



## **Abstracts of FY 2013 RTT-ELC Grantees (in alphabetical order)**

### **Georgia:**

Applicant: State of Georgia, Office of the Governor

Lead Agency: Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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Amount Requested: \$52,500,000

Georgia has identified four broad goals that form the basis of the State's Early Learning Challenge (ELC) agenda. The goals are to: 1) Increase the availability of high-quality programs for families of children with high needs; 2) Improve the overall quality of early learning programs and early childhood instruction statewide; 3) Reduce the achievement gap between young children with high needs and their same-age peers and increase school readiness skills; and 4) Increase measurement capacity for program quality and child outcomes.

The State plan for its TQRIS includes the goal of having all licensed, registered, and publicly funded programs participating in Quality Rated (the State's TQRIS) by 2017, as well as:

1. To revise Quality Rated criteria to more specifically address supporting children with high needs and to more specifically address cultural competency within and across the criteria across the five program standards.
2. To revise Quality Rated by incorporating additional rigor into the family engagement and comprehensive assessment system standards.
3. To evaluate and revise (as needed) the point structure in Quality Rated to ensure meaningful differentiation between the observation and the portfolio sections.
4. To increase professional development in the areas of family engagement, cultural competency, and assessment systems that will be strengthened in the revised Quality Rated system.
5. To maintain rigorous protocol for rating and monitoring programs participating in Quality Rated.
6. To maintain reliability protocol for Portfolio and ERS Assessors.
7. To expand/enhance the dissemination of information regarding licensing compliance and Quality Ratings to meet the needs of diverse families and increase the number of community partners who distribute information.
8. To strengthen the supports and incentives for programs to continuously improve.
9. To provide supports to families of children with high needs to help them access services.
10. To complete phases three and four of the validation process.

Georgia addressed the following Focused Investment Areas in its application:

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



The State has developed standards with documented vertical (birth-to-5 to K-3) and horizontal alignment (Georgia Performance Standards, Head Start, Work Sampling System [Georgia's Pre-K formative assessment]) and has begun the training, dissemination, and implementation process. Early Learning Challenge funds will facilitate the State's offering more professional development and expanding training beyond early childhood educators (though this is the primary audience). The State will also provide more in-depth professional development opportunities (cohort and coaching models) to help providers use standards, improve teacher child-interactions, and align instruction with formative assessments. The Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) will create a comprehensive roll out of the newly launched Georgia Early and Development Standards (GELDS), align the GELDS with national standards for English language learners and create professional development tools for early childhood educators for working with English language learners.

(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of comprehensive assessment systems

Currently, Georgia addresses all four components of a Comprehensive Assessment System: screening measures, formative assessments, measures of environmental quality, and measures of the quality of adult-child interactions. Building on the assessment systems in Georgia's Pre-K Program and Quality Rated, the State will:

- Review current child assessment tools, practices and policies to develop a more unified State approach –which includes screening in Georgia's Pre-K while extending down from Pre-K.
- Develop tools and provide support to early learning and development (ELD) programs to help them better understand, select and use each type of assessment in the Comprehensive Assessment System.
- Strengthen existing and create new professional development opportunities for early childhood educators to better understand and appropriately administer assessment tools to improve instruction and services.
- Develop awareness and guidelines for sharing assessment data with families and identify concrete actions for parents to address developmental concerns.

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families

Georgia recently completed a review of the Family Engagement Program Standards to ensure alignment with the Strengthening Families™ Protective factors. Using funds from the Early Learning Challenge grant, Georgia will convene state and national experts on cultural and linguistic competency to conduct a review of the Quality Rated Program Standards to ensure alignment with national indicators of cultural and linguistic appropriateness. The State will provide professional development on family engagement standards to early childhood educators through Quality Rated and will launch a statewide family engagement awareness campaign using GELDS resources. DECAL will partner with the Family Connection Partnership to infuse the campaign into the Family Connection Collaboratives operating in all 159 counties in Georgia. ELC funds will also offer grants to support community family engagement plans developed by the local collaboratives.

