emotional skills, language expansion, self-regulation, and cognitive growth.



Screening and Progress Monitoring Using the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS 3.1)

T-CRS 3.1 is an assessment tool designed to understand and proactively support student social-emotional and behavioral growth for students in grades Pre-K through 5th. A web-based system is available for data entry and reporting.



Understanding the NYSED Application for Funds

What is the Application for Funds (AFF)?

Children's Institute receives funding from NYSED to distribute to New York State school districts, other public or private elementary schools, charter schools, public agencies, and nonprofit 501(c)(3), to support the costs associated with implementing Primary Project. Grants are time limited (three years) with decreased funding in years 2 and 3. Districts, schools, or agencies may submit an application to begin a new Primary Project program for up to 2 schools OR the expansion of Primary Project to additional schools in a district contingent upon maintenance of effort in the original school(s). Schools awarded funds will begin Primary Project implementation in September of 2026.

Eligibility Requirements

To be considered for funding, NYS schools must be able to demonstrate the following:

- Space to host a Primary Project playroom.
- Use of SEL screening measures including the Teacher-Child Rating Scale.
- Supervision of the program provided by an on-site mental health professional.
- Ability to hire a high-quality child associate.
- Commitment from stakeholders to implement the program with fidelity.
- Commitment to long-term sustainability through alternate funding streams beyond the 3-year grant.

Award Amounts & Funding Structure



One School

Year 1: Up to \$15,000
Year 2: 75% of original award
Year 3: 50% of original award
Year 4+: The district assumes responsibility for the costs associated with program implementation.



Two Schools

Year 1: Up to \$30,000
Year 2: 75% of original award
Year 3: 50% of original award
Year 4+: Funding is the district's responsibility.

Funding Terms

The Primary Project Application for Funds is a reimbursement grant, which means that schools are reimbursed for their Primary Project expenses at the end of each school year. This may potentially include the salary and benefits of child associates, training expenses, playroom materials, and cost of measures. The amount of the award decreases each year, with the school fully funding their own program. Awards are contingent upon the continuation of NYSED funds and the school's ability to meet program expectations. Once awarded, schools can access ongoing training and consultation from Children's Institute beyond the life of the grant.

Roles and Responsibilities



SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

As the leader of the school community, the school administrator supports program implementation, ensures playroom space and materials, and promotes buy-in from teachers, staff, and the community.



MENTAL HEALTH SUPERVISOR

The supervisor of the program is a licensed social worker, psychologist, or counselor. Supervisors are responsible for directing day-to-day activities including supervising, supporting, and coaching child associates.



PROJECT COORDINATOR

This role may be filled by the mental health supervisor, school administrator, or district-level staff. The coordinator oversees district-wide implementation.



CHILD ASSOCIATE

Associates are hired for their natural abilities to establish effective, genuine, and caring relationships with children. Associates are trained in the skills of child-centered play to deliver the intervention.

Commitments

Principals, mental health supervisors, project coordinators and child associates supported by NYSED funds are required to attend trainings to ensure best practices and receive support for implementation. Initial training occurs in September 2026. At the end of the third year of implementation, schools are required to complete a program evaluation using the Best Practices Inventory.

Ready to Apply?

The NYSED Application for Funds is a four-phase process. Initial applications are accepted on a rolling basis beginning November 3, 2025 until January 9, 2026. If your district, school or agency meets the initial requirements, you will be contacted to advance to the next phase. Final funding decisions are contingent upon NYSED funding.

Phase 1: Application

Initial applications, including a project budget, are due no later than Friday, January 9, 2026. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.

Phase 2: Interviews

If invited, an hour-long interview will be scheduled with your school team by the end of February to further explore eligibility.

Phase 3: Final Materials

Schools who are invited to the final round submit a sustainability plan and a letter of support from the superintendent for review by mid-March 2026.

Phase 4: Awards

Upon approval from NYSED, award letters are sent before the end of the 2025-2026 school year.

LEARN MORE



[Register here](#) for a virtual information session on Tuesday, December 2nd at 9am.

Apply Now



If you feel well informed and ready to apply, [click here](#).