



## **THE RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE YEAR TWO PROGRESS REPORT**

**December 2014**



# THE RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE YEAR TWO PROGRESS REPORT

AN OVERVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION FROM THE FOURTEEN  
RTT–ELC STATES’ ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORTS FOR 2013

Suggested citation: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2014). *The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Year Two Progress Report*. Washington, DC.

*In States that make it a priority to educate our youngest children . . . studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind.*

—President Barack Obama, State of the Union, February 12, 2013

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The human brain develops rapidly in the first five years of life. High-quality early learning experiences can have a profound and lasting positive effect on young children during these years, setting the stage for success in kindergarten and beyond.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true for young children with high needs who are from low-income families;<sup>2</sup> who have disabilities or developmental delays; who are English learners; who reside on “Indian lands”; who are migrant, homeless, or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.

The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) program, authorized by Congress in 2011,<sup>3</sup> is designed to improve the quality of early learning and development programs for young children. The RTT-ELC grants support States' efforts to design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services.

Twenty States were awarded four-year grants in three phases. Nine Phase 1 States (**California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington**) received funding in 2012. Five Phase 2 States (**Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin**) received funding in 2013 and supplementary funding in 2014. In Phase 3, an additional six States (**Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont**) received funding in 2014. The Federal investment in these 20 RTT-ELC grants is just over \$1 billion.<sup>4</sup> This discretionary grant program is administered jointly by the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS).

As they work to implement their RTT-ELC projects, each State brings an individual early learning history, climate, and structure to the work, as well as unique challenges that must be addressed. While the RTT-ELC framework provides a general structure for key reform levers to improve quality and access for children with high needs, States were given flexibility to choose which components they were ready to address and how they would reach the goals within their plans.

### The RTT-ELC Framework for Reform

The RTT-ELC framework consists of five key areas that represent the foundation of an effective early learning and development reform agenda. All RTT-ELC grantees were required to address two Core Areas of the RTT-ELC framework: *A) A Successful State System* and *B) High-Quality, Accountable Programs*. States then identified specific components in the remaining three areas (called Focused Investment Areas) and developed plans for how they would use their RTT-ELC funds in these areas. The Focused Investment Areas are: *C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children*, *D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce*, and *E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress*.<sup>5</sup>

### State-Reported Progress

RTT-ELC States submit Annual Performance Report (APR) data to ED and HHS each year as a requirement of the grant. In the spring of 2014, Phase 1 States and Phase 2 States submitted their APRs for 2013, their second and first APRs, respectively. This summary report provides information about the progress the 14 Phase 1 and Phase 2 States reported in their APRs for 2013.

This report provides information from the 14 States about the impressive progress they are making in reforming their early learning and development systems. Here are a few of the highlights:

- A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) is a systemic approach to assessing, improving and communicating the levels of quality in early learning and development programs.<sup>6</sup> RTT-ELC States have increased the number of early learning and development programs participating in their TQRIS and are implementing strategies to improve the quality of those programs. The total number of programs in the 14 States' TQRIS increased from 31,321 programs to 54,157 programs enrolled in their TQRIS, a 73 percent increase from the time of their applications to the end of 2013.
- More children with high needs gained access to high-quality early learning and development experiences in RTT-ELC States. There was a 175 percent increase in the numbers of children with high needs enrolled in State-funded preschool programs in the top tiers of their TQRIS, a 43 percent increase in the numbers of children with high needs enrolled in Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funded programs in the top tiers of their TQRIS, and an 83 percent increase in the numbers of children with high needs enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start programs in the top tiers of their TQRIS.
- Ten States are targeting specific high-need communities or “zones” where they are implementing a set of initiatives aimed at building local capacity to support the workforce, engage families, and serve more children with high needs.
- RTT-ELC States are working to identify what the early childhood education workforce should know and be able to teach young children. States are tying these core competencies to professional development opportunities and higher education course offerings so that early childhood educators can continue to progress in the field.
- States are gathering essential data about how ready children are when they begin kindergarten by developing or implementing Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEAs). Some States are currently piloting their KEAs; others are focused on training their early childhood educators to conduct the assessments; and still others are in the development phase and identifying assessment tools or establishing implementation strategies.
- States are increasingly working across agencies to develop governance structures, put Memoranda of Understanding in place, and build or enhance program teams to implement their RTT-ELC plan activities.

