



WISCONSIN'S REFORM AGENDA, AS articulated in its fiscal year 2011 application, (1) improves access to high quality early childhood and development programs by improving and expanding YoungStar; (2) implements an effective cross-sector early childhood professional development system; (3) strengthens family engagement and parent support strategies to improve children's school readiness; (4) revises the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) and expands related training, coaching, and mentoring activities; (5) pilots and implements a comprehensive kindergarten entry assessment; (6) accelerates expansion of the state's longitudinal data system to include early childhood data; and (7) develops a public-private partnership to support system building.

Wisconsin's Phase 2 reform agenda will target resources to programs and providers who serve these children, so as to increase access to and improve the quality of programming these children receive and better prepare them for success at school entry. To achieve this goal while accommodating reduced funding, Wisconsin's Phase 2 application addresses fewer selection criteria, with decisions to pursue criteria based on the priorities of

- increasing the supply of high-quality early learning and development programs, especially for children whose care is subsidized by Wisconsin Shares;
- helping families with high needs to access these programs;
- improving data systems to inform policy and practice decisions; and
- aligning efforts across early learning and development sectors to leverage and maximize resources.

Developing the infrastructure necessary to implement the state's reform agenda will be addressed as follows:

Applicant

Office of the Governor,
State of Wisconsin

Lead Agency

Wisconsin Department of
Children and Families

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Total Federal Award

\$34,052,084

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January 1, 2013 –
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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.

(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the state. Wisconsin's Phase 2 governance and infrastructure for implementing its reform agenda builds on a foundation of collaboration and shared governance across the participating state agencies and at the regional and local levels. Tribal outreach and liaison services will ensure a coordinated approach to improving the quality of tribal early learning and development programs statewide, and a public-private partnership will aid in the sustainability of quality improvement activities.

Another goal is to strengthen YoungStar, the state's tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS). Wisconsin will employ the following strategies to increase the number of high-quality early learning and development programs, as well as the number of participating children with high needs:

(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide tiered quality rating and improvement system. The state will leverage current resources to expand training and onsite technical assistance opportunities, and build its capacity to assist child care programs to better connect families with key inclusion services and supports such as Birth to 3, Early Childhood Special Education, and the Regional Centers for Children with Special Health Care Needs.

(B)(2) Promoting participation in the state's tiered quality rating and improvement system. Phase 2 funding will support a communication campaign that targets high needs families, including families using Wisconsin Works (W-2, Wisconsin's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program), families involved in the child welfare system, and families at risk of being involved in the child welfare system. Wisconsin will focus outreach efforts on expanding the number of collaborative, community-based 4K programs that participate in YoungStar, building on alignment work that has occurred over the past year, and continuing ongoing outreach to Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

(B)(3) Rating and monitoring early learning and development programs. In light of reduced funding, Wisconsin is not allocating funds for the purpose of training more individuals to implement the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), as the YoungStar Consortium currently has the capacity to meet training needs.

(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality early learning and development programs for children with high needs. Given the strong evidence base for education, training, technical assistance, coaching, and mentoring, Wisconsin has elected to concentrate resources in these areas in its Phase 2 application, targeting activities to support programs serving the most concentrated numbers of children with high needs.

(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of state tiered quality rating and improvement systems. In Phase 2, Wisconsin remains committed to a full evaluation of YoungStar, inclusive of Phase 1 activities. The state proposes

using the Environment Rating Scale (ERS), including the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCRS), as additional study outcomes to validate program quality.

Effective application of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards will be addressed as follows:

(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality early learning and development standards. Phase 2 builds on the existing cross-sector structure formed among state agencies to ensure that the state has early learning standards and a system to deliver professional development and training, and targets activities that will increase training capacity and quality to high need populations and/or service areas.

Enhancing family engagement and support will be addressed as follows:

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families. Phase 2 proposes to develop family engagement standards for YoungStar programs, building on and aligning with public 4K and 5K family engagement standards and the recently issued Head Start Family Engagement Framework; to develop training curricula on practices in support of these standards; and to provide training on the family engagement standards. Wisconsin will target a media outreach campaign to high needs communities.

A great early learning and developmental workforce will be addressed as follows:

(D)(1) Developing a workforce knowledge and competency framework and a progression of credentials. Given the high number of low-rated providers in YoungStar, Wisconsin's efforts in this area intentionally support increased provider access to professional development, educational credentials, and degrees that are needed to improve program quality. A cross-sector professional development coordinator will lead cross-system efforts related to credit alignment, early childhood licensing redesign, and career pathways in coordination with the Early Childhood Advisory Council's Professional Development subcommittee and the Department of Public Instruction's Office of Early Learning. In addition, the regional training delivery structures that include regional coaches and action teams will be strengthened so as to leverage resources across systems.

Accelerating the development of an early childhood longitudinal data system will be addressed as follows:

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies. There is consensus in Wisconsin that, without an early childhood longitudinal data system (ECLDS), the state has little ability to evaluate its early childhood system building efforts or

target resources effectively. Phase 2 funding will support ways to connect data from YoungStar with education and health outcome data, and additional service participation data for the same children at the Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Health Services. It will also support efforts to strengthen and link related data systems at the Department of Children and Families, including YoungStar, Wisconsin Shares (Wisconsin's child care subsidy program), and Child Welfare.

In summary, Wisconsin believes that its Phase 2 application continues to support its original vision of a strong early childhood system built on quality program standards embedded in a TQRIS, comprehensive early learning and development standards, high-quality family engagement practices and supports, a comprehensive early childhood workforce development framework, and a strong assessment and accountability system.