

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge



**U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C.**

July 2011

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Program

Thank you for your interest in the [RTT-ELC Program](#), the administration’s signature early learning reform initiative. This program will be jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS).

In order to run a rigorous competition and obligate funds to grantees before the December 31, 2011 statutory deadline, ED will waive rulemaking for this new program, pursuant to its authority in the General Education Provisions Act. However, we want your input on how we implement the major elements of this program so we are posting this draft executive summary of the draft requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions for the RTT-ELC competition on this Web site and we encourage all interested parties to share their comments with us. This document will be posted for public input until 5:00 PM EDT on July 11, 2011, at which time the input section will be closed and we will begin considering input received as we develop final requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions. We will publish those requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions in a Notice Inviting Applications in the *Federal Register* later this summer.

The RTT-ELC competition is a powerful tool that will help highly committed States provide more children from birth to age five from low-income families – with access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs. As with the first two rounds of Race to the Top, the bar to receive an RTT-ELC grant will be set high.

Through the RTT-ELC, we want to support breakthrough work that dramatically improves the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs serving High-Need Children. The competition will focus on key reforms, including aligning early childhood resources and systems and improving early learning and development standards and assessment, program standards, tiered rating and improvement systems, and early childhood educators. We will be looking to fund applications that demonstrate courage, commitment, capacity, and creativity.

In commenting on this document, we encourage potential applicants to identify barriers in current federal programs that may impede implementation of an ambitious, high-quality State Plan.

We are posting this document on a moderated site. That means all posts will be reviewed before they are posted. We intend to post all responsive submissions on a timely basis. We reserve the right not to post comments that are unrelated to this request, are inconsistent with ED’s Web site policies, are advertisements or endorsements, or are otherwise inappropriate. Please do not include links to advertisements or endorsements, as we will delete them before we post your comments. Additionally, to protect your privacy and the privacy of others, please do not include personally identifiable information such as Social Security numbers, addresses, phone numbers, or email addresses in the body of your comments. For more information, please be sure to read the “[comments policy](#).”

Please understand that posts must be related to the RTT-ELC competition and program, and should be as specific as possible. Each post must be limited to 1,000 words. All opinions, ideas, suggestions, and comments are considered informal input and ED and HHS will not respond to any posts. If you include a link to additional information in your post, we urge you to ensure that the linked information is accessible to all individuals, including individuals with disabilities. We look forward to receiving your ideas and suggestions. However, the input you provide in these posts might or might not be reflected in the final RTT-ELC requirements, priorities, selection criteria, or definitions, or the other policies that are enunciated in the final RTT-ELC NIA.

Again, thank you for your interest in this historic opportunity to support early learning. We look forward to hearing from you.

- [Department of Education's linking policy](#)
- [Department of Education's disclaimer of endorsement](#)

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

Priorities

Priority 1: Absolute Priority - Using Early Learning and Development Standards and Kindergarten Entry Assessments to Promote School Readiness

Priority 2: Absolute Priority - Using Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems to Promote School Readiness

Priority 3: Competitive Preference Priority – Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System

Priority 4: Invitational Priority – Sustaining Program Effects in the Early Elementary Grades

Priority 5: Invitational Priority – Encouraging Private Sector Support

Selection Criteria

(A) Successful State Systems

- (A)(1) The State’s ambitious early learning and development reform agenda and goals
- (A)(2) Demonstrating past commitment and investment in supporting Early Learning and Development Programs
- (A)(3) Organizing and aligning the early learning and development system to achieve success
- (A)(4) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies
- (A)(5) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant

(B) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

- (B)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards
- (B)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems
- (B)(3) Understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry
- (B)(4) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of High-Need Children to improve school readiness
- (B)(5) Engaging and supporting families

(C) High-Quality, Accountable Programs

- (C)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide set of tiered Program Standards
- (C)(2) Promoting Participation in the State’s Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System
- (C)(3) Rating, monitoring, and improving Early Learning and Development Programs
- (C)(4) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in improving school readiness

(D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

- (D)(1) Developing Workforce Knowledge and Competencies and a progression of credentials
- (D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities
- (D)(3) Partnering with postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in developing effective Early Childhood Educators

SIGNATURES and ASSURANCES

(1) The application must be signed by the State's governor and by an authorized representative from every Participating State Agency¹.