(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials



Georgia has developed and fully implemented a common, statewide knowledge and competency (WKC) framework, the *Early Care and Education Professional Development Competencies*, to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes. Funds the RTT-ELC will support the revision of Georgia's WKC Framework to show an overt alignment with the revised Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), address competencies required to work with children with disabilities and English learners, and promote better outcomes for Georgia's children. Also using RTT-ELC grant funds, DECAL, in partnership with the University System of Georgia, Technical College System of Georgia, and in collaboration with the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH), will: 1) survey current post-secondary courses and curricula and make recommendations to the AEAH for changes based on the WKC Framework, alignment to the GELDS, and overt attention to cultural competency; and 2) evaluate current articulation agreements and ensure that 100% of the technical schools in Georgia have updated agreements that support seamless transitions between the regional two- and four-year institutions.

(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities Georgia has developed a four-tiered approach to **Professional Development**, called the Georgia Professional Development Hierarchy (GPDH). All levels of the hierarchy are embedded in the WKC Framework. With ELC funding, Georgia will build professional development models in Tiers Three and Four. Also with ELC funding, early childhood educators in Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) will receive coaching as part of the fourth tier of the GPHD. The State plans to expand DECAL's existing Scholarships and Incentives programs to increase the number of early care and education professionals moving up a knowledge and career pathway.

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry Currently, Georgia utilizes a formative assessment - the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) - in all public Kindergarten classrooms across the state. GKIDS is a year-long performance-based assessment that is aligned to the state's learning standards. As part of the State's ELC agenda, Georgia will augment its current Kindergarten Assessment (GKIDS) by creating a Kindergarten Entry Profile, which will provide formative assessment information during the first six weeks of Kindergarten. This profile will be added to the existing GKIDS administration and will provide data about the skills of children at Kindergarten entry. It will be based upon both direct (structured tasks) and indirect (observational) measures of concepts and skills that are deemed essential at the beginning of a student's kindergarten experience.

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies

The State will build on existing data systems and expand its data collection capacity. Activities include expanding the quantity and quality of data collected and creating access points for providers to both enter and extract data for their own use. Efforts in this area will also be used to facilitate greater family engagement by making data more readily available at the program and child level.

Georgia has 454,363 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The State reports it is leveraging \$46,204,878 in other funding sources to support this effort.



## **Kentucky:**

Applicant: Office of the Governor, State of Kentucky

Lead Agency: Office of Early Childhood

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Amount Requested: \$45,000,000

Kentucky's RTT-ELC proposal, Kentucky All-STARS – Accelerating Learning Statewide through an Advanced Rating System, expands upon the State's robust ongoing early learning reform efforts, working within its already existing model that is structured around three main building blocks: 1) High-Quality Early Learning Environments, 2) Supporting Families, and 3) Access to Data

Guiding these three building blocks and Kentucky's RTT-ELC agenda is one simple idea; that kindergarten readiness begins and ends with quality and clarity in early learning programs. As such, Kentucky's reforms and improvements through RTT-ELC use as their foundation the expansion and improvement of their STARS rating system, intending to usher in a sea change in how families understand, select, and engage with early learning providers. In fact, 93 percent of Kentucky's proposed program budget is dedicated to expanding and improving its rating system.

Kentucky will work through the three building blocks of High-Quality Learning Environments, Supporting Families, and Access to Data by:

- Redesigning and shifting its current rating system from optional to mandatory for all public preschool, Head Start, and early learning and development programs. The State will require (by 2016) that no provider receive a license to operate without first qualifying through the redesigned STARS system. Additionally, all programs will be required to display their rating in prominent locations within their facilities, giving every parent an objective way to assess the relative quality of a program.
- Expanding and improving current professional development and supporting programs to create a skilled and supported early childhood workforce.
- Directly engaging and supporting families, implementing two new strategies statewide to help families better understand the needs of their young child and ensuring that they are connected with a network of resource providers.
- Integrating data systems for a usable, informative birth to workforce system to guide future decision-making.

Kentucky addressed the following focused investment areas in their application:

(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards Kentucky already utilizes early learning and development standards and builds the foundations for K-3 learning. It will continue to include the Standards in all professional development and will also develop online training modules to ensure all early learning and development programs



use the Standards. Use of the Standards is already tied to the monitoring of public preschools and Head Start - Kentucky will also include the intentional use of the Standards within its STARS expansion as an indicator of increasing quality.

