

Georgia



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 tiered quality rating and improvement system (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 of 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 a rigorous protocol for rating and monitoring programs participating in Quality Rated;
6. to maintain the reliability protocol for portfolio and Environment Rating Scales (ERS) assessors;

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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Total Federal Award

\$51,739,896

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.

7. to expand and 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:

*Early Learning
and
Development
Standards*

(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality early learning and development standards. The state has developed standards with documented vertical alignment (birth-to-5 to K-3) and horizontal alignment (Georgia Performance Standards, Head Start, Work Sampling System [Georgia's PreK formative assessment]) and has begun the training, dissemination, and implementation process. RTT-ELC 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 rollout 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.

*Comprehensive
Assessment
System*

(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 PreK 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 PreK while extending down from PreK;
- 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.

*Family
Engagement*

(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 RTT-ELC 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. RTT-ELC funds will also offer grants to support community family engagement plans developed by the local collaboratives.

*Establish
Workforce
Knowledge and
Competency
Framework*

(D)(1) Developing a workforce knowledge and competency framework and a progression of credentials. Georgia has developed and fully implemented a common, statewide workforce 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 from the RTT-ELC grant 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 postsecondary 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 percent of the technical schools in Georgia have updated agreements that support seamless transitions between the regional two- and four-year institutions.

*Support
Workforce
Improvement*

(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 RTT-ELC funding, Georgia will build professional development models in tiers three and four. Also with RTT-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.

*Kindergarten
Entry
Assessment*

(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 RTT-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.

*Build or
Enhance Data
Systems*

(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 that it is leveraging \$46,204,878 in other funding sources to support this effort.