(2) The State also must submit a certification from the State's Attorney General that the State's descriptions of, and statements and conclusions regarding, State laws, and regulations contained in the State's application are complete and accurate and are reasonable interpretations of those State laws and regulations.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

A State must meet the following requirements to be eligible to compete for funding under this program:

(a) The Lead Agency must have executed with each Participating State Agency a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which the State must attach to its application, describing the Participating State Agency's level of participation in the grant. At a minimum, the MOU must include an assurance that the Participating State Agency agrees to implement policies and practices, consistent with the State Plan, including to the extent applicable--

- (i) Statewide Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (ii) Statewide Program Standards;
- (iii) The State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System;
- (iv) Statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competencies and progression of credentials; and
- (v) Statewide Essential Data Elements that are captured in the State's data system.

(b) The State must have an operational State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care that meets the requirements described in Section 642B(b) of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9837 b).

AWARD INFORMATION

Budget Requirements: To support States in planning their budgets, the Department has developed budget caps for each State. These are listed below. The Department will not consider for funding an application from a State that proposes a budget that exceeds the applicable cap set for that State. The Department developed the following categories by ranking every State according to its share of the national population of children ages birth through five years old

¹ Note to reader: Defined terms are used throughout this document and are identified using initial capitalization. Definitions are provided later in the document.

from low-income families, and identifying the natural breaks. Then, based on population, we developed budget caps for each category.²

Category 1 – up to \$100M – California, Florida, New York, Texas

Category 2 – up to \$70M – Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania

Category 3 – up to \$60M – Alabama, Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Category 4 – up to \$50M – Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming

In addition to considering other relevant factors (see 34 CFR 75.217(d)(3)), the selection of grantees may consider the need to ensure that systems are developed in States with large, high-poverty, rural communities (including States with high percentages of high-poverty populations in rural areas, as well as States with high absolute numbers of high-poverty individuals in rural areas), and awards may be granted to high-quality applications out of rank order to meet this need. The grant period for this award is December 31, 2011 through December 31, 2015.

² Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2009. American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data.

PRIORITIES

Absolute priorities describe items that a State must address in its application in order to receive an award. States do not write directly to the absolute priorities; instead, reviewers determine if the priorities are met after evaluating a State's response to all of the Selection Criteria. We consider for funding only applications that meet the absolute priorities.

Priority 1: Absolute Priority - Using Early Learning and Development Standards and Kindergarten Entry Assessments to Promote School Readiness

To meet this priority, the State's application must address the need to improve early learning and development outcomes for High-Need Children by (1) describing how the State is using its Early Learning and Development Standards to inform its Program Standards, curriculum, Comprehensive Assessment System, and professional development activities; and (2) having a credible plan to administer a kindergarten entry assessment, aligned with the Early Learning and Development standards, to all children who are entering a public school kindergarten by the start of the 2014-2015 school year, with the goals of informing efforts to close the school readiness gap at kindergarten entry and informing instruction and services in the early elementary school grades.

Priority 2: Absolute Priority - Using Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems to Promote School Readiness

To meet this priority, the State's application must demonstrate that it is implementing and validating or will implement and validate a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System with the purpose of (1) increasing the number of High-Need Children in high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs, (2) increasing participation in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System across Early Learning and Development Programs (including programs with full-day, full-year care) particularly publicly funded programs, (3) supporting programs in improving the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs, and (4) communicating program ratings to parents and the public.

A competitive preference priority describes an area of particular interest for which an applicant may earn additional points. States may respond to the competitive preference priority throughout their application, as appropriate, as well as through a summary of the State's approach to addressing the priority. This priority is evaluated in the context of the State's entire application.

Priority 3: Competitive Preference Priority – Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System

To receive competitive preference under this priority, the State's Plan must be designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State must demonstrate in its application that--

(a) It has a licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting, or that it has a High-Quality Plan to implement such a system by June 30, 2013; and

(b) All licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, or that it has a High-Quality Plan to implement such a system by June 30, 2013.