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families

Kentucky has proposed two strategies – Toyota bornlearning® Academies and the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework – that will engage and support families, especially those with children with high needs, in comprehensive and innovative ways.

(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials

Kentucky has in place an extensive system to provide professional development through partner agencies statewide. That system will become more formalized and focused through an Early Childhood Education Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry

In 2013, the Kentucky Department of Education implemented a universal kindergarten entry assessment. Data from the statewide assessment will be released in November 2013 and will be analyzed and shared through a network of partners.

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.

Kentucky’s Office of Early Childhood continues to build systems to bridge early childhood data to Kentucky’s Longitudinal Data System. This will provide more than just access to the entire early learning universe, it will also build a data system for birth to work.

Kentucky has 177,228 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The State reports it is leveraging \$0 in other funding sources to support this effort.



## Michigan:

Applicant: Office of the Governor, State of Michigan

Lead Agency: Michigan Department of Education

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Amount Requested: \$52,497,525

Michigan is currently implementing an **ambitious, comprehensive early learning and development plan**, *Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future: The Plan for Early Learning and Development in Michigan*. Through its RTT-ELC grant work, the State will:

1. Increase access for children with high needs to high-quality early learning programs.
2. Increase opportunities for licensed and unlicensed home-based providers to improve the quality of their programs.
3. Ensure that many more parents understand and are meaningfully engaged in their children's early learning and development.
4. Involve many more families and providers in efforts to identify and promote children's physical, social, and emotional health.
5. Expand education and professional development opportunities, especially for home-based providers.
6. Build an early learning data system that provides information (anonymously and in aggregate) on children across departments and programs and allows the State to assess programs' value to parents and children.

In terms of Michigan's TQRIS, Great Start to Quality (GSQ), the State plans to:

- Work with the local Great Start Collaboratives to provide scholarships to child care subsidy-eligible *families* in the highest need communities.
- Target outreach to home-based early learning and development programs in the highest need communities, including Pathways to Potential communities, and encourage and support participation in GSQ.
- Support unlicensed subsidized providers in Pathways to Potential communities to improve their program quality and support progress toward licensure.
- Strengthen participation in Great Start to Quality with (a) financial incentives to licensed and registered programs for completing a self-assessment and developing a quality improvement plan, as well as unlicensed subsidized providers who reach Tier 3 and (b) quality improvement grants.
- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing licensing system by developing key indicators, maximizing the current data sharing between licensing and GSQ and supporting consultants to monitor licensing compliance and help programs improve quality.

Michigan addressed the following Focused Investment Areas in its application:



(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral health, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness

Michigan plans to capitalize on efforts already under way in the State to increase healthy behaviors through education and personal action. The State will:

- Conduct a gap analysis of GSQ program standards.
- Pilot the use of Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs) and Family Engagement Consultants.
- Train home-based providers to promote healthy eating habits, nutrition, and physical activity.
- Use CCHCs to support home-based providers in promoting screening, referral, and wellchild care.
- Pilot the use of Social-Emotional Consultants to support home-based providers.
- Review and incorporate protective factors into the GSQ program standards.
- Develop training modules on family and community partnerships.
- Support families and providers in the use of protective factors.
- Provide grant funding to disseminate information about early childhood development.
- Evaluate the pilot of Child Care Health Consultants, Social-Emotional Consultants, and Family Engagement Consultants.

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families

“Support families’ critical role in their children’s early learning and development” is the second recommendation in *Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future*. The State will:

- Assure GSQ standards for Family and Community Partnerships engagement reflect the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors (SFPF) framework.
- Enhance the quality improvement capacity of GSQ through the addition of specialized Quality Improvement Consultants (QICs) in family engagement.
- Use specialized quality improvement consultation to measurably improve the capacity of home based providers to engage families in their children’s learning.
- Ensure that families have information and resources that support their engagement in children’s learning and development.
- Engage Great Start Parent Coalitions to strengthen their community of trusted advisors to improve linkages to the families most difficult to engage in early learning and development programs and related community supports.