The document describes some of the initiatives that 14 RTT-ELC States undertook in the first or second year of their grants, as reported in their Annual Performance Reports (APRs). It is not intended to be a comprehensive look at all the activities and progress States have made to date. Yet even in this short period of time and in this brief report, it is clear that the RTT-ELC grantees are making progress toward improving the quality of early learning and development programs in their States and providing access to these high-quality programs for more children with high needs. These efforts are moving States toward the RTT-ELC goal of providing more children from birth through age 5 with a strong foundation that is needed to succeed in school and beyond. The infusion of funding, coordinated technical assistance from RTT-ELC, and firm timelines are giving States the needed impetus to develop a systems-based approach to improving the education and development of their youngest citizens.

---

<sup>1</sup> For research about the lasting effects of high-quality early learning experiences, see Camilli, Gregori, Sadako Vargas, Sharon Ryan, and W. Steven Barnett. "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development," *Teachers College Record*, 112 (2010): 579–620. [http://rci.rutgers.edu/~camilli/Papers/38\\_15440.pdf](http://rci.rutgers.edu/~camilli/Papers/38_15440.pdf). Reynolds, Arthur J., Judy A. Temple, Suh-Ruu Ou, Irma A. Arteaga, and Barry A. B. White. "School-Based Early Childhood Education and Age-28 Well-Being: Effects by Timing, Dosage, and Subgroups," *Science*, 33 (2011): 360-364. <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/333/6040/360>. Princiotta, Dan, and Kristin Denton Flanagan. *Fifth Grade: Findings From the Fifth-Grade Follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS–K)*. (NCES 2006–038). U.S. Department of Education, 2006. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006038.pdf>. Halle, Tamara, Nicole Forry, Elizabeth Hair, Kate Perper, Laura Wandner, Julia Wessel, and Jessica Vick. *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort (ECLS–B)*. Child Trends, 2009. <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2009-52DisparitiesELExecSumm.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For information about the benefits of high-quality early learning opportunities for children from low-income families, see Duncan, Greg J. and Robert J. Murnane. *Restoring Opportunity: The Crisis of Inequality and the Challenge for American Education*. Boston: Harvard Education Press, 2014. Additional information including Video about Boston Public Schools PreK program and related infographics is at <http://restoringopportunity.com/>. Also see Forry, Nicole, Elizabeth E. Davis, and Kate Welti. "Ready or not: Associations Between Participation in Subsidized Child Care Arrangements, Pre-Kindergarten, and Head Start and Children's School Readiness." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 28 (2013): 634-644.

<sup>3</sup> See §1832(b)(1), title VIII, Division B of P.L. 112-10, the Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/rtt\\_elc\\_legislation.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/rtt_elc_legislation.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the three phases of RTT-ELC please see the RTT-ELC website at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/applicant.html>, which contains links to materials related to the three phases.

<sup>5</sup> The RTT-ELC framework was first established in the 2011 Notice Inviting Applications for RTT-ELC, [76 FR 53564](https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2011-08-26) (Aug. 26, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement. QRIS Quality Standards Web Sites. Office of Child Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013. [https://occrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS\\_Standards\\_Websites.pdf](https://occrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Standards_Websites.pdf). Also see the definition of "Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System" from the RTT-ELC Notices Inviting Applications, which is identical across the three ELC Phases. NOTE: Information in the endnotes of the Executive Summary are also contained in the main section of the report, *The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge: Year Two Progress Report* at <https://elc.grads360.org/#program>