Invitational priorities signal areas the Department is particularly interested in; applicants may choose to address one or both invitational priorities. Applicants who meet an invitational priority do not earn extra points and are not given preference over other applications.

Priority 4: Invitational Priority – Sustaining Program Effects in the Early Elementary Grades

The Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Health and Human Services are particularly interested in applications that describe the State's plans to sustain and build upon improved early learning outcomes throughout the early elementary school years, including by--

- (a) Enhancing the State's current kindergarten through grade 3 standards in order to align them with the Early Learning and Development Standards across all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Ensuring transition planning between Early Learning and Development Programs and elementary schools, and promoting family engagement, including in the early grades; and
- (c) Increasing the percentage of children who are able to read and do mathematics at grade level by the end of the third grade.

Priority 5: Invitational Priority – Encouraging Private Sector Support

The Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Health and Human Services are particularly interested in applications that describe how the private sector will provide financial and other resources to support the State and its Participating State Agencies or Participating Programs in the implementation of the State Plan.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Selection criteria are the focal point of the application and peer review. States address the selection criteria in their application narrative and a panel of peer reviewers will evaluate the applications based on the extent to which the selection criteria are addressed.

A. Successful State Systems

(A)(1) The State's ambitious early learning and development reform agenda and goals.

The extent to which the State clearly articulates an ambitious yet achievable early learning and development reform agenda and goals for improving program quality and child

outcomes statewide, and for closing the achievement gap for High-Need Children; establishes a clear and credible path to achieving these goals (by presenting evidence on its past performance and commitment); and the extent to which the State's early learning reform agenda and goals are consistent with the State Plan.

Performance Measures: States must establish baseline numbers, annual targets, and final goals for the following:

- Increasing the number and percentage of High-Need Children participating in high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs (disaggregated by race, gender, disability status, and English learner status, and by each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers); and
- Improving performance of High-Need Children on the State's kindergarten entry measure (disaggregated by race, gender, disability status, and English learner status).

(A)(2) Demonstrating past commitment and investment in supporting Early Learning and Development Programs.

The extent to which the State has demonstrated from January 2007 to the present--

- (a) Its commitment to early learning and development, as evidenced by the State's existing policies and practices;
- (b) Its commitment to investing resources in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of High-Need Children;
- (c) Increased access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Program for High-Need Children in the State.

(A)(3) Organizing and aligning the early learning and development system to achieve success.

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and a governance structure that will facilitate interagency system-wide coordination or integration to support and enable streamlined decision-making, allocation of resources, and sustainability by--

- (a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will work together and govern themselves both during and after the period of the grant, including:
 - (i) The organizational structure for managing the grant;
 - (ii) The roles and responsibilities of the State Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1441 et seq.), and other partners, if any;
 - (iii) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
 - (iv) The plan for when and how to involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, families, and other key stakeholders

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the Memoranda of Understanding or other binding agreements--

- (i) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including by aligning and leveraging the Participating State Agency's existing funding to support the State Plan;
- (ii) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require the Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan, including a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs, (especially those that are in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System); and
- (iii) A signature from an authorized representative of the Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating understanding of and commitment to the State Plan, from a broad group of stakeholders and local communities, that translate into broad statewide impact and will enable the State to reach its ambitious yet achievable goals as outlined in Selection Criterion (A)(1), including--

- (i) Strong letters of intent or actions of support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations and, local early learning councils, if applicable; and
- (ii) Letters or actions of support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, the State's legislators; local community leaders; State and local union affiliates; faith-based organizations; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, and education association leaders); family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); and postsecondary institutions.

(A)(4) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.

The extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to build, an extension to the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or a separate, but coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that such system --

- (a) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (b) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (c) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision-making;
- (d) Is supported by high-quality professional development for Early Childhood Educators on the access and use of data; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

(A)(5) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.

