

Pennsylvania



PENNSYLVANIA'S RISING STARS AGENDA

will enhance high-quality early learning and development, including for 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 (TQRIS) 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 to grade 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 and implement a universal kindergarten entry inventory, available at no cost to all local education agencies, in order to better understand the status of children upon kindergarten entry.
8. Measure child outcomes to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies through data system enhancements.

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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Total Federal Award

\$51,734,519

Grant Period

January 1, 2014 –
December 31, 2017

The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) discretionary grant program supports states in building statewide systems that raise the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children with high needs, so that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Information in this abstract is drawn from the state's RTT-ELC grant application.

9. Conduct Governor's Institutes for educators of PreK to grade 3 to increase the dialogue and collaboration among early learning and development educators and K12 teachers.

With RTT-ELC funding, Pennsylvania will offer 50 competitive early childhood community (ECE) Community Innovation Grants during years 2-4 of the grant. Through this competitive process, Pennsylvania will establish 50 local ECE Community Innovation Zones based on the neighborhoods that serve the lowest performing elementary schools in the state as designated by Pennsylvania's ESEA Flexibility Waiver. Each ECE Community Innovation Zone will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment and following receipt of intensive supports will be required to develop strategies focused on (1) increasing family supports and engagement, (2) developing stronger relationships between early childhood programs and school districts to build birth to third grade alignment, and (3) strengthening the network of community organizations that serve families with young children. The most effective strategies and best practices will be documented so they can be replicated in other communities throughout the state.

Pennsylvania has also 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 percent of regulated early learning and development programs participate in the TQRIS and also include additional early childhood programs (such as Head Start, private academic licensed nursery schools, 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:

*Early Learning
and
Development
Standards*

(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.

*Comprehensive
Assessment
System*

(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of comprehensive assessment systems. Pennsylvania will focus on improving access to and application of high-quality birth-PreK assessment systems by

- continuing to improve the quality of its reporting frameworks and access to a birth to age five authentic observation tool;
- refining and validating the Early Learning Outcomes Reporting system; and
- improving the access to and quality of professional development to support the effective application of collected data.

*Family
Engagement*

(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 STARS standards;
- providing targeted technical assistance and supports in high-risk communities; and
- increasing access to information for families through technology.

*Establish
Workforce
Knowledge and
Competency
Framework*

(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 Knowledge Competencies (CKC). 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 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 CKC;

- 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; and
- 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.

*Support
Workforce
Improvement*

(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.

*Kindergarten
Entry
Assessment*

(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 PreK-12 Standards Aligned System;
- create reports for teachers, school districts, and communities to use to understand the status of children at an aggregate level, upon kindergarten entry; and
- require use of the KEI by Pennsylvania's Focus and Priority Schools as part of their Comprehensive Planning process.

*Build or
Enhance Data
Systems*

(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 policymakers. 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;
- improve data upload functionality to eliminate duplicative data entry; and
- enrich existing system functionality to increase accessibility and ease of use.

Finally, Pennsylvania will conduct Governor's Institutes for educators of PreK to grade 3 to increase dialogue and collaboration among early learning and development educators and K12 teachers. Through four week-long Governor's Institutes per year over four years, Pennsylvania will provide a platform for approximately 3,000 early education leaders and practitioners to experience and share developmentally appropriate strategies for the implementation of integrated standards in early education settings (birth through third grade). Pennsylvania will provide strategy-focused information, learned from grassroots early leader leaders and practitioners, to the broader statewide population. The four cohorts of Governor's Institute participants will be provided with continued follow-up through ongoing use of electronic professional learning communities, as well as one face-to-face follow-up subsequent to attendance at an Institute. In addition, Pennsylvania will collect examples of instructional strategies and resources and post them to the Standards Aligned Systems portal.

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