(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities  
The State has developed five strategies to move toward its overarching goal of having effective early childhood educator support in place for all children with high needs by 2020.

These strategies are to:

1. Support the expansion of online training for the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential.
2. Increase the number of community college early childhood programs that are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
3. Expand the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship.
4. Create a new T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship to support Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) teachers.



5. Offer business training to help early childhood educators in three regions improve their business and operational plans.

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry  
Currently, nearly 200 kindergarten teachers across the state are piloting the assessment, Teaching Strategies GOLD Online®, and in 2015 the assessment will be available statewide. In addition to pursuing GOLD, Michigan is collaborating with Maryland, Ohio, and their consortium partners to develop a new Kindergarten Entry Assessment through the Enhanced Assessment Grant for Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The State will use RTT-ELC funding to support family engagement in the assessment process. Michigan plans to develop both print and online materials for families, and accompanying tips for early childhood educators to help them support pre-kindergarten families in the transition to kindergarten, including how to understand and utilize the results and reports from the KEA.

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies

Michigan will bring all early learning data for publicly funded early learning programs within the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (MSLDS) beginning with Unique Identification Code (UIC) assignment, program participation, star quality of programs, and improved demographic reporting.

Michigan has 374,854 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The State reports it is leveraging \$500,000 in other funding sources to support this effort.



## **New Jersey:**

Applicant: Office of the Governor, State of New Jersey

Lead Agency: New Jersey Department of Education

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Amount Requested: \$44,937,339

New Jersey's RTT-ELC agenda, the NJ Plan, builds on ongoing state reform efforts to implement an aligned and coordinated high-quality system of early education and care with measurable impact for all of the state's high needs children from pregnancy through age eight.

In the past few years, New Jersey has made early learning a priority. Through interagency collaboration and a strong State commitment to improving early learning for children with high needs, NJ has put in place a solid governance structure and set clear goals to build an accessible, high-quality early learning system. The NJ Plan will expand on this commitment to early learning.

At the core of the NJ Plan are four primary foci that will guide the State's early learning agenda:

- 1) High-Quality Programs
  - a. Equip educators with common standards and supports.
  - b. Elevate the quality of all programs through participation in Grow NJ Kids, the State's QRIS.
  - c. Create a seamless pre-k through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade system.
- 2) Family Support
  - a. Provide health linkages and information to families and educators.
  - b. Empower families to support the development of children.
- 3) High-Quality Workforce
  - a. Align early education preparation programs with Workforce Competency and Career Lattices.
- 4) Data-Driven Decision-Making
  - a. Ensure Grow NJ Kids differentiates quality.
  - b. Capture skills at kindergarten entry.
  - c. Improve the ability to understand outcomes using connected data.

New Jersey's evidence-based early learning and development standards, when alignment is completed, will serve as guideposts for both early education and development programs and families, as they seek to help infants and young children in the culturally and linguistically diverse state of New Jersey meet appropriate milestones and prepare for school.

The Family Engagement Standards plan will provide tools to help high needs families obtain access to high quality early learning and development programs and empower them to be leaders in their child's overall growth and development.



New Jersey will set clear expectations for what early childhood educators should know by clarifying the New Jersey Core Knowledge and Competencies Framework and integrating it with the myriad of early childhood workforce preparation programs.

The New Jersey Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NJKEA) will serve as the pivotal focal point that will provide a metric of how well the State's early learning and development system is working to close the school readiness gap and how and where to make improvements in a timely, productive way.

New Jersey addressed the following Focused Investment Areas in its application:

(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards  
New Jersey has made progress in designing infant/ toddler and preschool standards that meet all essential domains of school readiness, in addition to adopting the Common Core. New Jersey will complete the alignment of these standards, disseminate the new infant/toddler standards to early learning and development programs statewide, produce multi-lingual guides to the standards that are useful for the diverse families of New Jersey and conduct training of early childhood educators on the standards.