The extent to which the budget included in the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how resources will be repurposed or reallocated, from other Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF, Title I, IDEA, State preschool, Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding, Home Visiting, Title V MCH, TANF, Medicaid, Child Welfare, Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and foundation and other private funding sources) to align those resources with, and support and sustain, the State Plan, including--

- (i) How funds from this grant will be supplemented by repurposing or reallocating funds from other existing early learning and education sources, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used to support and sustain activities described in the State Plan;
- (ii) How funding levels will be sustained after the period of the grant is over to ensure that the number and percentage of High Need Children served by Early Learning and Development Programs will be sustained or expanded.

(b) Describes, in both the budget narratives and budget tables, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

- (i) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;
- (ii) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and
- (iii) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, including a significant amount of funding going to the local implementation of the State Plan.

B. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

(B)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.

The extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to put in place in a timely fashion, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used in common by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

- (a) Include evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and cover the Essential Domains of School Readiness; and
- (b) Include evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics.
- (c) Are incorporated in high-quality Program Standards, curricula, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, Workforce Knowledge and Competencies, and professional development activities.
- (d) Include evidence that the State has supports in place to promote understanding and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs

(B)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.

The extent to which the State and the Participating State Agencies are supporting, or have a High-Quality Plan to support, the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment within the Comprehensive Assessment System and their ability to select instruments that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;

(b) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessment and coordinate services for High-Need Children served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

(c) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to guide and improve instruction, programs and services.

(B)(3) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.

The extent to which the State is administering, or has a High-Quality Plan to administer, a common, statewide kindergarten entry assessment that is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards, that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades, and that—

(a) Covers all of the Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used;

(c) Is administered to all children who are entering a public school kindergarten statewide;

(d) Is appropriate for all children, including English learners and children with disabilities;

(e) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal State, and local, privacy laws; and

(f) Will be administered statewide no later than the start of school year 2014-2015.

(B)(4) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of High-Need Children to improve school readiness.

The extent to which the State is identifying and addressing, or has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address, the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of High-Need Children by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety, ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow up are done, and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;

(b) Meeting ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported in meeting, the health standards;

(c) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual statewide targets to--

- (i) Screen all High-Need Children using screening measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (Section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and consistent with "Child Find" (Sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400)), as appropriate;
- (ii) Refer children for services based on the results of those screenings, and confirm that follow-up occurred, where appropriate;
- (iii) Promote participation in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well child care; and
- (iv) Promote healthy eating habits and expanded physical activity and improved nutrition.

(B)(5) Engaging and supporting families.

The extent to which the State provides, or has a High-Quality Plan to provide, information and support to families of High-Need Children to promote school readiness for their children, by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;

(b) Meeting ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained on the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and

(c) Leveraging existing resources to promote family support and engagement statewide, including through home visiting programs and other family-serving agencies.

C. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

(C)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide set of tiered Program Standards.

The extent to which the State and the Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System based on a common set of tiered Program Standards that--

(a) Are clear and measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and demonstrate high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards³ that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

³ See such nationally recognized standards as:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2009). *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

U.S. Department of Defense. (2009). *Sure Start Program Guide: Department of Defense Education Activity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense. Retrieved from:

http://www.dodea.edu/curriculum/docs/sureStart/programGuide/guide_surestart.pdf.

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2011) *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance*

(b) Are linked to the State licensing system.

(C)(2) Promoting Participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, participation in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by –

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participating in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (i) State-funded Early Learning and Development Programs;
- (ii) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (iii) Early Learning and Development Programs funded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C, and Part B Section 619;
- (iv) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and
- (v) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices toward the goal of increasing the number and share of High-Need Children in Early Learning and Development Programs that are a part of such a system;

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs and that participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (C)(2)(a) (i) through (v) above); and

(d) Providing supports to help working families with High-Need Children access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet their needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs, transportation, meals, and family support services).

(C)(3) Rating, monitoring, and improving Early Learning and Development Programs.

The extent to which the State and the Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating, monitoring, and improving the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring, trained monitors whose results have a sufficient level of inter-rater reliability, and an appropriate frequency of monitoring and rating;

(b) Making program quality information and licensing history easily available to families selecting care, to families whose children are enrolled in programs, and to the public (including by posting any health and safety violations on a public website), in ways that are easy to understand, interpret, and use for decision-making; and

(c) Developing and implementing practices and policies that support and provide incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through

training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing the number and percentage of High-Need Children in Early Learning and Development Programs that--

- (i) Participate in programs covered by the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and
- (ii) Participate in programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

(C)(4) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in improving school readiness.

