

Massachusetts



MASSACHUSETTS' REFORM AGENDA BUILDS upon the Early Education and Care (EEC) Board's five-year strategic plan, which outlined a core set of strategies to monitor, assess, and improve children's learning experiences in their first five years and produce greater school readiness, especially among children with high needs. The state has identified opportunities for future systemic growth and has outlined a comprehensive plan for transforming early childhood systems statewide, through a set of core strategies. Foundational to taking expansive steps toward creating a unified approach to improving child outcomes in Massachusetts is a focus in four key areas, including increasing teacher/educator quality, program quality, child outcomes, and community and family engagement.

Within that frame, Massachusetts' Plan identifies plans to increase quality for children and families served in both formal and informal settings. In terms of formal initiatives, the state will seek to achieve maximum participation in its tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS), beginning with mandatory participation among programs serving the 55,761 children receiving state financial assistance. Key strategies will include providing financial supports to programs for the purpose of achieving higher levels of quality; promoting the state's online registration and application review system; providing online professional development on the TQRIS, including mandatory training; conducting an evaluation to validate the TQRIS; and developing an interactive cost model to review subsidy rates as the steps toward examining strategies for providing programs with needed resources to maintain quality.

To reach children and families in informal settings, the state plans to link its existing statewide network of family engagement and community supports to evidence-based practices for literacy and universal child screening and to partner with statewide museums and libraries to implement a shared child development lens with an intentional focus on family engagement and early learning within those settings.

Applicant

Office of the Governor,
State of Massachusetts

Lead Agency

Department of Early
Education and Care

Contact Information

Sarah Harding
sarah.harding@state.ma.us

Total Federal Award

\$50,000,000

Grant Period

January 1, 2012 –
December 31, 2015

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.

Specifically, Massachusetts 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. Massachusetts will establish a seamless system of developmentally appropriate learning and development standards for children from birth to third grade. Key strategies will include conducting a study to determine how well the current standards are aligned with essential domains of readiness; reviewing model standards and issuing recommendations on developing a set of developmental guidelines aligned with the standards; and producing multilingual brochures that describe the standards to culturally and linguistically diverse families and educators.

*Comprehensive
Assessment
System*

(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of comprehensive assessment systems. Massachusetts will ensure that all 275,000 children in early learning programs are screened, prioritizing children receiving financial assistance. Formative assessments will be required in level three and four programs in the TQRIS. Tools and training will be provided to programs in the TQRIS serving children with high needs and a cohort of external evaluators will be trained to help validate the assessment system.

*Family
Engagement*

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families. Massachusetts will share information in multiple languages on supporting children's learning and development and available state resources. The state will work to strengthen implementation of evidence-based strategies in 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grants. Training on parent and family engagement will be provided through a partnership with the national Head Start training center.

*Support
Workforce
Improvement*

(D)(2) Supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Massachusetts will improve the education, training, and compensation of early childhood educators to promote effective practices and alignment with the state's workforce core competencies, increase retention, and strengthen adult-child interactions, especially among high needs children.

*Kindergarten
Entry
Assessment*

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry. Massachusetts will implement the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment to produce a common statewide measure of children's school readiness. Key strategies will include enabling data sharing and implementing a common approach to kindergarten entry assessment; training kindergarten teachers on the use of formative assessment and effective use of data; assessing the degree of alignment between state learning standards and approved formative assessment tools; evaluating approved assessment tools for appropriateness, validity, and reliability for high needs children including those whose home language is not English; and establishing Readiness Centers to provide technical assistance to teachers and schools.

*Build or
Enhance Data
Systems*

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies. Massachusetts will complete the development of its Early Childhood Information System in order to track children's progress and allow information sharing. This system will increase the state's ability to collect child data; collect consent information and multiple assessment scores over time; identify families or children engaged with other agencies' programs; note children who are in early intervention, homeless, or involved with Head Start and subsidy initiatives; match multiple child risk factors; and send messages to families and providers in an automated or scheduled manner.

Massachusetts has 134,703 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The state reports that it is leveraging \$1,463,681 in other funding sources to support this effort.