(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs to improve school readiness

While New Jersey has prioritized investment in and development of certain areas of focus, the State has lacked the capacity to fully coordinate the multitude of programs that are available to high needs children and their families. RTT-ELC funds will be used to help the State meet this need by expanding its capacity to link high needs children, families, early childhood educators and health care providers with referrals to and follow up of all types of health services (physical, social-emotional etc.) and by providing ongoing training and education on evidence-based standards that encompass a "whole-child" approach to readiness for school and life.

(C)(4) Engaging and Supporting Families

New Jersey will expand the best practices from the State Preschool Program, Head Start and home-visiting programs to other early learning and development programs and the families they serve to empower families to be leaders in their child's development. New Jersey has included Family Engagement Standards in the pilot of the Grow NJ Kids Tiered QRIS, but RTT-ELC funds will help translate those standards into meaningful, user-friendly formats for high needs families and train the program leaders who will put them into practice. The funds also will help assess the degree to which New Jersey is actually reaching its intended targets.

(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials

New Jersey will refine the New Jersey Core Knowledge and Competencies Framework and career lattice and integrate them into all sectors of early childhood workforce preparation. This process will facilitate the calibration of the quality and types of coursework being offered.

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry



New Jersey is currently in the second year of a pilot of the NJKEA and plans to implement the NJKEA statewide by September 2019. The instrument will allow New Jersey to understand children's development upon entry to kindergarten and, with parent input, will be used to create individualized learning plans for children. New Jersey will integrate more and better professional development around the assessment tool. New Jersey will assess the degree of alignment between the NJKEA, preschool standards, and kindergarten standards.

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services and policies

New Jersey's restructured governance system will be reflected in the way it gathers, analyzes, and utilizes the myriad types of data it collects. To this end, the State's Data Committee has undergone detailed preparation to create the New Jersey Enterprise Analysis System for Early Learning (NJ-EASEL) data warehouse so that it will align with NJ SMART (the State's longitudinal data system) and all of the other State data systems that collect information on high needs infants and young children. RTT-ELC funds will allow New Jersey to finish this work by aligning the systems and building capacity to collect and analyze the data so it can understand the key outcomes identified as wanting to measure—and to ensure this work continues indefinitely in the future.

New Jersey has 185,688 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The State reports it is leveraging \$83,095,241 in other funding sources to support this effort.



**Pennsylvania:**

Applicant: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Governor's Office

Lead Agency: Office of Child Development and Early Learning – Departments of Education and Public Welfare

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Amount Requested: \$52,494,544

Pennsylvania's Rising STARS Agenda will enhance quality early learning and development, including children with high needs, through the following strategies:

1. Empower communities through Early Childhood Education Community Innovation Grants to ensure that communities are able to address local needs.
2. Refine the Keystone STARS (STARS) tiered quality rating and improvement system to enhance access for children with high needs to high-quality early learning and development programs.
3. Revise early learning standards in all content areas to fully align with Pennsylvania's education standards to ensure a cohesive set of standards from birth-12.
4. Support effective use of comprehensive assessment systems to better understand program outcomes and Pennsylvania's return on investment and to empower educators in making informed decisions.
5. Promote community access, awareness, and family engagement focusing on high-quality early learning.
6. Increase access to and delivery of high-quality professional development to improve early learning and development program environments, especially for children with high needs.
7. Develop a no-cost universal Kindergarten Entry Inventory for all local education agencies in order to better understand the status of children upon kindergarten entry.
8. Measure outcomes to improve instruction, practices, services and policies through data system enhancements.
9. Conduct Governor's Institutes for Educators Pre-K to Grade 3 to increase dialogue and collaboration among early learning and development educators and K-12 teachers.

With RTT-ELC funding, Pennsylvania has proposed as part of its High-Quality Plan to make changes to the STARS standards as well as the number of stars in the system. The State also intends to consider implementing a differentiated monitoring system in order to effectively oversee the system. The State plans to have 100% of regulated early learning and development programs participate in the TQRIS and also include additional early childhood programs (such as private academic nurseries, early intervention and school-based prekindergarten) in the TQRIS. The State also plans to revise incentives for providers and for parents by investigating Child Care Works copays for parents who choose quality services.