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to demonstrate the relationship between quality ratings and the learning outcomes of children served by Early Learning and Development Programs, by validating that the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of quality, are related to progress in learning and development, and build toward school readiness.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

(D)(1) Developing Workforce Knowledge and Competencies and a progression of credentials.

The extent to which the State has developed, or has a High-Quality Plan to develop, a common statewide--

- (a) Set of Workforce Knowledge and Competencies designed to promote children's learning and development and improve outcomes; and
- (b) Progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies.

(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators with the goal of improving child outcomes through--

- (a) Professional development opportunities that are aligned with its Workforce Knowledge and Competencies;
- (b) Policies and incentives, (*e.g.*, scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities), that promote professional development and career advancement along an articulated career pathway; and
- (c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for:
 - (i) Increasing Early Childhood Educator retention rates; and
 - (ii) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators moving up through the progression of credentials.

(D)(3) Partnering with postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in developing effective Early Childhood Educators.

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets for increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers that have aligned their programs with the State's Workforce Knowledge

and Competencies and progression of credentials, and the number of Early Childhood Educators that these institutions credential annually.

DEFINITIONS

Common Education Data Standards (CEDDS) means voluntary, common standards for a key set of education data elements (e.g., demographics, program participation, transition, and course information) at the early learning, K-12, and postsecondary levels developed through a national collaborative effort being led by the National Center for Education Statistics. CEDDS focus on standard definitions, code sets, and technical specifications of a subset of key data elements and are designed to increase data interoperability, portability, and comparability across early learning programs and agencies, States, districts, and postsecondary institutions.

Comprehensive Assessment System⁴ means a coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments – each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used – that organizes information about the process and context of young children’s learning and development in order to help Early Childhood Educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions. A Comprehensive Assessment System includes, at a minimum--

- (a) Screening Measures;
- (b) Formative Assessments;
- (c) Measures of Environmental Quality; and
- (d) Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions.

Data System Oversight Requirements means policies for ensuring the quality, privacy, and integrity of data contained in a data system, including--

(a) A data governance policy that identifies the elements that are collected and maintained; provides for training of system users in internal controls; establishes who will have access to the information and how the information may be used; sets appropriate internal controls to restrict access to only authorized users; sets criteria for determining the legitimacy of data requests; establishes processes that verify the accuracy, completeness, and age of the information elements maintained in the system; sets procedures for determining the sensitivity of each inventoried element and the risk of harm if that information was improperly disclosed; and establishes procedures for disclosure review and auditing; and

(b) A transparency policy that informs the public, including families, Early Childhood Educators, and programs of the existence of data systems that house personally identifiable information, explains what data elements are included in such a system, enables parental consent to disclose personally identifiable information as appropriate, and describes allowable and potential uses of the data.

Early Childhood Educator means any professional working in Early Learning and Development Programs, including but not limited to center-based and family child care providers, infant and toddler specialists, early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators, home visitors, related service providers, administrators, Head Start teachers, Early

⁴The use of these assessments must conform with the recommendations of the National Research Council’s reports on early childhood.

Head Start teachers, preschool and other teachers, teacher assistants, family service staff, and health coordinators.

Early Learning and Development Program means any (a) State-licensed or State-regulated program or provider, regardless of setting or funding source, that provides early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry, including, but not limited to, programs operated by child care centers and in family child care homes; (b) preschool programs funded by the Federal government, State or local educational agencies (including Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-funded programs); (c) Early Head Start and Head Start programs; and (d) any non-relative child care providers not otherwise regulated by the State and regularly cares for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting.

Early Learning Intermediary Organization means an organization (statewide, regional, or community-based) that represents networks of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State that have influence or authority over those Early Learning and Development Programs, including, but not limited to, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, State Head Start Associations, Family Child Care Associations, State affiliates of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, State affiliates of the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood and, where appropriate, the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association, the National Tribal, American Indian, and Alaskan Native Head Start Association, and the National Indian Child Care Association.