Pennsylvania addressed the following Focused Investment Areas in its application:



(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards Pennsylvania's Standards, which are already widely used in many of Pennsylvania's early learning and development programs, will be improved and revised so that the Standards mirror the standards in the Standards Aligned System (SAS) portal. Infant Toddler standards will also be revised to reflect changes in the prekindergarten learning standards and will have a greater emphasis on cultural, developmental and linguistic appropriateness. Executive function skill standards exist for infant, toddler, prekindergarten and kindergarten and will be developed for Grades 1 and 2. This work will focus on informing teachers and administrators about curriculum and assessment to guide the selection of program materials and the design of instruction, informing parents from diverse populations of developmental and age-appropriate expectations for children, and providing a common framework for community-based work on curriculum, assessment, and transitions.

(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems

Pennsylvania will focus on improving access to, quality and application of birth-Pre-K assessment systems by:

- Continuing to improve the quality of its reporting frameworks and access to a birth to five authentic observation tool.
- Refining and validating the Early Learning Outcomes Reporting system.
- Improving access to and the quality of professional development to support effective application of collected data.

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families

The Pennsylvania RTT-ELC family engagement strategy focuses on:

- Strengthening the family engagement components of the State's learning and TQRIS standards.
- Providing targeted technical assistance and supports in high-risk communities.
- Increasing access to information for families through technology.

(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials

Pennsylvania is working to develop a common statewide progression of credential and degree opportunities aligned with the Core Body of Knowledge. One of Pennsylvania's biggest opportunities for growth is in professional development that includes content relevant to cultural, linguistic and ability diversity. In order to improve Pennsylvania's workforce, the State will:

- Fully integrate the new Core Knowledge Competencies (CKC) into the Workforce Registry and Training Catalog.
- Improve Pennsylvania's Learning Management System.
- Engage institutes of higher education in aligning course content to the revised CKC.
- Develop a coordinated and clear communication plan to support consistent, clear information for early learning professionals and Knowledge Mediators about expectations and to support access to professional development opportunities.
- Better integrate professionals providing home visiting services, consulting and Early Intervention Technical Assistance with Pennsylvania's Core Knowledge Competencies.
- Develop an accurate baseline of the educational status and needs of the early



childhood workforce in Pennsylvania in order to develop strategies to continue to professionalize the field.

- Significantly enhance providers' ability to increase STAR levels by establishing consistent quality in peer mentoring efforts and making it easier for professionals and providers to navigate the Career Lattice.

(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities  
The State has a mature system of technical assistance and professional development, but recognizes opportunities to increase its effectiveness. The State plans to increase targeted incentives for program directors, teachers, coaches, trainers and higher education faculty/advisers as a way to increase staff qualifications, particularly among those who serve children with high needs. Additionally, Pennsylvania is committed to better serve rural communities and to provide cross-sector professional development by creating linkages between Pennsylvania's Workforce Registry and other appropriate State Professional Development systems.

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry  
Currently, Pennsylvania's Kindergarten Entry Inventory (KEI) is used by school districts that have participated in the three-year pilot program, but Pennsylvania is ready to expand opportunities for programs to use this important tool. The State will:

- Conduct a research-based validation of the KEI.
- Create a linkage between the KEI and the pre-K-12 Standards Aligned System.
- Create reports for teachers, school districts, and communities to use to understand the status of children at aggregate level, upon kindergarten entry.
- Require use of the KEI to Pennsylvania's Focus and Priority Schools as part of their Comprehensive Planning process.

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies

Drawing on the full resources of Pennsylvania's data system, the Office of Child Development and Learning (OCDEL) will develop and implement tools for families, the public, practitioners, and policy-makers. Development of provider and community reports and dashboards will be completed by the end of the RTT-ELC grant period and will boost the ongoing sustainability of quality programming. This information will be available to early childhood educators, parents, program administrators and other community stakeholders. The State will also:

- Enhance the State longitudinal data system (SLDS) to include all children participating in an OCDEL-funded program.
- Develop provider self-service modules for Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.
- Improve data upload functionality to eliminate duplicative data entry.

Pennsylvania has 369,656 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The State reports it is leveraging \$64,500,000 in other funding sources to support this effort.

**Vermont:**



Applicant: Office of the Governor, State of Vermont

Lead Agency: Vermont Agency of Human Services

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Amount Requested: \$37,473,626

While the State of Vermont has already demonstrated a longstanding and significant commitment to early learning, the RTT-ELC grant will further Vermont's progress for children, particularly those with high needs. Vermont plans to use RTT-ELC to thoughtfully move its existing early learning systems, programs, services and overall infrastructure forward in a robust, integrated manner. At the core of its reform agenda are four overarching strategies:

1. Capitalize on the deep professional linkages and relationships in the State to maximize service reach and effectiveness, and the efficient and effective implementation of the State Plan.
  - Vermont will use its existing governance structure in Building Bright Futures (Vermont's early care, health and education system) to assure broad partner and stakeholder participation and collaboration in the management and implementation of the reform agenda throughout the State.
2. Invest in people through expanded personal and professional development to drive effectiveness and where needed, change.
  - RTT-ELC funds will be used to expand a range of professional development opportunities to assure an educated, trained early childhood workforce. Vermont will also invest in and empower families by providing additional information and strengthening programs.
3. Improve standards, assessment and data integration to drive increased program quality and improvement.
  - While Vermont already implements a TQRIS through its VT STARS system, RTT-ELC funds will be used to improve the rating system, revise early learning standards, assure broader use of assessments and improve reliability and expand and better integrate early childhood data systems.
  - Vermont aims to increase the number of early learning and development programs (ELDP) participating in VT STARS to at least 95% by the end of the funding period (2017), including 100% of Specialized Child Care Services.
4. Expand supports and services to improve outcomes for children in the State's highest need rural areas.
  - Implement Vermont Promise Communities, an initiative to provide high intensity services for children with high needs in rural areas.
  - Vermont aims to provide 100% of families (particularly families with children with high needs) living in Promise Communities in rural Vermont the ability to find ELDP rated as high-quality in VT STARS in their communities.



Vermont addressed the following focused investment areas in its application:

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

The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) are based on a set of principles that view the child holistically and developmentally, include readiness domains and recognize the importance of play. Vermont will seek to further strengthen these standards by assuring they reflect current research on early learning, are aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, include infants and toddlers and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for K-12.

(C)(2) Supporting the effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems

Over the last few years, Vermont has put in place aspects of a comprehensive assessment system; however, these efforts have not been as aligned, coordinated, nor as widely and reliably implemented as is necessary for improving outcomes for young children (especially for those with high needs). Through the RTT-ELC agenda, Vermont will seek to improve its capacity and quality. By 2016, Vermont will have a statewide plan for a Comprehensive Assessment System that aligns screenings and assessments, coordinates the implementation of assessments, describes data sharing procedures and sets forth a professional development plan for early childhood educators across the various types of early learning and development programs, especially those programs supporting young children with high needs.

(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness

Vermont will build upon existing systems to create additional supports to improve school readiness for children with high needs. These include implementing an evidence-based home visiting system; offering child care health consultation services; implementing the Help Me Grow framework, which offers a population-based approach to the early detection of children at-risk for developmental and behavioral problems and their linkage to programs and services; and multiple strategies to strengthen the capacity of early care and education programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes of young children and address challenging behavior.

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

Vermont will implement a statewide framework to identify, support and effectively integrate mentoring, coaching and other similar services. The State also proposes to develop and implement an Early Childhood Leadership Institute, which will provide training to 100 early childhood stakeholders during the funding period.

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry

Since 2000, Vermont has gathered information on the readiness of children entering kindergarten through the Ready Kindergarten Survey (RKS) by annually surveying all kindergarten teachers about the "readiness" of their students within the first six to ten weeks of school. Although the RKS has served the State well, there is work to be done to ensure that it reflects the latest research on predictors of school success and to verify that it is appropriate for all subgroups of kindergartners.



(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies

For the purposes of improving instruction, practices, services, and policies that support the health, development and learning of children and families (including children with high needs) Vermont seeks to enhance its early learning data capacity via a coordinated, integrated 21st Century early learning data system that enhances, is aligned with, and is interoperable with the State of Vermont's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS).

Vermont has 13,355 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The State reports it is leveraging \$61,599,383 in other funding sources to support this effort.