Early Learning and Development Standards means a set of expectations, guidelines, or developmental milestones that describe what all children from birth until kindergarten entry should know and be able to do and their disposition toward learning. These standards must be appropriate for each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and English learners, and for children with developmental delays and disabilities. In addition, the standards must cover all the Essential Domains of School Readiness, and must be developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate.

Essential Data Elements means the critical child, program, and workforce data elements of a coordinated early learning data system, including--

(a) A unique statewide child identifier or another highly accurate, proven method to link data on that child to and from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, including kindergarten entry assessment data;

(a) A unique statewide worker/teacher identifier;

(b) A unique program site identifier;

(c) Child and family demographic information;

(e) Early Childhood Educator demographic information including data on educational attainment and State credential or licenses held, as well as professional development information;

(f) Data on the program's structure, quality, child suspension and expulsion rates, staff retention, and work environment, including all applicable data reported as part of the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(g) Child-level program participation and attendance data.

Essential Domains of School Readiness means the domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development.

Formative Assessment means assessment questions, tools, and processes that are specifically designed to monitor children's progress along the Early Learning and Development Standards and to guide and improve instructional practice, and are valid and reliable for their intended purposes and their target populations.

High-Need Children means children from birth until kindergarten entry who are from low-income families or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, including children who have disabilities or developmental delays, who are English learners, who reside on "Indian lands" as that term is defined by Section 8013(6) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, of 1965, who are migrant, homeless, or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.

High-Quality Plan means a plan that includes, at a minimum, the following components--

- (a) A description of the current policies, practices, and resources;
- (b) The key goals of the plan.
- (c) The key activities to be undertaken and rationale for the activities, which include why the specific activities are thought to bring about the change envisioned and how these activities are linked to the key goals of the plan, and an explanation of how the policies, practices, and resources described in (a) will change as a result of implementing this plan, if applicable.
- (d) The timeline for implementing the activities;
- (e) The party or parties responsible for implementing each activity;
- (f) The information requested in the performance measures, where applicable;
- (g) The information requested under the selection criteria as supporting evidence, if any, together with any additional information the State believes will be helpful to peer reviewers in judging the credibility of the plan; and
- (h) Any specific elements of the plan that describe how the State will meet the unique needs of the following categories of High-Need Children (as applicable): children who have disabilities or developmental delays, who are English learners, who are living in Tribal communities, and who are homeless or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.

Lead Agency means the State-level agency designated by the Governor for the administration of the grant; this agency is the fiscal agent for the grant. The Lead Agency must be one of the Participating State Agencies.

Measures of Environmental Quality means valid and reliable indicators of the overall quality of the early learning environment.

Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions means the measures obtained through a valid and reliable process for observing how teachers and caregivers interact with children. The process should be designed to promote child learning and to identify strengths and areas for improvement for early learning professionals.

Participating State Agency means a State agency that administers public funds related to early learning and development and is participating in the State Plan. The following State agencies must be Participating State Agencies: the agencies that administer or supervise the administration of the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C and Part B Section 619, State-funded preschool, Home Visiting, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the Head Start State Collaboration Grant, the State Advisory Council on Early Care and Education, and Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant; and the State’s Child Care Licensing Agency and the State’s Education Agency. Other State agencies, such as the agencies that administer or supervise the administration of Child Welfare, Mental Health, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), are encouraged to participate in the State Plan.

Participating Program means an Early Learning and Development Program that elects to carry out activities described in the State Plan.

Program Standards means the standards that serve as the basis for a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and define levels of quality for Early Learning and Development Programs. Program Standards are expressed, at a minimum, by the extent to which--

(a) *Early Learning and Development Standards* are implemented through evidence-based activities, interventions, or curricula that are appropriate for each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers;

(b) *Comprehensive Assessment Systems* are used routinely and appropriately to improve instruction and enhance program quality by providing robust and coherent evidence of--

(i) Children’s learning outcomes and development; and

(ii) Program performance;

(c) *A qualified workforce* improves young children’s health, social, emotional, and educational outcomes;

(d) Strategies are successfully used to *engage families* in supporting their children’s development and learning, including but not limited to: parent access to the program, ongoing two-way communication with families, parent education in child development, outreach to fathers and other family members, training and support for families as children move to preschool and kindergarten, social networks of support, intergenerational activities, linkages with community supports and family literacy programs, parent involvement in decision-making, and parent leadership development;

(e) *Health promotion practices* include developmental, behavioral, and sensory screening, referral, and follow up; promote physical activity, healthy eating habits, oral health and behavioral health; and support health literacy among parents;

(f) *Effective data practices* include gathering Essential Data Elements and entering them into the State’s Statewide Longitudinal Data System or other early learning data system, using these data to guide instruction and program improvement, and making this information readily available to families; and

Screening Measures means age- and developmentally appropriate, valid, and reliable instruments that are used to identify children who may need follow-up services to address

developmental, learning, or health needs in, at a minimum, the areas of physical health, behavioral health, oral health, child development, vision, and hearing.

State Plan means the plan submitted as part of the State's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

Statewide Longitudinal Data System means the State's longitudinal education data system that collects and maintains detailed, high-quality, student- and staff-level data that are linked across entities and, over time, providing a complete academic and performance history for each student. The Statewide Longitudinal Data System is typically housed within the State educational agency but includes or can be connected to early childhood, postsecondary, and labor data.

Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System means the system through which the State uses a set of progressively higher Program Standards to evaluate the quality of an Early Learning and Development Program and to support program improvement. A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System consists of four components: (1) tiered Program Standards with multiple rating categories that clearly and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels; (2) monitoring to evaluate program quality based on the Program Standards; (3) supports to help programs meet progressively higher standards (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial support); and (4) public availability of program quality ratings; and includes a process for validating the system.

Workforce Knowledge and Competencies means the set of expectations that describes what Early Childhood Educators (including those working with children with disabilities and English learners) should know and be able to do. These must, at a minimum, be evidence-based; incorporate knowledge and application of the State's Early Learning and Development Standards, the State's Comprehensive Assessment System, child development, and strategies for working with families; and incorporate feedback from experts at the State's postsecondary institutions and other early learning and development experts.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

A State that receives a grant must meet the following requirements:

(a) The State will continue to participate in the programs authorized by Section 619, Part B, and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1419, seq.1431 et seq.), in the Child Care and development Fund (CCDF) program (pursuant to the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9858 et seq.) and Section 418 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 618) and) program, and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (Section 511 of Title V of the Social Security Act, as added by Section 2951 of the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-148) for the duration of this grant.

(b) The State may not spend funds from this grant on the direct delivery of health services.

(c) The State must participate in grantee technical assistance activities facilitated by ED or HHS, individually or in collaboration with other State grantees, to share effective program practices and solutions and collaboratively solve problems, and must set aside at least 1 percent from its grant funds for this purpose.

(d) The State must participate in any evaluation of the State's proposed reforms, including participating with a consortium of States in a cross-State evaluation, if funded by ED or HHS.

(e) The State must have a longitudinal data system that includes the 12 elements described in Section 6401(e)(2)(D) of the America COMPETES Act by the date required under the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) grant and in accordance with its approved SFSF plan for Indicator b(1).

(f) The State must comply with the requirements of all applicable Federal, State, and local privacy laws, including the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and their applicable regulations.

(g) The State and its Participating State Agencies must ensure that the grant project is implemented in accordance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws.

(h) The State must provide researchers with access, consistent with the requirements of all applicable State, local and Federal privacy laws, to data from the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System so they can analyze the States' quality improvement efforts and answer key policy and practice questions.

(i) Unless otherwise protected by Federal or State law or a specific written agreement as proprietary information, the State must make any work (e.g., materials, tools, processes, systems) developed under its grant freely available to the public, including by posting the work on a website identified or sponsored by the Department. Any websites developed under this grant must meet government or industry-recognized standards for accessibility.

(j) Funds made available under this grant must be used to supplement, not supplant, any Federal, State, or local funds that, in the absence of the funds awarded under this grant, would be available for increasing access to and improving the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs.