



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
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### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

- (a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;
- (b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;
- (c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and
- (d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(1)

(A)(1) The state provides historical evidence of a strong commitment and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development programs for Children with High Needs. (A)(a) Table (A)(1)-4, provides a list of the financial investments committed by the state to Early Learning and Development Programs since 2007. The table reveals that the state has seen a 10% reduction in early childhood funding and investment. But the state further demonstrates its efforts and financial commitment to meeting the needs of young children by accepting funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and provides evidence that the funds were utilized to further enhance and to continue the work in the development of early childhood programming in spite of the recession. For example, the applicant indicates that funds were used to develop the infant toddler early learning guidelines and for providing wrap around services for Head Start children utilizing Child Care Development Funding (CCDF). (a) The state provides documentation indicating an increase in the number of children with high needs who have accessed Early Learning and Development programs. The applicant has provided Table (A)(1)-5 which shows an increase in the number of children served by CCDF, Head Start/Early Head Start and Title I funds from 2007 – 2011. (b) Four key legislative efforts are cited by the applicant demonstrating a strong response and understanding of the importance of early childhood, the coordination of services, dedicated funding, and specific program improvements to early childhood programs in targeted communities of children with the highest need. (c) Demonstrating a clear understanding and strong commitment to the development of a high quality early learning and development system, the state provides detailed information on the status of all seven key building blocks identified in this grant announcement. In addition, the applicant has self identified an additional key component entitled "Program Quality Improvement". All current data on the status for each key area is provided in Tables (A) (1) -6 through (A)(1)-10. Given the combination of historical financial investment, the increase in the number of Children with High Needs enrolled in services for the past four years, in spite of an economic downturn, and the political will demonstrated by state leaders and the proactive approach to building a strong early childhood infrastructure that is constantly improving, the applicant has presented a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 20 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

- (a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;
- (b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and
- (c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(2)**

(A)(2)(a) The applicant identifies five key areas to be addressed in the state's plan. Each area is aligned with current efforts and is the foundation for the eight specific plans for building an effective Early Learning and Development System described by the state. The state of Massachusetts demonstrates ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers. (A)(2)(b) Building upon the Early Education Board's current strategic goals, the state proposes eight high quality plans as the means for improving child outcomes through the grant period. Each goal identified within the plans includes desired outcomes and details key strategies the state will take to ensure accomplishment of the goal. For example, the EEC has identified a goal to create a diverse workforce system that provides supports, expectations, and core competencies leading to positive outcomes. The applicant states that by utilizing the funding provided through this grant application, the applicant can more effectively address the goal to ensure competency through workforce knowledge, skills, and practice-based support. The desired outcomes identified include increased professional development, career advancement and professionalization, and compensation. There are nine specific strategies for achieving the desired outcomes and the goal. (A)(2)(c) The applicant provides a high quality response and detailed description, with clearly stated rationale for each Focused Investment Area identified by the applicant. For example, recognizing the important role parents play in improving the outcomes of children, the applicant has identified Focus Investment Area (C)(4)engaging and supporting families. The applicant indicates that it will build upon the current statewide infrastructure and network of 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grants to focus on family literacy and linking families to comprehensive services that will support child development. In addition, the applicant recognizes the importance of collaborations across Early Learning and Development systems and proposes to utilize a national Head Start training organization to provide trainings to parents, family, and community engagement. The applicant has provided a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 20 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	9

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

- (a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--
  - (1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;
  - (2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;
  - (3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
  - (4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (A)(3)

(A)(3)(a) The governance structure identified by the applicant builds upon the existing Department of Early Education and Care established by the state legislature in 2005. The EEC is also the operating State Advisory Council and consists of an 11 member board including Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services as well as other key stakeholders including a parent, an early childhood teacher and a child care provider. The applicant provides an organizational chart outlining the relationships and hierarchy of all partnering agencies responsible for implementation of the grant. The EEC will be the lead agency and will continue to partner with the Head Start Collaboration Office who is also a member of the Interagency Coordinating Council for Part C of IDEA. The applicant provides a complete organizational chart identifying the roles and responsibilities of the lead agency. The EEC board will meet 11 times a year and will make decisions regarding grant activities, prioritizing, public process and other actions. The applicant does not clearly address or identify a process for resolving disputes, a critical structure given the number of participating agencies. (A)(3)(b) The state presents strong evidence in the commitment of participating agencies. The applicant provides a clear narrative and detailed description of all 12 participating agencies and their role in implementing the activities outlined within the grant application. The state has provided, in the appendix, all 12 MOUs outlining the terms, conditions, and the specific scope of work for each agency. All MOUs are signed by the agencies authorized representative. (A)(3)(c) The applicant provides 49 letters of support by Early Learning Intermediary Organizations from across the state demonstrating a broad range and depth of support for the state plan. In addition to public support, the applicant presents letters of support from legislative entities. A list of all Intermediary Organizations are outlined in Table (A)(3)- 2 and provided in the appendix. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan and high-quality response and therefore has received a score of 9 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	14

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(4)**

(A)(4)(a) The applicant provides a complete and concise narrative outlining the status of current state funds dedicated to Early Learning and Development programs. This is also presented in Table (A)(4)-1. The applicant provides a complete description of state funds that are proposed for FY 12 and dedicated key component areas of a high quality early childhood system outlined in the state plan including: program quality supports, early learning and development standards, comprehensive assessment system, family and community engagement, early childhood workforce and early learning data systems. The applicant does not address how it plans to utilize Child Care Development Fund quality set aside. (A)(4)(b) Budget Section VIII 1. The applicant provides information in the budget and budget narrative that appears adequate to support the state plan. 2. The applicant provides information for the costs for each of the eight plans and activities. The state does not provide data or information on the anticipated number of children to be served or impacted by the proposed efforts. 3. The applicant provides a detailed description in the narrative outlining the amount of funds budgeted for each participating agency and the activities the agency will be responsible for. There are no funds allocated for Intermediary Organizations. (A)(4)(c) The state outlines a detailed feasible plan for sustaining the activities and efforts proposed beyond the grant period. The state has identified a three point approach to sustain efforts by: strengthening the capacity of the 12 partnering agencies, targeting investments on those activities that appear promising for success, and using grant funding to cover one time start up costs in building a strong early childhood infrastructure. The applicant has submitted a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 14 points.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(1)**

(B)(1)(a) The state has submitted a high quality plan for building a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) for the state of Massachusetts. The applicant has piloted a TQRIS over the past two years and submits a plan to build upon the TQRIS and develop a fifth tier. The applicant has provided a detailed description of desired outcomes and eight key targeted strategies and proposed funding for support and implementation of each strategy. The applicant provides strong evidence demonstrating that the proposed TQRIS will build upon and address; early learning and development standards, a comprehensive assessment system, family engagement, health promotion practices, and effective data practices. The state does not address Early Educator Qualifications but has in place and proposes an aggressive system of training and credentialing supports. (B)(1)(b) The state provides documentation and evidence that the current and proposed TQRIS has and will include standards that are measurable, differentiate levels of quality, aligned with nationally recognized standards and plans to work with the Massachusetts Donahue Institute to conduct a validation study. In addition, the proposed draft TQRIS outlines

standards for varying early childhood settings including: center and school based standards, family child care standards, and after school and out of school time standards. The applicant proposes proactive plans to develop a fifth tier by 2015. The fifth tier will require linkages between the Early Childhood Information System and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment which will allow for further alignment of the programs participating in TQRIS. The applicant indicates that this will assist the state in analyzing and determining which elements are effective in producing positive child outcomes for continuous improvement of the TQRIS. (B)(1)(c) The applicant indicates that only licensed programs are able to participate in the state's current TQRIS. Licensed exempt programs are allowed to participate if they complete a self assessment and develop a program improvement plan. Given that the applicant has already begun the development of TQRIS and proposes a highly sophisticated review and validation of tiers the applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan with a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 10 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	14

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(2)
(B)(2)(a) The applicant states that it plans to increase the number of Early Learning and Development programs, participating in a TQRIS, by 20% for each year of the grant. The state of Massachusetts has outlined a feasible plan and set an achievable goal to have 100% of publicly funded programs participating in the TQRIS by 2014. The applicant outlined a plan under Priority 2 that will require all programs that receive funding through contract for subsidies or vouchers for high needs children and receive state aid through stipends, materials or training to participate in the TQRIS. All programs received notice in December 2010 of the requirement but the applicant does not clarify if this is a new state regulation implemented through the Child Care Development Fund. In addition, it is not clear how the state proposes to implement policies that will require state funded Pre K programs or other programs which fall under differing federal or state regulations and differing agencies, to participate in the TQRIS. (B)(2)(b) The applicant indicates that all contracted programs who receive state or federal subsidies or vouchers are currently in the process of being brought into the state TQRIS by August 2012. The program proposes to require subsidized programs to meet the requirements for Tier Two by 2015. The state has historically provided TQRIS Program Quality Improvement Grants to incentivize programs to participate in the TQRIS and provides evidence that this approach has been successful. The state proposes to utilize grant funding to continue this approach by awarding up to 500 stipends, for each year of the grant to proactively support and incentivize programs to achieve higher levels of quality. (B)(2)(c) The applicant has provided Table (B)(2)(c) outlining the current baseline number and percentage of Early Learning and Development programs participating in the statewide TQRIS and the projected number it anticipates will be participating by 2015. Implementing the planned strategies outlined by the state, the targeted numbers and percentages of programs identified appears ambitious and feasible. The applicant has presented a substantially and fully implemented plan with a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 14 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	12

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(3)**

(B)(3)(a) The state provides evidence that it currently has in place a high quality monitoring and rating system. A detailed description of the current monitoring process and a complete list of validated tools utilized by each service setting is provided. The applicant indicates there are plans to formalize the training process for monitors by consolidating the current training process and methods which will ensure inter rater reliability. Utilizing the infrastructure the state indicates that the reliable raters will be dispersed through regional offices. (B)(3)(b) The applicant indicates that it plans to develop a communication plan and identify community engagement strategies to inform the public and families on the status and quality ratings of Early Learning and Development Programs. But the applicant does not provide sufficient information or details to ensure that the information is available in formats that are easy to understand and assist families in making decisions about where they would like to enroll their child. For example, the applicant only states in the application that "Beginning in 2014, EEC plans to develop a sophisticated communication and community engagement strategy to share information about program quality ratings and licensing with families online, which will be fully implemented by 2015". The applicant provides a substantially/fully implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 12 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	16

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(4)**

(B)(4)(a) The applicant cross references to sections(B)(2), EEC Partnership with Together Quality (T4Q), EPS Grants and Readiness Centers in (A)(1 and 2), and professional development outlined in (D)(2) as evidenced by its polices and practices that provide support and incentives to Early Learning and Development programs as a means to continuously improve the state's early childhood system. The state indicates that it plans, through public-private partnerships, to develop and provide online professional development on the newly revised tiered TQRIS ensuring that training is available for providers on each of the key standards and training reliability in monitors. The applicant provides evidence through its partnership with United Way that this is in development but does not provide additional substantial evidence of other private partnerships that assist in providing training statewide. (B)(4)(b) The applicant does not sufficiently address the criterion outlined in (B)(4)(b). The applicant describes five approaches for enhancing information provided to programs participating in the TQRIS to facilitate their engagement with families including the currently implemented Family and Community Engagement Guides issued to programs. The Guides are disseminated to providers to assist them in connecting families to resources, adult education and job training, assistance around children's development, early literacy, math and approaches to learning. However, the guides do not fully address how the state proposes to help working families who have

Children with High Needs access high quality programs that meet their specific needs such as full day full year, transportation issues and meals. The applicant does not provide or propose to identify any baseline data on the needs of working families in order to determine if the existing approaches or efforts will meet that need. (B)(4)(c) In Table (B)(4)(c)(1) the applicant provides complete detail of the current and projected numbers of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In Table (B)(4)(2), the state presents detailed data on the number and projected number of Children with High Needs who are and will be enrolled in an Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. Given the supports and incentives that the state has proposed to assist programs in achieving higher tiers the targets identified by the applicant are ambitious and feasible. The applicant provides documentation and information indicating a substantially or fully implemented system and a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 16 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	15

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (B)(5)
(B)(5)(a) The applicant has submitted a high quality detailed plan that addresses all areas for consideration in validating the state's TQRIS. The state is currently designing and implementing an evaluation of the TQRIS in collaboration with an independent evaluator, the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute. The applicant indicates that in addition to examining child outcomes the proposed research plan will examine the tiered TQRIS system in respect to child need and risk factors, and understand in-depth the characteristics that make up the system in order to continuously improve upon it. (B)(5)(b) The applicant has provided a detailed description of the approach that will be utilized in validating the critical components of the TQRIS system such as ensuring the accuracy of self assessments. The evaluation plan will also address and examine the association between program quality and child outcomes by identifying appropriate data, the sources, and appropriate means for analyzing. The applicant provides a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 15 points.

### **Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)**

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

#### **C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	19

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;

(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and

(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(1)**

(C)(1)(a) The state presents historical evidence of developing and maintaining high quality Early Learning and Development Standards since 2003. The applicant references the Early Learning Guidelines for infants and toddlers and for children in Pre K through Kindergarten but provides no evidence that the standards are culturally and linguistically appropriate. The applicant proposes to improve the standards during the grant period by validating and aligning the standards with the Head Start Performance standards and plans for the development of English Language Development Guidelines. The state plans to provide extensive training once completed. (C)(1)(b) The applicant indicates that it has conducted some preliminary review and alignment of the state's Early Learning Guidelines with literacy and mathematics, and has identified plans in which a more in-depth study will be conducted to determine the degree of alignment of standards to the Common Core Standards and the three approved formative assessment tools utilized within early learning and development programs. (C)(1)(c) The applicant indicates that the Early Learning Development Standards are incorporated into the Workforce Core Competencies and into the State Curriculum Standards. In addition, the state indicates that it is working with private partners to ensure that their material and programmatic activities are aligned with the Early Learning and Development Standards. (C)(1)(d) The state has an infrastructure in place, the Educator Provider Support and Readiness Centers, which operate as local hubs for professional development. In addition, the state has developed an online and continuing education unit and course for providing training on the Early Learning Guidelines. Through a public private partnership, the applicant has collaborated with WGBH media which provides curriculum training on the basic standards. The state indicates that the Early Learning Standards are developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate and admits that the Guidelines for Preschool Early Learning Experiences do not reflect the current research and sensitivity for children from diverse cultures or languages but has developed a plan for revising the Guidelines. It is evident that the state has in place training and technical assistance system for ensuring the availability of training on the Early Learning and Development guidelines. The applicant provides a detailed description of the major training structures in place. The state has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan and a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 19 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;

(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;

(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(2)**

(C)(2)(a) The state provides evidence of implementing evidence-based screening, formative and environmental assessment tools and plans to develop the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development (MELD) Assessment System. The applicant indicates that they have conducted online surveys from early educators in the state and for three years have conducted meetings around the state of early childhood providers gathering their input and recommendations on the identification of and administration of appropriate screening and assessment instruments. The applicant indicates that it will gather input from early care and education providers on the Kindergarten Entry Assessment. (C)(2)(b) Through the platform of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, the applicant has ensured that early educators are trained in observation, assessment, and developmental screenings at every level. The applicant demonstrates an understanding of the importance for early education providers to know and understand the intent and purpose of assessment tools. (C)(2)(c) The applicant indicates that it has historically aligned the state Pre K Early Learning Guidelines with the Pre K Common Core and will use the same means for aligning the screening and assessment instruments but does not provide any detailed information on how it proposes to integrate, share assessment results, or avoid duplication of efforts by multiple programs who may be serving the same child and family. (C)(2)(d) The state proposes to continue to utilize its existing Educator Provider Support grantees to provide training to early care and education providers on the effective administration and interpretation of assessment tools. The applicant provides a detailed example of the potential content of the trainings conducted by Wheelock College and Associated Early Education and Care who have been training providers. The applicant has identified a goal of training 100% of all early care and education providers who work with high needs children who are not in formal programs and at least 800 programs for each year of the grant. The applicant does not provide sufficient detail or description of how it plans to align all screening and assessment instruments to allow for integration or avoid duplication. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 16 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(4)**

(C)(4)(a) The applicant historically demonstrates support for family engagement through the establishment of the 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement(CFCE) grantees. All grantees are required to utilize the Strengthening Families Framework in providing training and services to early childhood providers and families. The grantees are also required to document languages and populations within their communities. The applicant proposes to build upon the CFCE infrastructure and identify best practices for ensuring services are provided to children and families that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. The state plans to accomplish this by implementing evidence based English Language Development practices, train informal early learning programs, provide translation of materials, and translate the Guidelines for Preschool Early Learning Experiences for families. (C)(4)(b) The state indicates and provides evidence that the current TQRIS maintains family engagement standards. These standards require programs to utilize the Strengthening Families self assessment. In addition, the applicant proposes to build upon training that is already provided to early childcare providers and enhance training provided to paraprofessionals and online training for directors. The applicant indicates that by June 2012 all grantees will be required to develop training strategies to specifically address training that promotes anti-bias curriculum and culturally and linguistically appropriate practices. In addition, the state proposes to collect data and information on number and percentage of early childhood educators trained on family engagement activities but does not specify how this information will be collected. (C)(4)(c) The applicant proposes to build upon its existing infrastructure for family engagement and support statewide through its 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grantees, expanding Wrap Around Zones, Home Visiting programs, the Help Me Grow model for screening children and community action agencies which provide training on financial literacy to families. In addition, the state will continue its work with the private sector public awareness activities. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan with a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 20 points.

**D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce**

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	40
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--</p> <p>(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;</p> <p>(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;</p> <p>(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (D)(2)
<p>(D)(2)(a) The applicant provides historical evidence of implementing a statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. With the passage of An Act Relative to Early Education and Care in 2008, the state codified their comprehensive workforce development system that provides professional development and includes educational attainment by early childhood staff. The state has an established Professional Quality Registry in place. The applicant presents a strong and aggressive plan for enhancing the Comprehensive Workforce Development system through the implementation of four key goals. (D)(2)(b) The state presents a strong plan for implementing policies and incentives that promote professional development and career improvement. The state indicates that it will address three core areas including; transferring early childhood education credits among Institutes of Higher Education, engaging the early childhood field, and targeting support for specific areas of knowledge and skills for early childhood providers. For example, the applicant indicates that it will complete a mapping project started in 2010. The mapping project that aligns all early childhood areas of study and degrees across 33 higher education institutions. (D)(2)(c) The state has established the foundation for building a Workforce Knowledge and Skill Framework with the Provider Qualifications Registry. The applicant plans to utilize the registry to publicly report aggregated data on the early childhood educator professional development, advancement, and retention. (D)(2)(d) The state has provided evidence of a strong partnership in place with Institutes of Higher Education indicating that 26 of the institutions have already aligned their training programs with the states core competencies. In addition the state has an infrastructure in place for making training easily accessible statewide for early childhood providers through the EPS Grants and the Readiness Centers. Utilizing this foundational infrastructure the applicant has outlined in Table (D)(2)(d)(1 and 2) ambitious and achievable goals for increasing the number of post secondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. In addition, the applicant has set ambitious and achievable goals for increasing the number and percentage of early childhood educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan and a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 40 points.</p>

**E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress**

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

- (a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- (c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;
- (d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and
- (e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant. (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (E)(1)**

(E)(1)(a) The state proposes a plan to develop the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA) utilizing several formative assessment tools currently in place including: the Working Sampling System, Teaching Strategies-Gold, and the High Scope COR which have already been reviewed by an external evaluator for alignment with the TQRIS, the curriculum frameworks and approved by both Departments of Early Education and Care, and the Elementary and Secondary Education. The state plans to adopt a new curriculum framework that will incorporate Pre K into the Common Core Standards and conduct an additional review for alignment with the revised Early Learning Standards and correlation with each of the formative assessment tools named. (E)(1)(b) The applicant plans to contract with an Institute of Higher Education to produce a common measure of school readiness. The state proposes to conduct psychometric testing, including item analysis, to produce a valid common measure of children's school readiness at kindergarten. It is not clear how a common measure of school readiness can be derived from multiple formative assessment tools. (E)(1)(c) The state has identified a detailed timeline which indicates that the newly developed MKEA system of assessments will be phased in across the state, by district, until 2015. But the applicant references Table (E)(1)-1 that provides an outline and summary of the state's plan, including goals and activities, the project timelines, roles and responsibilities and financing to improve overall programs quality but the table is not provided. (E)(1)(d) The applicant refers to (E)(2) for more detailed description of how the state proposes to incorporate the MKEA into the States Longitudinal Data System. MKEA is not addressed in (E)(2). (E)(1)(e) The applicant states that the state maintains a Chapter 70 formula but does not identify the source of these funds (e.g. state general revenue) or how these funds supplemented Pre K programs within school districts. The state also utilizes Kindergarten Expansion Grants and will use these existing funds to support the implementation of the MKEA. In addition, the state plans on using \$2.4 million distributed to Readiness Centers to conduct training on child assessment and use of data information. The state has indicated that it has been in the process of developing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment but fails to address significant criteria (MKEA aligned with the State Longitudinal Data System) and though the applicant presents a very sophisticated process for identifying and measuring child outcomes and readiness, it is not clear what will be measured (children or the MKEA itself). In addition, the applicant references a Table which outlines the state plan for improving the overall program quality, but the Table is not provided. The applicant has submitted a partially implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 12 points.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (E)(2)
<p>(E)(2)(a) The applicant provides a detailed and comprehensive plan for the development of an Early Childhood Information System (ECIS) including identifying and describing all essential elements. (E)(2)(b) The state indicates that it has already reviewed the existing data systems and developed MOUs and ISA agreements as the foundation for mapping existing data sets. The applicant describes ambitious plans and timelines for the start up and implementation of the ECIS. For example, the state plans to launch ECIS in the first year linking all Early Education Council agencies in addition to the development of web portals for inputting all family and provider assessment data. The \$734,000 budgeted for the development and implementation of the ECIS in the first year of the grant does not appear sufficient due to the complexity of agencies, systems, and data platforms to be addressed. (E)(2)(c) The applicant indicates that the newly established Education Data State Advisory Group has made progress in developing the foundation for the ECIS. Appendix V provides a description of the state's efforts and participating agencies efforts in developing agreements for exchange of data information and agreement that the ECIS will be implemented in accordance with the Common Education Data Standards. (E)(2)(d) The state has drafted an initial list of intent and uses for the ECIS as identified by key participating agencies. The information will give agencies information and will be used to assist in making policy decision and identifying areas for improvement in the early childhood system of services. In addition, the applicant has provided in Appendix Y the initial listing of ECIS indicators by agency as the foundational information in building the Early Childhood Information System. (E)(2)(e) The state of Massachusetts has established the Education Data State Advisory Group. This group comprised of key agencies is responsible for the creating guidelines and policies that address privacy issues and concerns. The EDSAG will also be responsible for developing the process for granting permission, security, ensuring privacy, and meeting the Data Oversight Requirements. The applicant has provided a partially implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 12 points.</p>

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	249

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	5

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

- (a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and
- (b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (P)(2)**

Priority 2 (a) and (b) The applicant describes a three part plan which will require all licensed programs to participate in the Universal Tiered Quality Rating System by June 30, 2015. The three part plan includes: conducting a study to determine how to motivate early learning and development programs to participate in TQRIS, conducting a public awareness campaign, and soliciting recommendations from the various early childhood programs and providers. The state proposes to develop policies based on the findings from the study and the input of licensed providers. It is not clear by the applicant's description what types of policies or regulations will be addressed and whether these will be mandated. It does not appear achievable to enroll all early learning and development programs by 2015, especially those programs who may be private or exempt providers. In addition, the state indicates by 2014 they will passively enroll all licensed programs into Tier Level I but does not address the potential of the validity or fidelity issues this may have to the TQRIS. The applicant has provided a partially implemented plan medium quality response with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 5.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

**Comments on (P)(3)**

The applicant has chosen to write to and address criterion (E)(1). The applicant submitted a partially implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore received a score of 12 points or 60% of the maximum points.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

**Comments on Absolute Priority**

The applicant has presented a strong foundation for building an early learning and development system. The state has presented evidence in its commitment to young children both through state policies and financially. The state is in the process of evaluating and creating a very sophisticated TQRIS. Some of the timelines outlined in the plan for developing the TQRIS may potentially not be feasible however the state has developed and implemented strong early learning guidelines for children from birth through third grade, proposes to develop a comprehensive assessment system and Kindergarten Entry Assessment that will be aligned and incorporated into the Early Childhood Information System and has already begun aligning the Early Childhood Information System data into the State Longitudinal Data System. There is need for some clarification in what this process would look like but the state has a strong foundational system among state agencies and partnerships with Institutes of Higher Education in which to accomplish this. It is apparent that the state is committed to building a strong competent early care and education workforce through multiple means, including a strong support system that is in place by both public and private organizations who currently train early care and education providers. The state plans on continuing to use this infrastructure and ensure all providers are knowledgeable on the Early Learning Guidelines, screening and formative assessment, engaging families and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment. However, it was not clear how the state would compensate and support these providers after achieving credentialing. The applicant does not address two criteria in the Focus Investment

Areas:(C)(3)Identifying and addressing health behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness or (D)(1) Developing a workforce knowledge and competency framework and a progression of credentials. However the state does have the key elements in place and partners (or plans to partner) with key agencies to effectively address these two areas and comprehensively build out a high quality early childhood system.



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

## Technical Review Form Page



Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 11:50 AM

### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;

(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;

(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and

(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(1)

A strong state agenda supporting early learning reform has been evident for over a decade in the context of a commitment to general education reform. Legislative actions since 2005 demonstrate a commitment to building an effective system based on quality and supported through policy, governance structure, and continuous improvement. 1. Consolidation of the Office for Children's Services and the Early Learning Unit in the Department of Education into an independent department (Early Education and Care) provided an infrastructure for more effective support for reforms to promote high quality programs and care. Outcomes have been increased efficiencies and enhanced program quality. 2. The cabinet level Executive Office of Education has oversight for public education agencies, EEC, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Department of Higher Education. This unified governance structure aligns early education and care with the overall education system enhancing the ability to achieve ambitious reform goals. 3. 2008 legislation expanded the original statute creating the EEC to more clearly articulate an agenda for a coordinated system of early education and care. 4. EEC actions document the importance of continuous improvement in program quality – inclusion of measures of quality in the revised licensing regulations and implementation of QRIS. 5. Passage of universal Pre-K legislation A continuous fiscal investment in early learning has accompanied the legislative actions. The strength of this commitment is seen in the overall levels of funding invested since 2007 (a stable pattern of funding ranging from 537M to 587M), even during periods of budget constraints and deficits. The degree of commitment is further documented in letters from the state legislative leadership in the House and Senate and the Joint Committee on Education confirming past fiscal investments and outcomes and commitment to the projected reform agenda. The level of investment compared to the number of children served is high. Over 90% of the EEC budget is used to provide direct aid to state's low income children, B-13 years. This investment represents over \$3000.00 per child. Increases in quality were supported through leveraging of state funds and aligning resources across agencies, sound EEC fiscal management and the influx of ARRA funds. These sound fiscal strategies have allowed quality improvements and implementation of the strategic plan to continue in spite of funding reductions. The leveraging of federal ARRA funds to enhance sustainable initiatives demonstrates the effective use of funding to advance the current reform initiatives and program quality. ARRA funds totaling over 26M were targeted for early learning

initiatives identified in the State Strategic Plan. Outcomes of the investment of these funds included the development and implementation of the infant toddler guidelines, provision of access to summer programs to prevent learning gaps, provision of wrap-around services for Head Start families meeting CCDBG guidelines and partnership between EEC and K-3 to align and provide professional development regarding early literacy. Leveraged federal funding (ARRA and CCDF) funds increased the available number of slots in Head Start and Title I programs by 40%. The impact of the access was increases in the number of children participating in early learning and development programs from 32% and 28% respectively. Table (A)(1)-5. Elements of the key building blocks are in place. Although variation exists in the level of development or implementation, clear next steps are identified, where appropriate. 1. The following elements have been implemented (1) early learning and development standards (infants/toddlers, preschool, and Pre-K), (2) a comprehensive assessment system including screening, formative assessment, normative assessment (particularly in regard to social/emotional development, literacy and numeracy), (3) a tiered QRIS implemented in 2011, (3) health promotion practices, (4) family engagement strategies beyond early education and care programs, (5) development of ECE (professional development, transfer compact, scholarship and grant support) . 2. Two elements are less developed – statewide Kindergarten entry assessment and the Early Childhood Information System. The applicant has provided a high quality, comprehensive overview of the past investments and commitments to early learning and development addressing all components of the selection criteria. Accomplishments and investments have been supported with data and evidence of their outcomes. How challenges have been met to achieve the desired outcomes is addressed. A clear vision is provided of the foundation upon which the reform agenda will be built and the infrastructure to support implementation and sustainability.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

- (a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;
- (b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and
- (c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(2)

The strategic nature of legislation and current initiatives identified in (A)(1) has established a strong foundation for the proposed reform agenda. Letters from legislative leaders documented commitment to the current initiatives with the role of federal support allocating for expansion and continued improvement of policies and programs. A letter from the Joint Committee on Education endorsed the reform agenda goals and confirmed alignment with state priorities. The reform agenda's core components push the current accomplishments forward to improve quality outcomes for children and implement a seamless system from Birth-20. Direct linkages to continued investment in quality initiatives that are sustainable and enhancement of cross and mixed system alignment are identified in the components of the reform agenda: 1. Tiered QRIS validation, universal participation and quality improvement 2. Standards validation and alignment 3. Measuring growth and development through an integrated Early Learning and Development Assessment system from birth to grade three, including a kindergarten entry assessment 4. Universal engagement of families and the public 5. Ensuring workforce knowledge, skills, and practice-based support 6. Pre-K to Grade three alignment for educational success 7. Addressing system-wide gaps in data collection and integration Although ambitious, the goals are achievable. Actions of the EEC have built an effective infrastructure required for implementing the agenda. The following elements are specific to forwarding the reform agenda: 1. Collaborative relationships with other government agencies, private institutions, agencies and foundations, and business partners 2. Promotion of consistency of regulations and policies across agencies 3. Technology system and infrastructure revamping 4. Leveraging strategies that produce significant outcomes (i.e., increase in programs and number of children served) 5. Alignment of the strategic goals of the EEC and the reform agenda emphasizing program quality, teacher quality, child assessment and family and community engagement. The rationale for the focused investments, program and teacher quality and family and community engagement, was the areas having the greatest potential to impact child outcomes. This impact is increased by the strategic nature of the investments relative to sustainability. The reform agenda is strategic, building on the current status of achievement toward the overall Commonwealth vision for early learning and development. The goal statements for each reform area and accompanying measurable desired outcomes and key strategies documented a clear path to achievement of the agenda. Past achievements, responses to challenges and the alignment with state priorities and Early learning and development strategic goals document capacity to achieve the reform agenda.

	Available	Score
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**(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State**

10

10

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

- (1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;
- (2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;
- (3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
- (4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant.

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

- (1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;
- (2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and
- (3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

- (1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and
- (2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (A)(3)**

The existing administrative and governance structures with authority for oversight for the Commonwealth's Early Learning Agenda is the organizational structure of managing the grant. This governance structure has a demonstrated a record of effective management and leadership in moving forward the current agenda forward, for example the leveraging resources and ARRA funds to increase access for special populations. Authority for policy, decision-making, conflict resolution and implementation is codified in legislation, as is the role of the EEC Board. The governance related roles of the participating agencies are based on their legislative authority and are documented in Table A3-1. Documentation of progress to date confirmed the range and level of interagency partnerships formalized through MOUs or interagency service agreements. The extent of stakeholder involvement is significant through both formal and informal mechanisms. The State Advisory Council/EEC Board's membership represents multiple stakeholder groups and holds quarterly public meetings with parents, ECE and childcare providers and other community stakeholders. The letters of support documented broad support of and participation in prior early learning initiatives by private and public agencies, foundations, professional associations, the business sector, educators, legislators, community action organizations, public schools, immigrant and refugee associations/agencies, and institutions of higher education. Plans specific to each component of the reform agenda identify the mechanism for involvement of key constituent groups. All agencies with authority related to the components of the reform agenda have signed MOUs which detail specific and joint responsibilities and the scope of work – State Advisory Council, Department of Higher Education, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Early Education and Care, Head Start State Collaboration

Office, Children's Trust, Department of Health and Human Services (with separate MOUs for the Department of Public Health, Department of Mental Health) Department of Children and Families, Department of Transitional Assistance, Office for Refugees and Immigrants, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. The attached Scope of Work agreements are of high quality ensuring clarity of role and authority for specific project elements, address policy concerns and alignment of work across agencies, and leveraging of funds. Action statements identify the type of participation and align with the agency's specific role in the reform agenda. Support letters documented the breadth of support for the overall early learning agenda including participation in past initiatives and partnerships with the Lead Agency. Letters from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, including Head Start State Collaboration Office, Associated Early Education and Care, Alliance of YMCAs, Community Advocates for Young Learners Institute, MA Head Start Association, MA Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, MA Association of Community Partnerships for Children, MassAEYC, and local public school districts documented individual initiatives supporting the Commonwealth's early learning agenda and support and/or intent to participate in specific initiatives of the grant. The level of commitment noted supported the timelines for implementation of key initiatives. Letters from the legislative leadership of the House and Senate and the Joint Committee on Education built a compelling case for the reform, the capacity to achieve the goals, and commitment to continuous improvement to increase child outcomes.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	15

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act, Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used.

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(4)

The level of fiscal commitment and strategic leveraging of state, federal and private resources and a demonstrated record of past use of such funding to move its early learning agenda forward are strengths of the application. The fiscal strategy demonstrates effective and efficient use of resources to meet the outcomes of the reform agenda in ways that enhance sustainability. 1. The FY12 state budget commits over \$40M of state funds to support the plans to increase participation across program types in the new Tiered QRIS, increase the alignment of the early learning and development standards with practice, develop the kindergarten entry assessment, support community family engagement initiatives, increase ECE scholarship support and access to professional development, and strengthen the alignment and integration of early learning data systems. 2. Significant federal funds are leveraged to support the early learning agenda including CCDF subsidies, TANF, IDEA and a portion of ESEA Title funds. Partial funding of the state's universal health care for children and families is funded using federal Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance funding. 3. Leveraging of federal ARRA resulted in the increased access to quality care and support for sustainable projects enhancing program and ECE quality and family community engagement initiatives. The overall statewide budget supports the achievement of the reform agenda outcomes. The level of in-kind resources committed and the alignment of agency priorities and activities (as specified in the signed MOUs) significantly increases the cost-benefits of the use of grant funds. 1. The financial strategy of targeted investments is reflected in the budget allocations for specific projects. 2. Four agencies with signed MOUs are non-funded through grant funds; these agencies will commit existing resources to support their roles in the reform agenda. 3. Allocations for the remaining participating agency are reasonable and align with the identified scope and timelines of the projects for which they have responsibility. Allocations for the specific projects are sufficient to support the achievement of the identified milestones and implementation steps. These allocations are aligned with the required effort associated with the project given the current status of implementation and the reform goals. The costs associated with the major reform projects are transparent due to the detailed description of subproject-associated costs and anticipated agenda outcomes. A high quality plan is identified for sustaining support for early learning and development programs and the progress toward achievement of the Commonwealth's early learning agenda. Continuing commitment of state investments.

leveraging of resources across funding streams and agency responsibility, and a targeted strategy for the investment of grant funds in sustainable areas are strengths of the plan. 1. MOUs and related scopes of work from participating agencies document efforts to build increased capacity and support from other agencies, including committed in-kind resources and alignment of priorities and activities. 2. The strategic investment of grant funds targets components of the early learning and development system that are demonstrating success or hold potential for success, such as moving the QRIS to an additional tier focused on formative assessment aligned with the MKEA and expansion of successful literacy and family engagement models to increase access. 3. One time strategic investments are targeted for areas where the cost-benefit extends beyond the grant period – studies to validate the QRIS, alignment of standards and KEA, and a coaching/mentoring infrastructure, and the early childhood information component of the state longitudinal data system. The state has provided a substantive and high quality response to the criterion.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(1)**

The current tiered QRIS, implemented in 2011, is of high quality. Indicators of this quality are evident in both the development and final design of the system. The strong focus on quality programs in the state's early learning agenda initiatives formed the foundation for the system's development. 1. These initiatives included strengthened state licensing regulations and Universal Pre-Kindergarten grant program quality criteria. 2. The development process incorporated various stages of validation: working groups of leaders and national experts to draft provisional standards, formal pilot evaluation, and a public input process. The design and content of the system's components address standards related to increased program quality that impact child outcomes and alignment with the state's early learning agenda goals. 1. The linkages between the QRIS standard category directly related to the required components were evident from a review of the standards. Linkages were documented for inclusion of knowledge and skills related to the early learning and development standards, comprehensive assessment system, family engagement, health promotion practices, effective data practices and early childhood educator qualifications. 2. Key indicators for each standard documented progressively higher levels of quality across the tiers. Indicators are stated as observable behaviors or align with documentary evidence (i.e., level of IHE degree obtained, licensure confirmed). Specific instrumentation is identified for measuring observable behaviors or environmental conditions. 3. Baseline expectations align with licensing requirements. Outcomes of the validation process were alignment with accreditation standards of national associations, such as NAEYC, Head Start performance standards, NAFCC, Council on Accreditation Standards for After School Programs, Office of Special Education Programs, and validated program assessment instruments. The validation process confirmed the measures were appropriate for the types of programs to be included in the system. TQRIS participation is available to both licensed and statutory license-exempt programs. The latter must demonstrate that they meet licensure requirements. The reform agenda plans address the following areas for continuous improvement of the system: 1. A validation study to ensure the levels meaningfully differentiate levels of observed quality. 2. Development of Level 5 that aligns program practices with the kindergarten entry assessment. The State has substantially implemented the TQRIS system with a high quality plan detailed for adopting and implementing the remaining components and refinements. The response to the criterion was of high quality providing substantive discussion of the required elements and a clear indication of the path to developing and implementing the TQRIS.

	Available	Score
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(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	15
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The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(2)**

The state plan integrates the goal to maximize participation in the TQRIS with increased access for families to high quality child care building on the current state subsidy programs and resources. The strength of this approach is the emphasis on increasing the pool statewide of high quality programs. The plan requires all publicly funded early learning and development programs, to participate in the tiered QRIS by 2014. The feasibility of this goal is enhanced by the State's broadening of its definition of publicly funded programs. The definition was broadened to include those programs that receive subsidies or vouchers for placement of high needs children and those programs that receive state aid, such as stipends in the form of services or technical assistance. In addition to this participation through the state subsidies system, UPK programs, required to serve low-income children, will be mandated to participate. Collaboration with the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) network directly supports family access to the high quality programs in the TQRIS. The plan includes the identification of measurable outcomes including timelines and key strategies. The timeline for conversion from the current QRIS to the new TQRIS is 2012. Specific targets are identified for the different types of early learning and development programs (with the exception of Part C and B of IDEA and Title I of ESEA which are not separately tracked in the QRIS system). The strategies identified in the plan have a high probability of supporting increased participation and tier progression through development of a cost model to examine strategies for providing the needed resources to maintain quality at higher level tiers, provision of financial supports (stipends in the form of supplies, services and technical assistance, on-line professional development) related to tier progression for achieving a higher level of quality each year and supporting continuous improvement. The overall projected outcomes are ambitious, setting high goals across program types and including participation targets for non-licensed and license exempt programs. The targets exceed the overall goal of increasing participation by 20% per year, thus achieving full participation of programs directly supported by the state prior to 2015. Based on baseline data and the quality of the plan, the targets represent reasonable progression to the 2015 goal of 100% for state-funded preschools, inclusive early learning environments, Early Head Start and Head Start, Part B of IDEA and programs receiving CCDF funds. The targets for programs funded under Title I and other licensed and exempt programs take into consideration tracking challenges, yet the plan is ambitious setting targets of 75% and 50% respectively for 2015. The State has substantially implemented a combination of policies, strategies, and incentives to maximize participation in the TQRIS. A high quality plan has been detailed outlining continuing efforts. The response provides substantive documentation of efforts/plans addressing criterion elements that form a coherent and comprehensive plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	12

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and

Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(3)

The plan describes in detail the system for rating and monitoring implementation of the TQRIS, used and refined during the pilot validation phase of development. The selected monitoring tools have solid validity and reliability data and are used nationally to assess program quality in early learning and development programs. The decisions represent careful and deliberate considerations such as consistency across the system, i.e., use of the appropriate Environmental Rating Scale for monitoring across program types (infant-toddler, early childhood, family child care and school-age care); the same level of differentiation is evident across monitoring areas. The strategies for formalizing and expanding the current monitoring and training system in alignment with the timelines for implementation of the new TQRIS are detailed in the plan. Initial training of monitors has occurred. The proposed expansion of the system to increase access for educators, program leaders and executive directors is an effective strategy to encourage program advancement and build a cadre of trained monitors. Although the rationale for delay in making program quality ratings available to parents until the system's validity is established is reasonable, it is not clear if the delay applies to other currently accessible and valid information such as licensing and licensing history. Details of plans for communication and family engagement are limited as strategies for engaging families with limited online access or adaptations for immigrant and refugee families are not addressed. The plan reinforces the reform agenda's emphasis on quality, including full implementation timelines for the rating and monitoring elements that ensure alignment/integration with other components (i.e., family and community engagement strategies, training initiatives) and system validity. The State has substantially implemented the rating and monitoring system. The measurement process and monitoring structure are in place. The response to the criterion indicators is substantive and integrates the components of the rating and monitoring system. Although the narrative provides evidence of an innovative communication plan (use of public radio), engagement of the unique populations (i.e., immigrant and refugee families) is not explicitly addressed.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(4)

Linking incentives directly to support for program continuous improvement is an effective strategy for maximizing TQIR participation and enhancing child outcomes. The current TQRIS grant program allows grantees unrestricted use of funds; the plan moves to provision of stipends for supplies, services, and technical assistance aligned with advancement in levels. This shift in the incentive structure more directly aligns with supporting advancement in levels. Supports for working families are not identified beyond the general statement of inclusion of programs receiving CCDF subsidies. Supports available through resources under participating partners such as the Department of Children and Families, Department of Housing and Community Development, Office for Refugee and Immigrants and the Department of Transitional Assistance are not identified. The application did not address what the family needs might be and how these resources would address them. The performance targets for increasing overall program participation (total number of programs covered by the system and the number in Tier 1) are reasonable, but not ambitious, and achievable within the identified timelines. Realistic targets are established for increases in the # of programs participating in the TQRIS based on the following factors: required participation for all state-funded early learning programs and funding incentive for programs receiving state-aid or subsidies. 1. Required participation for all state-funded early learning and development programs 2. The entry participation requirement of meeting at least Tier 2 requirements. 3. Incentives for early learning and development programs are directly linked to support for program advancement within designated time periods 4. Contract subsidies and voucher agreements are linked to increasing requirements of quality for each year. However,

assessment of the performance targets for the top tiers is complicated by a shift in how the data is presented; an explanation of the data presentation strategy would clarify whether the targets identify additional programs moving across tiers rather than the resulting total number of programs at the end each calendar year as a result of these programs' advancement. Targets set for the increased # of programs in the top tiers do not support achievement of the stated goal of increases in the # of ELD programs in the top tiers (3-4) by 20% each grant year and reflect what would be the expected impact given the pilot programs, timeline for TQRIS implementation, the policy changes for incentives supporting advancement to the next level, and level of fiscal resources allocated. While clear goals are stated in the narrative for yearly advancement, the performance measures do not reflect numbers consistent with these articulated goals – 20% increase each year of the grant. The baseline numbers are not consistent with the baseline data for performance measures for (B)(2)(c). The pattern of projected target increases for the % of children in programs in the top tiers aligns with the pattern of targeted increases in the number of TQRIS participating programs. This alignment supports the validity of the projected targets in relation to participation in programs that are a part of the TQRIS system. However, the targets do not align with the stated goal of increasing the number of children in tiers 3-4 by 20% each year of the grant. The weaknesses noted in the performance measures for baseline and the projected growth of programs in Tiers 3-4 affect the data on # of children enrolled. Due to these data issues, the context for validating the degree to which the goals are reasonable and achievable is not present. The systems for promoting access to high quality programs are substantially implemented. The strengths of the plan are the ability to build on past initiatives such as the pilot QQRIS participation and grants, incentives linked to continuous improvement, a level of fiscal and other resources to support advancement, and defined steps and timelines for implementation. However, the weaknesses in the performance measures, specifically the inconsistency between the specificity of the goals stated in the narrative and the projected targets and the lack of clarity of the data for increased participation in the tiers 3-4, significantly compromise the quality of the overall plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	10

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (B)(5)

The plan's process for determining the validation strategy is of high quality. 1. An independent University-based research and program evaluation Institute will collaborate with the EEC in the evaluation design and implementation. 2. Development of the research design was based on review of the validation processes in two states that included evaluation of the link between tier level and child outcomes. 3. Clearly stated research questions relevant for a comprehensive evaluation of the system drive the actual validation study plan. A well-articulated research design is described that will yield data for determining the effectiveness of the system. 1. Two sequential validation studies are proposed -- validating the tiers followed by evaluation of the changes in program quality related to outcomes (comparison with learning outcomes and Kindergarten entry readiness) 2. Methodology strengths include detailed sampling strategies that account for areas of potential error and the use of an experimental design 3. Sampling strategies are detailed and account for areas of potential error. 4. The use of an experimental design with appropriate control groups The following elements of the design are to be determined and/or represent areas of weakness: 1. The exact alignment of the studies with the implementation timeline of the TQRIS to ensure the projected sample sizes 2. The research-based measure of program quality (to be determined in collaboration with independent evaluator; however the criteria guiding the selection are not described) 3. Potential threats to the validity and reliability of the child outcomes study due to the use of multiple criterion measures of child developmental progress and learning outcomes. There is no evidence that the same domains will be consistently evaluated. In response to the criterion, the application outlines a validation strategy that is methodologically sound and of high quality. The design specifically evaluates the degree to which the tiers reflect differential levels of quality. However, weaknesses are evident in the evaluation of the relationship to child outcomes. These weaknesses include the timing of the studies, lack of selection criteria for the measure for program quality and questions regarding the validity and reliability of the child outcomes study.

#### **Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)**

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E)

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the

same number of points.

**C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

- (a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;
- (c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and
- (d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(1)**

The state has developed and implemented a sequence of three sets of early learning and development standards, infant/toddlers, preschool, and Pre-K common core (math and literacy). Licensing requirements mandate use of the standards. Evidence that the early learning and development standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and cover the essential domains for school readiness is weak. 1. Table A16 indicated that the early learning standards and development standards addressed the essential domains across all age groups – infants, Toddlers and preschool. While the State is to be commended for engaging an independent analysis of the standards, the analysis documented the following weakness: (1) social and emotional development and approaches to learning were missing in the preschool and pre-K standards; (2) physical well-being and motor development were missing in the Curriculum Frameworks. Beyond missing domains, there was limited alignment of the standards across age groups and lack of alignment with standards for English language learners and children with disabilities. 2. With the exception of the infant-toddler standards, the research or evidence basis for developing the standards or crosswalks to early learning standards of national early childhood associations is not addressed. 3. Examination of the content of the guides and references was restricted based on RTT-ELC guidelines to reviewers to use only evidence provided in the actual application excluding web-linked materials. The plan activities and identified resources specifically address the identified weaknesses in the alignment of standards across ages groups and increased alignment with standards for English language learners and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. Alignment with developmentally appropriate and evidence based practice for children with disabilities is not addressed. This omission is noteworthy given the number of programs funded under Part B of IDEA and, particularly, the inclusion of children with disabilities in other programs. The inclusion of Pre-K guidelines in the development of the state's Common Core Standards, specifically in math and literacy, ensured alignment between preschool and K-3. The AIR analysis independently confirmed math and literacy as the domains with the greatest alignment across age group guidelines. Licensing requirements for all early education and care programs, including after school programs, group childcare centers and family child care homes, require adherence to the standards. TQRIS Tier 3 requirements specify the use of a curriculum aligned with the early learning and development guidelines and teacher competency in understanding and use of the guidelines. While workforce core competencies do not reflect incorporation of either early learning standard, alignment is either required or evident in standard related professional development, integration of the new standards into teacher preparation programs, and the requirement of sponsored and contracted professional development activities to align with the standards. Responding to the weakness of the alignment of the standards and their use across programs, the plan emphasizes effective professional development resources as the mechanism for enhancing knowledge and effective use of the standards. However, more explicit linkage to TQRIS would strengthen confidence that these alignment weaknesses would be resolved beyond more external studies. The current professional development infrastructure, the regional Educator Provider Support grantees and the Readiness Centers are established mechanisms for initial training and on-going support for understanding the current standards as well as future revisions. These resources are currently viewed as resource centers for information for early childhood educators. EPS grantees align training with specific state initiative requirements. The State has substantially implemented a set of quality early learning standards, including the mandated use in licensed programs. Overall the response to

the criterion was of high quality, acknowledging weakness in the standards or their alignment and identifying a solid plan for addressing them.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	10

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

- (a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;
- (b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;
- (c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and
- (d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(2)
<p>The stated outcomes of this component align with the associated reform objective of designing and implementing a comprehensive assessment system birth through grade 3 to measure and improve child outcomes. These outcomes are linked to weaknesses in the current assessment system. However, the narrative descriptions of identified key strategies/tasks and list of additional objectives do not provide a coherent plan for implementation. Although key elements are identified with timelines, the organization of the activities and strategies and the narrative do not document a clear path for achieving the overall goal of a comprehensive system. Key elements supporting implementation of the plan include 1. Identification of a statewide screening instrument and designated support for implementation at the community level (reasonable and clear targets projected for implementation and outcomes) 2. Identification of evidence-based formative assessment instruments that are linked to the curriculum; however, the expectations for use statewide are not clear from the narrative or the program standards for the TQRIS 3. Inclusion of the KEA development in the design of the comprehensive system 4. Activities specific to the alignment across age groups of the early learning standards including alignment of the Pre-K core to the common core across domains identified as critical for school readiness The following elements are less clearly defined or did not align with effective implementation of a comprehensive assessment system 1. A convincing rationale for the investment in training educators in normative assessments to validate the formative assessments and the specific instruments to be used was not presented. It would appear that the linkage to KEA and the Pre-K common core would be stronger validation of child outcomes specifically related to school readiness. 2. The environmental rating scales of adult child interaction are included on the diagram of the system, yet no explanation of the role of these assessments in the comprehensive child assessment system is provided. 3. The unified plan for working with ECE to expand their knowledge and skills in assessment is not identified in relation to the comprehensive assessment system or linked to the program advancement support in the TQRIS. 4. The approach for integrating and aligning assessments to avoid duplication and data sharing is not sufficiently addressed, particularly given the choice of formative assessments used statewide and the lack of discussion of cross agency responsibilities for screening. 5. Given the strategy for tying the use of screening and assessment tools to the tiered QRIS, a more detailed and integrated plan for training was needed. While elements of the comprehensive assessment system have been implemented and weaknesses identified, weaknesses identified in the plan's organization and specific elements do not meet the criterion as a high quality plan. As a result, the State's response was scored as partially implemented and a medium quality response.</p>

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(4)

Table A19 documents a range of family engagement activities both within and across program type. The TQRIS levels document an appropriate progression of standards of family engagement, including reference to culturally and linguistically appropriate information. Expansion and specific targeting of funds to existing statewide networks such as the Educator Provider Support partnerships or the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Program, are effective strategies for increasing the integration of culturally relevant strategies in the program standards and their effective use in programs. The plan does not explicitly address an on-going strategy for increasing ECE to implement family engagement strategies. The narrative notes the intent to establish a cohort of trainers in each of the six regions defined by the EEC. The focus of the coaching and guidance to be provided emphasizes working with diverse families, an identified weakness in the current standards. More general parent, family and community engagement training is to be in collaboration with the national Head Start center. However, training in family engagement strategies as a part of the TQRIS program progression is not addressed. A strength of the plan is the leveraging of existing resources which maximize the plan's ability to impact change in family engagement practice statewide. Specific strategies are identified for collaboration of key resources in the refinement of program standards to more explicitly include culturally relevant best practice, ECE and paraprofessional professional development and the direct support of families. The resources, such as the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Program and Educator Provider Support partnerships grantees, and cross agency programs, support effective implementation of initiatives that will move the reform agendas goals for increased cultural relevance of family engagement strategies. The breadth of participating state agencies, including the Office for Refugees and Immigrants, document this commitment with appropriate roles and responsibilities identified in the MOUs. The plan's strategies for leveraging these resources with targeted grant supported reform investments creates sustainable change across agencies for the inclusion of evidence-based family engagement support meeting the needs of the state's diverse population. The plan identifies specific outcomes that meet the overall goal of the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate support to families. Although a comprehensive set of activities are described addressing the areas identified in the criterion, there is limited evidence of the coherence seen in a high quality plan. Key strategies are identified supporting the overall goal; however, there is limited interface between the strategies, specific outcomes and the narrative discussion of proposed activities. The linkage of the activities to the timelines identified for other reform initiatives is not addressed.

**D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce**

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	30
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--</p> <p>(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;</p> <p>(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;</p> <p>(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (D)(2)**

The plan specifies an overall goal and aligned specific outcomes and strategies for impacting professional development, career advancement and compensation. While the narrative expands understanding of the reform agenda and presents activities specifically addressing the criterion indicators, there is no linkage to the description of key strategies earlier in the document. There are strategies identified in the initial section which are not addressed in the detailed narrative, thus becoming "stand-alone" items – for example the investment in an IHE's development of an Advanced Certificate in Early Education Research and Policy Leadership, designed to create leadership within the early childhood field at the post graduate level. Thus, the plan does not provide the structural coherence found in high quality plans. Fiscal resources documented that the budget aligns with the workforce plan with the following exceptions: (1) support for the Advanced Certificate (1.5M over 4 years) and (2) Building an Early Educators Fellowship, a leadership institute for administrators and community providers to support alignment of ECE with K-3ed (375,000). The relationship of these projects to the overall plan as articulated in the narrative is not clear nor is the rationale included in the budget sufficient. The following elements of the plan support achievement of the stated outcome for expanding access to professional development and incentives for advancement include: 1. The plan's implementation strategy uses the state's established early childhood professional development infrastructure – the Educator Support grant recipients and the Readiness Centers. Both programs increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of professional development through sharing resources, demonstrating economies of scale, and linking to continuing education units and college credit/enrollment. 2. Professional development targets are directly linked to the reform initiative elements, particularly supporting TQRIS advancement: standard and assessment alignment, social emotional development, English language development, formative assessment and data usage, family engagement and STEM. 3. Significant fiscal state support (2M or 50% of the allocation for this initiative) has been allocated to support the proposed professional development in addition to the requested federal funding. 4. Beyond the geographic access of the EPS and Readiness Center networks, increased access is achieved through professional development delivery incorporating a range of formats/strategies appropriate to the topic and level of competency development to be obtained – college credit courses aligned with the workforce competencies, on-line instruction and resources, and peer coaching and modeling. The policies and incentives have a high probability for impact on career advancement and retention due to a specific focus on gaps or weaknesses in the current compensation structures and linkage to TQRIS advancement. 1. Resolution of credit transfer issues through a IHE mapping strategy and resulting database 2. Request for direct grant support (.50 FTE) for in DHE to improve the outcomes of the Early Childhood Education Transfer Compact 3. Continuation of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program supporting pursuit of associate or bachelor degrees in early childhood (over 5,000 awarded since 2006) Strategies specific to compensation reform are aggressive and innovative although the degree of success in securing legislative and/or other support is not clear -- 1. Access to program professional development resources from TQRIS will require an MOU outlining benefits including compensation for staff who receive state supported training. 2. 15% refundable tax credit for early educators providing financial support for low-income staff in the field 3. The state's Early Education and Out of School Time Career Ladder included proposed salary levels on each tier with increments to be added within the levels to recognize increased knowledge, skills and responsibilities. Limited detail was provided regarding the date of implementation or the impact that it has had on advancement or retention. One component of a system for reporting aggregated data on ECE development, advancement and retention is in place –Professional Qualifications Registry. Annual registration is required for staff in EEC-licensed settings. The extent to which the system includes data categories addressing development and advancement is not clear. Once implemented, the TQRIS will provide the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the statewide EC workforce given the data included and the range of types of programs participating. The targets for increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and the related increase in the number of ECE credentialed by an aligned institution are reasonable, but not ambitious, and achievable based on three specific reform initiatives that enhance career advancement based on degree completion and address barriers: the TQRIS career advancement incentives, the IHE mapping project and the ECE transfer compact. Performance measures for increasing the number of ECE progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the workforce framework are reasonable and achievable given the projected implementation of the TQRIS, increased access strategies and incentives. While the increases are reasonable, they are not ambitious. The projected outcome is that less than ¼ of the total workforce will hold a credential that aligns with the framework. What is not addressed is the total number who currently hold a credential. The State has substantially implemented an effective infrastructure supporting workforce competency. Although the State has provided a substantive response to the criterion and its related elements, the identified weaknesses document a medium quality response.

**E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress**

*The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.*

*The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows*

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	12

practices rather than top down regulation.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry</b>	0 or 10	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p>		
<b>Comments on (P)(3)</b>		
(E)(1) was addressed with a score that represents 80% of the maximum points for that criterion.		

Note: this response has been amended by the reviewer. Because the reviewer gave 60% of available points in criterion E(1), he/she has amended this response to "no". Amended March 20, 2012.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
<b>Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.</b>	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.</p>	
<b>Comments on Absolute Priority</b>	
<p>The application builds on a strong statewide focus on increasing the quality and access to early education and care. Prior strategic initiatives, fiscal investments, policies and state governance structure alignment documented the significant commitment to the state's early learning agenda. The application identifies strategic initiatives and investments that have the greatest impact on moving and/or accelerating the achievement of an infrastructure supports program quality, a seamless early learning system and the integration of data across systems. Strengths of the reform agenda and plan are clearly stated goals, the broad support of the early education agenda across significant stakeholder groups, a governance infrastructure that supports effective and efficient implementation, sustainability and continuous improvement, MOUs documenting sustainable commitments, and strategic leveraging of fiscal resources.</p>	



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 3:43 PM

### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20
<p>The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--</p> <p>(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and</p> <p>(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(1)

The applicant has legislation, policies, and practices in place that demonstrate its strong commitment to Early Learning and Development Programs. In 2005, the State became the first state to create a separate agency to oversee early education and care (EEC) and it has served the State well. In 2008, the State passed An Act Relative to Early Education and Care that created an effective, coordinated system of early education and care as well as their Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program (UPK), a state advisory council and outlined the roles and responsibilities of the Early Education and Care (EEC) Board, Department and Commissioner. The applicant's financial investment was described in light of the nation's recession and is evidenced in reductions to early childhood programs from 2009 to 2010. Despite these reductions, spending on state-funded pre-school rose overall from 4.6 million in 2007 to 7.4 million in 2011. Data was not provided on the number of Children with High Needs served in 2011 in state-funded pre-school but numbers in other programs show an increased number of children served from 2007 to 2011 providing evidence and support for their investment in early childhood. The applicant currently has implemented The Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Pre-K which further defines their existing preschool guidelines, and these are quite strong. Currently the applicant has the requirement that participants of their TQRIS use evidence based tools for assessment and is working to develop a statewide system of screening and assessment for children from birth to third grade that will include a Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The applicant has the highest number of early childhood programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and almost 25% of the state's licensed programs participate in the TQRIS. The commitment to the development of Early Childhood Educators is evidenced through Educator Provider Grants, Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program, and the Professional Qualifications Registry. Similarly the Early Childhood Education Transfer Compact has made education more accessible. The applicant is first in the nation for providing health care for its residents and has numerous programs in place for health promotion including The Massachusetts Children at Play Initiative, Connected Beginning Training Institute (social-emotional health), and a state-wide strategy for vision screening. The applicant also supports family engagement through locally based programs through Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Programs, Early Childhood Resource

Centers and Promise Neighborhood Support Grants. Overall, the State has a demonstrated a strong commitment to early care and learning and this is evidenced in their high quality efforts to date. As a result, the response was scored in the high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	19

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(2)**

The State's history of providing resources and financial investment demonstrates the State's commitment to early learning that has improved program quality. The applicant's EEC board developed a five year strategic plan in 2009 with considerable stakeholder feedback which is impressive. The goals included strengthen the State's early childhood infrastructure and lay out a clear plan that creates an ambitious and achievable plan that improves and supports quality statewide, increases family support, access, and affordability, creates a diverse workforce system, and creates and implements a communications strategy. The applicant builds upon their current plan and acknowledges their gaps in system-wide data collection and Kindergarten Assessments to create a reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable through their selection of Focused Investment Areas to address these gaps. The applicant has provided a clear plan to maximize the number of Children with High Needs enrolled in quality programs through mandatory participation in TQRIS by programs receiving state financial assistance. More specificity is needed to explain how they will encourage participants to join the TQRIS beyond the mandatory participants. They will implement a common measure to assess children at Kindergarten and link data to share information across agencies. The applicant has provided evidence that they will provide training and technical assistance as well as financial incentives to early learning programs and provide technical assistance and training. Overall the State articulates a clear and connected plan where each part together creates ambitious and achievable goals. As a result, the response was scored in the high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	9

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: **Reviewed**  
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 11:29 AM

### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

- (a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;
- (b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;
- (c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and
- (d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(1)

(A)(1) The state provides historical evidence of a strong commitment and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development programs for Children with High Needs. (A)(a) Table (A)(1)-4, provides a list of the financial investments committed by the state to Early Learning and Development Programs since 2007. The table reveals that the state has seen a 10% reduction in early childhood funding and investment. But the state further demonstrates its efforts and financial commitment to meeting the needs of young children by accepting funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and provides evidence that the funds were utilized to further enhance and to continue the work in the development of early childhood programming in spite of the recession. For example, the applicant indicates that funds were used to develop the infant toddler early learning guidelines and for providing wrap around services for Head Start children utilizing Child Care Development Funding (CCDF). (a) The state provides documentation indicating an increase in the number of children with high needs who have accessed Early Learning and Development programs. The applicant has provided Table (A)(1)-5 which shows an increase in the number of children served by CCDF, Head Start/Early Head Start and Title I funds from 2007 – 2011. (b) Four key legislative efforts are cited by the applicant demonstrating a strong response and understanding of the importance of early childhood, the coordination of services, dedicated funding, and specific program improvements to early childhood programs in targeted communities of children with the highest need. (c) Demonstrating a clear understanding and strong commitment to the development of a high quality early learning and development system, the state provides detailed information on the status of all seven key building blocks identified in this grant announcement. In addition, the applicant has self identified an additional key component entitled "Program Quality Improvement". All current data on the status for each key area is provided in Tables (A) (1) -6 through (A)(1)-10. Given the combination of historical financial investment, the increase in the number of Children with High Needs enrolled in services for the past four years, in spite of an economic downturn, and the political will demonstrated by state leaders and the proactive approach to building a strong early childhood infrastructure that is constantly improving, the applicant has presented a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 20 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(2)

(A)(2)(a) The applicant identifies five key areas to be addressed in the state's plan. Each area is aligned with current efforts and is the foundation for the eight specific plans for building an effective Early Learning and Development System described by the state. The state of Massachusetts demonstrates ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers. (A)(2)(b) Building upon the Early Education Board's current strategic goals, the state proposes eight high quality plans as the means for improving child outcomes through the grant period. Each goal identified within the plans includes desired outcomes and details key strategies the state will take to ensure accomplishment of the goal. For example, the EEC has identified a goal to create a diverse workforce system that provides supports, expectations, and core competencies leading to positive outcomes. The applicant states that by utilizing the funding provided through this grant application, the applicant can more effectively address the goal to ensure competency through workforce knowledge, skills, and practice-based support. The desired outcomes identified include increased professional development, career advancement and professionalization, and compensation. There are nine specific strategies for achieving the desired outcomes and the goal. (A)(2)(c) The applicant provides a high quality response and detailed description, with clearly stated rationale for each Focused Investment Area identified by the applicant. For example, recognizing the important role parents play in improving the outcomes of children, the applicant has identified Focus Investment Area (C)(4)engaging and supporting families. The applicant indicates that it will build upon the current statewide infrastructure and network of 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grants to focus on family literacy and linking families to comprehensive services that will support child development. In addition, the applicant recognizes the importance of collaborations across Early Learning and Development systems and proposes to utilize a national Head Start training organization to provide trainings to parents, family, and community engagement. The applicant has provided a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 20 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	9

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant.

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (A)(4)

(A)(3)(a) The governance structure identified by the applicant builds upon the existing Department of Early Education and Care established by the state legislature in 2005. The EEC is also the operating State Advisory Council and consists of an 11 member board including Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services as well as other key stakeholders including a parent, an early childhood teacher and a child care provider. The applicant provides an organizational chart outlining the relationships and hierarchy of all partnering agencies responsible for implementation of the grant. The EEC will be the lead agency and will continue to partner with the Head Start Collaboration Office who is also a member of the Interagency Coordinating Council for Part C of IDEA. The applicant provides a complete organizational chart identifying the roles and responsibilities of the lead agency. The EEC board will meet 11 times a year and will make decisions regarding grant activities, prioritizing, public process and other actions. The applicant does not clearly address or identify a process for resolving disputes, a critical structure given the number of participating agencies. (A)(3)(b) The state presents strong evidence in the commitment of participating agencies. The applicant provides a clear narrative and detailed description of all 12 participating agencies and their role in implementing the activities outlined within the grant application. The state has provided, in the appendix, all 12 MOUs outlining the terms, conditions, and the specific scope of work for each agency. All MOUs are signed by the agencies authorized representative. (A)(3)(c) The applicant provides 49 letters of support by Early Learning Intermediary Organizations from across the state demonstrating a broad range and depth of support for the state plan. In addition to public support, the applicant presents letters of support from legislative entities. A list of all Intermediary Organizations are outlined in Table (A)(3)- 2 and provided in the appendix. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan and high-quality response and therefore has received a score of 9 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	14

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(4)**

(A)(4)(a) The applicant provides a complete and concise narrative outlining the status of current state funds dedicated to Early Learning and Development programs. This is also presented in Table (A)(4)-1. The applicant provides a complete description of state funds that are proposed for FY 12 and dedicated key component areas of a high quality early childhood system outlined in the state plan including: program quality supports, early learning and development standards, comprehensive assessment system, family and community engagement, early childhood workforce and early learning data systems. The applicant does not address how it plans to utilize Child Care Development Fund quality set aside. (A)(4)(b) Budget Section VIII 1. The applicant provides information in the budget and budget narrative that appears adequate to support the state plan. 2. The applicant provides information for the costs for each of the eight plans and activities. The state does not provide data or information on the anticipated number of children to be served or impacted by the proposed efforts. 3. The applicant provides a detailed description in the narrative outlining the amount of funds budgeted for each participating agency and the activities the agency will be responsible for. There are no funds allocated for Intermediary Organizations. (A)(4)(c) The state outlines a detailed feasible plan for sustaining the activities and efforts proposed beyond the grant period. The state has identified a three point approach to sustain efforts by: strengthening the capacity of the 12 partnering agencies, targeting investments on those activities that appear promising for success, and using grant funding to cover one time start up costs in building a strong early childhood infrastructure. The applicant has submitted a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 14 points.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children, and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(1)**

(B)(1)(a) The state has submitted a high quality plan for building a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) for the state of Massachusetts. The applicant has piloted a TQRIS over the past two years and submits a plan to build upon the TQRIS and develop a fifth tier. The applicant has provided a detailed description of desired outcomes and eight key targeted strategies and proposed funding for support and implementation of each strategy. The applicant provides strong evidence demonstrating that the proposed TQRIS will build upon and address; early learning and development standards, a comprehensive assessment system, family engagement, health promotion practices, and effective data practices. The state does not address Early Educator Qualifications but has in place and proposes an aggressive system of training and credentialing supports. (B)(1)(b) The state provides documentation and evidence that the current and proposed TQRIS has and will include standards that are measurable, differentiate levels of quality, aligned with nationally recognized standards and plans to work with the Massachusetts Donahue Institute to conduct a validation study. In addition, the proposed draft TQRIS outlines

standards for varying early childhood settings including; center and school based standards, family child care standards, and after school and out of school time standards. The applicant proposes proactive plans to develop a fifth tier by 2015. The fifth tier will require linkages between the Early Childhood Information System and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment which will allow for further alignment of the programs participating in TQRIS. The applicant indicates that this will assist the state in analyzing and determining which elements are effective in producing positive child outcomes for continuous improvement of the TQRIS. (B)(1)(c) The applicant indicates that only licensed programs are able to participate in the state's current TQRIS. Licensed exempt programs are allowed to participate if they complete a self assessment and develop a program improvement plan. Given that the applicant has already begun the development of TQRIS and proposes a highly sophisticated review and validation of tiers the applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan with a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 10 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	14

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (B)(2)

(B)(2)(a) The applicant states that it plans to increase the number of Early Learning and Development programs, participating in a TQRIS, by 20% for each year of the grant. The state of Massachusetts has outlined a feasible plan and set an achievable goal to have 100% of publicly funded programs participating in the TQRIS by 2014. The applicant outlined a plan under Priority 2 that will require all programs that receive funding through contract for subsidies or vouchers for high needs children and receive state aid through stipends, materials or training to participate in the TQRIS. All programs received notice in December 2010 of the requirement but the applicant does not clarify if this is a new state regulation implemented through the Child Care Development Fund. In addition, it is not clear how the state proposes to implement policies that will require state funded Pre K programs or other programs which fall under differing federal or state regulations and differing agencies, to participate in the TQRIS. (B)(2)(b) The applicant indicates that all contracted programs who receive state or federal subsidies or vouchers are currently in the process of being brought into the state TQRIS by August 2012. The program proposes to require subsidized programs to meet the requirements for Tier Two by 2015. The state has historically provided TQRIS Program Quality Improvement Grants to incentivize programs to participate in the TQRIS and provides evidence that this approach has been successful. The state proposes to utilize grant funding to continue this approach by awarding up to 500 stipends, for each year of the grant to proactively support and incentivize programs to achieve higher levels of quality. (B)(2)(c) The applicant has provided Table (B)(2)(c) outlining the current baseline number and percentage of Early Learning and Development programs participating in the statewide TQRIS and the projected number it anticipates will be participating by 2015. Implementing the planned strategies outlined by the state, the targeted numbers and percentages of programs identified appears ambitious and feasible. The applicant has presented a substantially and fully implemented plan with a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 14 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	12

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(3)**

(B)(3)(a) The state provides evidence that it currently has in place a high quality monitoring and rating system. A detailed description of the current monitoring process and a complete list of validated tools utilized by each service setting is provided. The applicant indicates there are plans to formalize the training process for monitors by consolidating the current training process and methods which will ensure inter rater reliability. Utilizing the infrastructure the state indicates that the reliable raters will be dispersed through regional offices. (B)(3)(b) The applicant indicates that it plans to develop a communication plan and identify community engagement strategies to inform the public and families on the status and quality ratings of Early Learning and Development Programs. But the applicant does not provide sufficient information or details to ensure that the information is available in formats that are easy to understand and assist families in making decisions about where they would like to enroll their child. For example, the applicant only states in the application that "Beginning in 2014, EEC plans to develop a sophisticated communication and community engagement strategy to share information about program quality ratings and licensing with families online, which will be fully implemented by 2015". The applicant provides a substantially/fully implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 12 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	16

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(4)**

(B)(4)(a) The applicant cross references to sections(B)(2), EEC Partnership with Together Quality (T4Q), EPS Grants and Readiness Centers in (A)(1 and 2), and professional development outlined in (D)(2) as evidenced by its policies and practices that provide support and incentives to Early Learning and Development programs as a means to continuously improve the state's early childhood system. The state indicates that it plans, through public-private partnerships, to develop and provide online professional development on the newly revised tiered TQRIS ensuring that training is available for providers on each of the key standards and training reliability in monitors. The applicant provides evidence through its partnership with United Way that this is in development but does not provide additional substantial evidence of other private partnerships that assist in providing training statewide. (B)(4)(b) The applicant does not sufficiently address the criterion outlined in (B)(4)(b). The applicant describes five approaches for enhancing information provided to programs participating in the TQRIS to facilitate their engagement with families including the currently implemented Family and Community Engagement Guides issued to programs. The Guides are disseminated to providers to assist them in connecting families to resources, adult education and job training, assistance around children's development, early literacy, math and approaches to learning. However, the guides do not fully address how the state proposes to help working families who have

Children with High Needs access high quality programs that meet their specific needs such as full day full year, transportation issues and meals. The applicant does not provide or propose to identify any baseline data on the needs of working families in order to determine if the existing approaches or efforts will meet that need. (B)(4)(c) In Table (B)(4)(c)(1) the applicant provides complete detail of the current and projected numbers of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In Table (B)(4)(2), the state presents detailed data on the number and projected number of Children with High Needs who are and will be enrolled in an Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. Given the supports and incentives that the state has proposed to assist programs in achieving higher tiers the targets identified by the applicant are ambitious and feasible. The applicant provides documentation and information indicating a substantially or fully implemented system and a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 16 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	15

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (B)(5)

(B)(5)(a) The applicant has submitted a high quality detailed plan that addresses all areas for consideration in validating the state's TQRIS. The state is currently designing and implementing an evaluation of the TQRIS in collaboration with an independent evaluator, the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute. The applicant indicates that in addition to examining child outcomes the proposed research plan will examine the tiered TQRIS system in respect to child need and risk factors, and understand in-depth the characteristics that make up the system in order to continuously improve upon it. (B)(5)(b) The applicant has provided a detailed description of the approach that will be utilized in validating the critical components of the TQRIS system such as ensuring the accuracy of self assessments. The evaluation plan will also address and examine the association between program quality and child outcomes by identifying appropriate data, the sources, and appropriate means for analyzing. The applicant provides a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 15 points.

### Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C).
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D), and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

#### C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows.

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	19

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;

(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and

(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(1)**

(C)(1)(a) The state presents historical evidence of developing and maintaining high quality Early Learning and Development Standards since 2003. The applicant references the Early Learning Guidelines for infants and toddlers and for children in Pre K through Kindergarten but provides no evidence that the standards are culturally and linguistically appropriate. The applicant proposes to improve the standards during the grant period by validating and aligning the standards with the Head Start Performance standards and plans for the development of English Language Development Guidelines. The state plans to provide extensive training once completed. (C)(1)(b) The applicant indicates that it has conducted some preliminary review and alignment of the state's Early Learning Guidelines with literacy and mathematics, and has identified plans in which a more in-depth study will be conducted to determine the degree of alignment of standards to the Common Core Standards and the three approved formative assessment tools utilized within early learning and development programs. (C)(1)(c) The applicant indicates that the Early Learning Development Standards are incorporated into the Workforce Core Competencies and into the State Curriculum Standards. In addition, the state indicates that it is working with private partners to ensure that their material and programmatic activities are aligned with the Early Learning and Development Standards. (C)(1)(d) The state has an infrastructure in place, the Educator Provider Support and Readiness Centers, which operate as local hubs for professional development. In addition, the state has developed an online and continuing education unit and course for providing training on the Early Learning Guidelines. Through a public private partnership, the applicant has collaborated with WGBH media which provides curriculum training on the basic standards. The state indicates that the Early Learning Standards are developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate and admits that the Guidelines for Preschool Early Learning Experiences do not reflect the current research and sensitivity for children from diverse cultures or languages but has developed a plan for revising the Guidelines. It is evident that the state has in place training and technical assistance system for ensuring the availability of training on the Early Learning and Development guidelines. The applicant provides a detailed description of the major training structures in place. The state has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan and a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 19 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;

(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;

(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(2)**

(C)(2)(a) The state provides evidence of implementing evidence-based screening, formative and environmental assessment tools and plans to develop the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development (MELD) Assessment System. The applicant indicates that they have conducted online surveys from early educators in the state and for three years have conducted meetings around the state of early childhood providers gathering their input and recommendations on the identification of and administration of appropriate screening and assessment instruments. The applicant indicates that it will gather input from early care and education providers on the Kindergarten Entry Assessment. (C)(2)(b) Through the platform of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, the applicant has ensured that early educators are trained in observation, assessment, and developmental screenings at every level. The applicant demonstrates an understanding of the importance for early education providers to know and understand the intent and purpose of assessment tools. (C)(2)(c) The applicant indicates that it has historically aligned the state Pre K Early Learning Guidelines with the Pre K Common Core and will use the same means for aligning the screening and assessment instruments but does not provide any detailed information on how it proposes to integrate, share assessment results, or avoid duplication of efforts by multiple programs who may be serving the same child and family. (C)(2)(d) The state proposes to continue to utilize its existing Educator Provider Support grantees to provide training to early care and education providers on the effective administration and interpretation of assessment tools. The applicant provides a detailed example of the potential content of the trainings conducted by Wheelock College and Associated Early Education and Care who have been training providers. The applicant has identified a goal of training 100% of all early care and education providers who work with high needs children who are not in formal programs and at least 800 programs for each year of the grant. The applicant does not provide sufficient detail or description of how it plans to align all screening and assessment instruments to allow for integration or avoid duplication. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 16 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

(a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;

(b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and

(c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (C)(4)

(C)(4)(a) The applicant historically demonstrates support for family engagement through the establishment of the 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement(CFCE) grantees. All grantees are required to utilize the Strengthening Families Framework in providing training and services to early childhood providers and families. The grantees are also required to document languages and populations within their communities. The applicant proposes to build upon the CFCE infrastructure and identify best practices for ensuring services are provided to children and families that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. The state plans to accomplish this by implementing evidence based English Language Development practices, train informal early learning programs, provide translation of materials, and translate the Guidelines for Preschool Early Learning Experiences for families. (C)(4)(b) The state indicates and provides evidence that the current TQRIS maintains family engagement standards. These standards require programs to utilize the Strengthening Families self assessment. In addition, the applicant proposes to build upon training that is already provided to early childcare providers and enhance training provided to paraprofessionals and online training for directors. The applicant indicates that by June 2012 all grantees will be required to develop training strategies to specifically address training that promotes anti-bias curriculum and culturally and linguistically appropriate practices. In addition, the state proposes to collect data and information on number and percentage of early childhood educators trained on family engagement activities but does not specify how this information will be collected. (C)(4)(c) The applicant proposes to build upon its existing infrastructure for family engagement and support statewide through its 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grantees, expanding Wrap Around Zones, Home Visiting programs, the Help Me Grow model for screening children and community action agencies which provide training on financial literacy to families. In addition, the state will continue its work with the private sector public awareness activities. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan with a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 20 points.

**D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce**

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	40

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--

(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;

(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;

(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and

(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

**Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (D)(2)**

(D)(2)(a) The applicant provides historical evidence of implementing a statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. With the passage of An Act Relative to Early Education and Care in 2008, the state codified their comprehensive workforce development system that provides professional development and includes educational attainment by early childhood staff. The state has an established Professional Quality Registry in place. The applicant presents a strong and aggressive plan for enhancing the Comprehensive Workforce Development system through the implementation of four key goals. (D)(2)(b) The state presents a strong plan for implementing policies and incentives that promote professional development and career improvement. The state indicates that it will address three core areas including; transferring early childhood education credits among Institutes of Higher Education, engaging the early childhood field, and targeting support for specific areas of knowledge and skills for early childhood providers. For example, the applicant indicates that it will complete a mapping project started in 2010. The mapping project that aligns all early childhood areas of study and degrees across 33 higher education institutions. (D)(2)(c) The state has established the foundation for building a Workforce Knowledge and Skill Framework with the Provider Qualifications Registry. The applicant plans to utilize the registry to publicly report aggregated data on the early childhood educator professional development, advancement, and retention. (D)(2)(d) The state has provided evidence of a strong partnership in place with Institutes of Higher Education indicating that 26 of the institutions have already aligned their training programs with the states core competencies. In addition the state has an infrastructure in place for making training easily accessible statewide for early childhood providers through the EPS Grants and the Readiness Centers. Utilizing this foundational infrastructure the applicant has outlined in Table (D)(2)(d)(1 and 2) ambitious and achievable goals for increasing the number of post secondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. In addition, the applicant has set ambitious and achievable goals for increasing the number and percentage of early childhood educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. The applicant has provided a substantially/fully implemented plan and a high quality response and therefore has received a score of 40 points.

**E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress**

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

- (a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- (c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;
- (d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and
- (e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (E)(1)**

(E)(1)(a) The state proposes a plan to develop the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA) utilizing several formative assessment tools currently in place including: the Working Sampling System, Teaching Strategies-Gold, and the High Scope COR which have already been reviewed by an external evaluator for alignment with the TORIS, the curriculum frameworks and approved by both Departments of Early Education and Care, and the Elementary and Secondary Education. The state plans to adopt a new curriculum framework that will incorporate Pre K into the Common Core Standards and conduct an additional review for alignment with the revised Early Learning Standards and correlation with each of the formative assessment tools named. (E)(1)(b) The applicant plans to contract with an Institute of Higher Education to produce a common measure of school readiness. The state proposes to conduct psychometric testing, including item analysis, to produce a valid common measure of children's school readiness at kindergarten. It is not clear how a common measure of school readiness can be derived from multiple formative assessment tools. (E)(1)(c) The state has identified a detailed timeline which indicates that the newly developed MKEA system of assessments will be phased in across the state, by district, until 2015. But the applicant references Table (E)(1)-1 that provides an outline and summary of the state's plan, including goals and activities, the project timelines, roles and responsibilities and financing to improve overall programs quality but the table is not provided. (E)(1)(d) The applicant refers to (E)(2) for more detailed description of how the state proposes to incorporate the MKEA into the States Longitudinal Data System. MKEA is not addressed in (E)(2). (E)(1)(e) The applicant states that the state maintains a Chapter 70 formula but does not identify the source of these funds (e.g. state general revenue) or how these funds supplemented Pre K programs within school districts. The state also utilizes Kindergarten Expansion Grants and will use these existing funds to support the implementation of the MKEA. In addition, the state plans on using \$2.4 million distributed to Readiness Centers to conduct training on child assessment and use of data information. The state has indicated that it has been in the process of developing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment but fails to address significant criteria (MKEA aligned with the State Longitudinal Data System) and though the applicant presents a very sophisticated process for identifying and measuring child outcomes and readiness, it is not clear what will be measured (children or the MKEA itself). In addition, the applicant references a Table which outlines the state plan for improving the overall program quality, but the Table is not provided. The applicant has submitted a partially implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 12 points.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (E)(2)
<p>(E)(2)(a) The applicant provides a detailed and comprehensive plan for the development of an Early Childhood Information System (ECIS) including identifying and describing all essential elements. (E)(2)(b) The state indicates that it has already reviewed the existing data systems and developed MOUs and ISA agreements as the foundation for mapping existing data sets. The applicant describes ambitious plans and timelines for the start up and implementation of the ECIS. For example, the state plans to launch ECIS in the first year linking all Early Education Council agencies in addition to the development of web portals for inputting all family and provider assessment data. The \$734,000 budgeted for the development and implementation of the ECIS in the first year of the grant does not appear sufficient due to the complexity of agencies, systems, and data platforms to be addressed. (E)(2)(c) The applicant indicates that the newly established Education Data State Advisory Group has made progress in developing the foundation for the ECIS. Appendix V provides a description of the state's efforts and participating agencies efforts in developing agreements for exchange of data information and agreement that the ECIS will be implemented in accordance with the Common Education Data Standards. (E)(2)(d) The state has drafted an initial list of intent and uses for the ECIS as identified by key participating agencies. The information will give agencies information and will be used to assist in making policy decision and identifying areas for improvement in the early childhood system of services. In addition, the applicant has provided in Appendix Y the initial listing of ECIS indicators by agency as the foundational information in building the Early Childhood Information System. (E)(2)(e) The state of Massachusetts has established the Education Data State Advisory Group. This group comprised of key agencies is responsible for the creating guidelines and policies that address privacy issues and concerns. The EDSAG will also be responsible for developing the process for granting permission, security, ensuring privacy, and meeting the Data Oversight Requirements. The applicant has provided a partially implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 12 points.</p>

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	249

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	5

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

- (a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and
- (b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (P)(2)**

Priority 2 (a) and (b) The applicant describes a three part plan which will require all licensed programs to participate in the Universal Tiered Quality Rating System by June 30, 2015. The three part plan includes: conducting a study to determine how to motivate early learning and development programs to participate in TQRIS, conducting a public awareness campaign, and soliciting recommendations from the various early childhood programs and providers. The state proposes to develop policies based on the findings from the study and the input of licensed providers. It is not clear by the applicant's description what types of policies or regulations will be addressed and whether these will be mandated. It does not appear achievable to enroll all early learning and development programs by 2015, especially those programs who may be private or exempt providers. In addition, the state indicates by 2014 they will passively enroll all licensed programs into Tier Level I but does not address the potential of the validity or fidelity issues this may have to the TQRIS. The applicant has provided a partially implemented plan medium quality response with a medium quality response and therefore has received a score of 5.

**Priorities**

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

**Comments on (P)(3)**

The applicant has chosen to write to and address criterion (E)(1). The applicant submitted a partially implemented plan with a medium quality response and therefore received a score of 12 points or 60% of the maximum points.

**Absolute Priority**

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

**Comments on Absolute Priority**

The applicant has presented a strong foundation for building an early learning and development system. The state has presented evidence in its commitment to young children both through state policies and financially. The state is in the process of evaluating and creating a very sophisticated TQRIS. Some of the timelines outlined in the plan for developing the TQRIS may potentially not be feasible however the state has developed and implemented strong early learning guidelines for children from birth through third grade, proposes to develop a comprehensive assessment system and Kindergarten Entry Assessment that will be aligned and incorporated into the Early Childhood Information System and has already begun aligning the Early Childhood Information System data into the State Longitudinal Data System. There is need for some clarification in what this process would look like but the state has a strong foundational system among state agencies and partnerships with Institutes of Higher Education in which to accomplish this. It is apparent that the state is committed to building a strong competent early care and education workforce through multiple means, including a strong support system that is in place by both public and private organizations who currently train early care and education providers. The state plans on continuing to use this infrastructure and ensure all providers are knowledgeable on the Early Learning Guidelines, screening and formative assessment, engaging families and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment. However, it was not clear how the state would compensate and support these providers after achieving credentialing. The applicant does not address two criteria in the Focus Investment

Areas:(C)(3)Identifying and addressing health behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness or (D)(1) Developing a workforce knowledge and competency framework and a progression of credentials. However the state does have the key elements in place and partners (or plans to partner) with key agencies to effectively address these two areas and comprehensively build out a high quality early childhood system.



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 11:50 AM

### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

- (a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;
- (b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;
- (c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and
- (d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(1)

A strong state agenda supporting early learning reform has been evident for over a decade in the context of a commitment to general education reform. Legislative actions since 2005 demonstrate a commitment to building an effective system based on quality and supported through policy, governance structure, and continuous improvement. 1. Consolidation of the Office for Children's Services and the Early Learning Unit in the Department of Education into an independent department (Early Education and Care) provided an infrastructure for more effective support for reforms to promote high quality programs and care. Outcomes have been increased efficiencies and enhanced program quality. 2. The cabinet level Executive Office of Education has oversight for public education agencies, EEC, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Department of Higher Education. This unified governance structure aligns early education and care with the overall education system enhancing the ability to achieve ambitious reform goals. 3. 2008 legislation expanded the original statute creating the EEC to more clearly articulate an agenda for a coordinated system of early education and care. 4. EEC actions document the importance of continuous improvement in program quality – inclusion of measures of quality in the revised licensing regulations and implementation of QRIS. 5. Passage of universal Pre-K legislation A continuous fiscal investment in early learning has accompanied the legislative actions. The strength of this commitment is seen in the overall levels of funding invested since 2007 (a stable pattern of funding ranging from 537M to 587M), even during periods of budget constraints and deficits. The degree of commitment is further documented in letters from the state legislative leadership in the House and Senate and the Joint Committee on Education confirming past fiscal investments and outcomes and commitment to the projected reform agenda. The level of investment compared to the number of children served is high. Over 90% of the EEC budget is used to provide direct aid to state's low income children, 0-13 years. This investment represents over \$3000.00 per child. Increases in quality were supported through leveraging of state funds and aligning resources across agencies, sound EEC fiscal management and the influx of ARRA funds. These sound fiscal strategies have allowed quality improvements and implementation of the strategic plan to continue in spite of funding reductions. The leveraging of federal ARRA funds to enhance sustainable initiatives demonstrates the effective use of funding to advance the current reform initiatives and program quality. ARRA funds totaling over 26M were targeted for early learning

initiatives identified in the State Strategic Plan. Outcomes of the investment of these funds included the development and implementation of the infant toddler guidelines, provision of access to summer programs to prevent learning gaps, provision of wrap-around services for Head Start families meeting CCDBG guidelines and partnership between EEC and K-3 to align and provide professional development regarding early literacy. Leveraged federal funding (ARRA and CCDF) funds increased the available number of slots in Head Start and Title I programs by 40%. The impact of the access was increases in the number of children participating in early learning and development programs from 32% and 28% respectively. Table (A)(1)-5. Elements of the key building blocks are in place. Although variation exists in the level of development or implementation, clear next steps are identified, where appropriate. 1. The following elements have been implemented (1) early learning and development standards (infants/toddlers, preschool, and Pre-K), (2) a comprehensive assessment system including screening, formative assessment, normative assessment (particularly in regard to social/emotional development, literacy and numeracy), (3) a tiered QRIS implemented in 2011, (3) health promotion practices, (4) family engagement strategies beyond early education and care programs, (5) development of ECE (professional development, transfer compact, scholarship and grant support) . 2. Two elements are less developed – statewide Kindergarten entry assessment and the Early Childhood Information System. The applicant has provided a high quality, comprehensive overview of the past investments and commitments to early learning and development addressing all components of the selection criteria. Accomplishments and investments have been supported with data and evidence of their outcomes. How challenges have been met to achieve the desired outcomes is addressed. A clear vision is provided of the foundation upon which the reform agenda will be built and the infrastructure to support implementation and sustainability.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

- (a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;
- (b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and
- (c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(2)
<p>The strategic nature of legislation and current initiatives identified in (A)(1) has established a strong foundation for the proposed reform agenda. Letters from legislative leaders documented commitment to the current initiatives with the role of federal support allocating for expansion and continued improvement of policies and programs. A letter from the Joint Committee on Education endorsed the reform agenda goals and confirmed alignment with state priorities. The reform agenda's core components push the current accomplishments forward to improve quality outcomes for children and implement a seamless system from Birth-20. Direct linkages to continued investment in quality initiatives that are sustainable and enhancement of cross and mixed system alignment are identified in the components of the reform agenda: 1. Tiered QRIS validation, universal participation and quality improvement 2. Standards validation and alignment 3. Measuring growth and development through an integrated Early Learning and Development Assessment system from birth to grade three, including a kindergarten entry assessment 4. Universal engagement of families and the public 5. Ensuring workforce knowledge, skills, and practice-based support 6. Pre-K to Grade three alignment for educational success 7. Addressing system-wide gaps in data collection and integration Although ambitious, the goals are achievable. Actions of the EEC have built an effective infrastructure required for implementing the agenda. The following elements are specific to forwarding the reform agenda: 1. Collaborative relationships with other government agencies, private institutions, agencies and foundations, and business partners 2. Promotion of consistency of regulations and policies across agencies 3. Technology system and infrastructure revamping 4. Leveraging strategies that produce significant outcomes (i.e., increase in programs and number of children served) 5. Alignment of the strategic goals of the EEC and the reform agenda emphasizing program quality, teacher quality, child assessment and family and community engagement. The rationale for the focused investments, program and teacher quality and family and community engagement, was the areas having the greatest potential to impact child outcomes. This impact is increased by the strategic nature of the investments relative to sustainability. The reform agenda is strategic, building on the current status of achievement toward the overall Commonwealth vision for early learning and development. The goal statements for each reform area and accompanying measurable desired outcomes and key strategies documented a clear path to achievement of the agenda. Past achievements, responses to challenges and the alignment with state priorities and Early learning and development strategic goals document capacity to achieve the reform agenda.</p>

	Available	Score
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(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State

10

10

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

- (1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;
- (2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;
- (3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
- (4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant.

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

- (1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;
- (2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and
- (3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

- (1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and
- (2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (A)(3)

The existing administrative and governance structures with authority for oversight for the Commonwealth's Early Learning Agenda is the organizational structure of managing the grant. This governance structure has a demonstrated a record of effective management and leadership in moving forward the current agenda forward, for example the leveraging resources and ARRA funds to increase access for special populations. Authority for policy, decision-making, conflict resolution and implementation is codified in legislation, as is the role of the EEC Board. The governance related roles of the participating agencies are based on their legislative authority and are documented in Table A3-1. Documentation of progress to date confirmed the range and level of interagency partnerships formalized through MOUs or interagency service agreements. The extent of stakeholder involvement is significant through both formal and informal mechanisms. The State Advisory Council/EEC Board's membership represents multiple stakeholder groups and holds quarterly public meetings with parents, ECE and childcare providers and other community stakeholders. The letters of support documented broad support of and participation in prior early learning initiatives by private and public agencies, foundations, professional associations, the business sector, educators, legislators, community action organizations, public schools, immigrant and refugee associations/agencies, and institutions of higher education. Plans specific to each component of the reform agenda identify the mechanism for involvement of key constituent groups. All agencies with authority related to the components of the reform agenda have signed MOUs which detail specific and joint responsibilities and the scope of work – State Advisory Council, Department of Higher Education, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Early Education and Care, Head Start State Collaboration

Office, Children's Trust, Department of Health and Human Services (with separate MOUs for the Department of Public Health, Department of Mental Health) Department of Children and Families, Department of Transitional Assistance, Office for Refugees and Immigrants, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. The attached Scope of Work agreements are of high quality ensuring clarity of role and authority for specific project elements, address policy concerns and alignment of work across agencies, and leveraging of funds. Action statements identify the type of participation and align with the agency's specific role in the reform agenda. Support letters documented the breadth of support for the overall early learning agenda including participation in past initiatives and partnerships with the Lead Agency. Letters from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, including Head Start State Collaboration Office, Associated Early Education and Care, Alliance of YMCAs, Community Advocates for Young Learners Institute, MA Head Start Association, MA Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, MA Association of Community Partnerships for Children, MassAEYC, and local public school districts documented individual initiatives supporting the Commonwealth's early learning agenda and support and/or intent to participate in specific initiatives of the grant. The level of commitment noted supported the timelines for implementation of key initiatives. Letters from the legislative leadership of the House and Senate and the Joint Committee on Education built a compelling case for the reform, the capacity to achieve the goals, and commitment to continuous improvement to increase child outcomes.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	15

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF, Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used.

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(4)

The level of fiscal commitment and strategic leveraging of state, federal and private resources and a demonstrated record of past use of such funding to move its early learning agenda forward are strengths of the application. The fiscal strategy demonstrates effective and efficient use of resources to meet the outcomes of the reform agenda in ways that enhance sustainability. 1. The FY12 state budget commits over \$40M of state funds to support the plans to increase participation across program types in the new Tiered QRIS, increase the alignment of the early learning and development standards with practice, develop the kindergarten entry assessment, support community family engagement initiatives, increase ECE scholarship support and access to professional development, and strengthen the alignment and integration of early learning data systems. 2. Significant federal funds are leveraged to support the early learning agenda including CCDF subsidies, TANF, IDEA and a portion of ESEA Title funds. Partial funding of the state's universal health care for children and families is funded using federal Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance funding. 3. Leveraging of federal ARRA resulted in the increased access to quality care and support for sustainable projects enhancing program and ECE quality and family community engagement initiatives. The overall statewide budget supports the achievement of the reform agenda outcomes. The level of in-kind resources committed and the alignment of agency priorities and activities (as specified in the signed MOUs) significantly increases the cost-benefits of the use of grant funds. 1. The financial strategy of targeted investments is reflected in the budget allocations for specific projects. 2. Four agencies with signed MOUs are non-funded through grant funds; these agencies will commit existing resources to support their roles in the reform agenda. 3. Allocations for the remaining participating agency are reasonable and align with the identified scope and timelines of the projects for which they have responsibility. Allocations for the specific projects are sufficient to support the achievement of the identified milestones and implementation steps. These allocations are aligned with the required effort associated with the project given the current status of implementation and the reform goals. The costs associated with the major reform projects are transparent due to the detailed description of subproject-associated costs and anticipated agenda outcomes. A high quality plan is identified for sustaining support for early learning and development programs and the progress toward achievement of the Commonwealth's early learning agenda. Continuing commitment of state investments.

leveraging of resources across funding streams and agency responsibility, and a targeted strategy for the investment of grant funds in sustainable areas are strengths of the plan. 1. MOUs and related scopes of work from participating agencies document efforts to build increased capacity and support from other agencies, including committed in-kind resources and alignment of priorities and activities. 2. The strategic investment of grant funds targets components of the early learning and development system that are demonstrating success or hold potential for success, such as moving the QRIS to an additional tier focused on formative assessment aligned with the MKEA and expansion of successful literacy and family engagement models to increase access. 3. One time strategic investments are targeted for areas where the cost-benefit extends beyond the grant period – studies to validate the QRIS, alignment of standards and KEA, and a coaching/mentoring infrastructure, and the early childhood information component of the state longitudinal data system. The state has provided a substantive and high quality response to the criterion.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(1)**

The current tiered QRIS, implemented in 2011, is of high quality. Indicators of this quality are evident in both the development and final design of the system. The strong focus on quality programs in the state's early learning agenda initiatives formed the foundation for the system's development. 1. These initiatives included strengthened state licensing regulations and Universal Pre-Kindergarten grant program quality criteria. 2. The development process incorporated various stages of validation: working groups of leaders and national experts to draft provisional standards, formal pilot evaluation, and a public input process. The design and content of the system's components address standards related to increased program quality that impact child outcomes and alignment with the state's early learning agenda goals. 1. The linkages between the QRIS standard category directly related to the required components were evident from a review of the standards. Linkages were documented for inclusion of knowledge and skills related to the early learning and development standards, comprehensive assessment system, family engagement, health promotion practices, effective data practices and early childhood educator qualifications. 2. Key indicators for each standard documented progressively higher levels of quality across the tiers. Indicators are stated as observable behaviors or align with documentary evidence (i.e., level of IHE degree obtained, licensure confirmed). Specific instrumentation is identified for measuring observable behaviors or environmental conditions. 3. Baseline expectations align with licensing requirements. Outcomes of the validation process were alignment with accreditation standards of national associations, such as NAEYC, Head Start performance standards, NAFCC, Council on Accreditation Standards for After School Programs, Office of Special Education Programs, and validated program assessment instruments. The validation process confirmed the measures were appropriate for the types of programs to be included in the system. TQRIS participation is available to both licensed and statutory license-exempt programs. The latter must demonstrate that they meet licensure requirements. The reform agenda plans address the following areas for continuous improvement of the system: 1. A validation study to ensure the levels meaningfully differentiate levels of observed quality. 2. Development of Level 5 that aligns program practices with the kindergarten entry assessment. The State has substantially implemented the TQRIS system with a high quality plan detailed for adopting and implementing the remaining components and refinements. The response to the criterion was of high quality providing substantive discussion of the required elements and a clear indication of the path to developing and implementing the TQRIS.

	Available	Score
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(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	15
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The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(2)**

The state plan integrates the goal to maximize participation in the TQRIS with increased access for families to high quality child care building on the current state subsidy programs and resources. The strength of this approach is the emphasis on increasing the pool statewide of high quality programs. The plan requires all publicly funded early learning and development programs, to participate in the tiered QRIS by 2014. The feasibility of this goal is enhanced by the State's broadening of its definition of publicly funded programs. The definition was broadened to include those programs that receive subsidies or vouchers for placement of high needs children and those programs that receive state aid, such as stipends in the form of services or technical assistance. In addition to this participation through the state subsidies system, UPK programs, required to serve low-income children, will be mandated to participate. Collaboration with the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) network directly supports family access to the high quality programs in the TQRIS. The plan includes the identification of measurable outcomes including timelines and key strategies. The timeline for conversion from the current QRIS to the new TQRIS is 2012. Specific targets are identified for the different types of early learning and development programs (with the exception of Part C and B of IDEA and Title I of ESEA which are not separately tracked in the QRIS system). The strategies identified in the plan have a high probability of supporting increased participation and tier progression through development of a cost model to examine strategies for providing the needed resources to maintain quality at higher level tiers, provision of financial supports (stipends in the form of supplies, services and technical assistance, on-line professional development) related to tier progression for achieving a higher level of quality each year and supporting continuous improvement. The overall projected outcomes are ambitious, setting high goals across program types and including participation targets for non-licensed and license exempt programs. The targets exceed the overall goal of increasing participation by 20% per year, thus achieving full participation of programs directly supported by the state prior to 2015. Based on baseline data and the quality of the plan, the targets represent reasonable progression to the 2015 goal of 100% for state-funded preschools, inclusive early learning environments, Early Head Start and Head Start, Part B of IDEA and programs receiving CCDF funds. The targets for programs funded under Title I and other licensed and exempt programs take into consideration tracking challenges, yet the plan is ambitious setting targets of 75% and 50% respectively for 2015. The State has substantially implemented a combination of policies, strategies, and incentives to maximize participation in the TQRIS. A high quality plan has been detailed outlining continuing efforts. The response provides substantive documentation of efforts/plans addressing criterion elements that form a coherent and comprehensive plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	12

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and

Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(3)

The plan describes in detail the system for rating and monitoring implementation of the TQRIS, used and refined during the pilot validation phase of development. The selected monitoring tools have solid validity and reliability data and are used nationally to assess program quality in early learning and development programs. The decisions represent careful and deliberate considerations such as consistency across the system, i.e., use of the appropriate Environmental Rating Scale for monitoring across program types (infant-toddler, early childhood, family child care and school-age care); the same level of differentiation is evident across monitoring areas. The strategies for formalizing and expanding the current monitoring and training system in alignment with the timelines for implementation of the new TQRIS are detailed in the plan. Initial training of monitors has occurred. The proposed expansion of the system to increase access for educators, program leaders and executive directors is an effective strategy to encourage program advancement and build a cadre of trained monitors. Although the rationale for delay in making program quality ratings available to parents until the system's validity is established is reasonable, it is not clear if the delay applies to other currently accessible and valid information such as licensing and licensing history. Details of plans for communication and family engagement are limited as strategies for engaging families with limited online access or adaptations for immigrant and refugee families are not addressed. The plan reinforces the reform agenda's emphasis on quality, including full implementation timelines for the rating and monitoring elements that ensure alignment/integration with other components (i.e., family and community engagement strategies, training initiatives) and system validity. The State has substantially implemented the rating and monitoring system. The measurement process and monitoring structure are in place. The response to the criterion indicators is substantive and integrates the components of the rating and monitoring system. Although the narrative provides evidence of an innovative communication plan (use of public radio), engagement of the unique populations (i.e., immigrant and refugee families) is not explicitly addressed.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(4)

Linking incentives directly to support for program continuous improvement is an effective strategy for maximizing TQIR participation and enhancing child outcomes. The current TQRIS grant program allows grantees unrestricted use of funds; the plan moves to provision of stipends for supplies, services, and technical assistance aligned with advancement in levels. This shift in the incentive structure more directly aligns with supporting advancement in levels. Supports for working families are not identified beyond the general statement of inclusion of programs receiving CCDF subsidies. Supports available through resources under participating partners such as the Department of Children and Families, Department of Housing and Community Development, Office for Refugee and Immigrants and the Department of Transitional Assistance are not identified. The application did not address what the family needs might be and how these resources would address them. The performance targets for increasing overall program participation (total number of programs covered by the system and the number in Tier1) are reasonable, but not ambitious, and achievable within the identified timelines. Realistic targets are established for increases in the # of programs participating in the TQRIS based on the following factors: required participation for all state-funded early learning programs and funding incentive for programs receiving state-aid or subsidies. 1. Required participation for all state-funded early learning and development programs 2. The entry participation requirement of meeting at least Tier 2 requirements. 3. Incentives for early learning and development programs are directly linked to support for program advancement within designated time periods 4. Contract subsidies and voucher agreements are linked to increasing requirements of quality for each year. However,

assessment of the performance targets for the top tiers is complicated by a shift in how the data is presented; an explanation of the data presentation strategy would clarify whether the targets identify additional programs moving across tiers rather than the resulting total number of programs at the end each calendar year as a result of these programs' advancement. Targets set for the increased # of programs in the top tiers do not support achievement of the stated goal of increases in the # of ELD programs in the top tiers (3-4) by 20% each grant year and reflect what would be the expected impact given the pilot programs, timeline for TQRIS implementation, the policy changes for incentives supporting advancement to the next level, and level of fiscal resources allocated. While clear goals are stated in the narrative for yearly advancement, the performance measures do not reflect numbers consistent with these articulated goals – 20% increase each year of the grant. The baseline numbers are not consistent with the baseline data for performance measures for (B)(2)(c). The pattern of projected target increases for the % of children in programs in the top tiers aligns with the pattern of targeted increases in the number of TQRIS participating programs. This alignment supports the validity of the projected targets in relation to participation in programs that are a part of the TQRIS system. However, the targets do not align with the stated goal of increasing the number of children in tiers 3-4 by 20% each year of the grant. The weaknesses noted in the performance measures for baseline and the projected growth of programs in Tiers 3-4 affect the data on # of children enrolled. Due to these data issues, the context for validating the degree to which the goals are reasonable and achievable is not present. The systems for promoting access to high quality programs are substantially implemented. The strengths of the plan are the ability to build on past initiatives such as the pilot QRIS participation and grants, incentives linked to continuous improvement, a level of fiscal and other resources to support advancement, and defined steps and timelines for implementation. However, the weaknesses in the performance measures, specifically the inconsistency between the specificity of the goals stated in the narrative and the projected targets and the lack of clarity of the data for increased participation in the tiers 3-4, significantly compromise the quality of the overall plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	10

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (B)(5)

The plan's process for determining the validation strategy is of high quality. 1. An independent University-based research and program evaluation Institute will collaborate with the EEC in the evaluation design and implementation. 2. Development of the research design was based on review of the validation processes in two states that included evaluation of the link between tier level and child outcomes. 3. Clearly stated research questions relevant for a comprehensive evaluation of the system drive the actual validation study plan. A well-articulated research design is described that will yield data for determining the effectiveness of the system. 1. Two sequential validation studies are proposed -- validating the tiers followed by evaluation of the changes in program quality related to outcomes (comparison with learning outcomes and Kindergarten entry readiness) 2. Methodology strengths include detailed sampling strategies that account for areas of potential error and the use of an experimental design 3. Sampling strategies are detailed and account for areas of potential error. 4. The use of an experimental design with appropriate control groups The following elements of the design are to be determined and/or represent areas of weakness: 1. The exact alignment of the studies with the implementation timeline of the TQRIS to ensure the projected sample sizes 2. The research-based measure of program quality (to be determined in collaboration with independent evaluator; however the criteria guiding the selection are not described) 3. Potential threats to the validity and reliability of the child outcomes study due to the use of multiple criterion measures of child developmental progress and learning outcomes. There is no evidence that the same domains will be consistently evaluated. In response to the criterion, the application outlines a validation strategy that is methodologically sound and of high quality. The design specifically evaluates the degree to which the tiers reflect differential levels of quality. However, weaknesses are evident in the evaluation of the relationship to child outcomes. These weaknesses include the timing of the studies, lack of selection criteria for the measure for program quality and questions regarding the validity and reliability of the child outcomes study.

#### **Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)**

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C).
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the

same number of points.

**C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

- (a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;
- (c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and
- (d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(1)**

The state has developed and implemented a sequence of three sets of early learning and development standards, infant/toddlers, preschool, and Pre-K common core (math and literacy). Licensing requirements mandate use of the standards. Evidence that the early learning and development standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and cover the essential domains for school readiness is weak. 1. Table A16 indicated that the early learning standards and development standards addressed the essential domains across all age groups – infants, Toddlers and preschool. While the State is to be commended for engaging an independent analysis of the standards, the analysis documented the following weakness: (1) social and emotional development and approaches to learning were missing in the preschool and pre-K standards; (2) physical well-being and motor development were missing in the Curriculum Frameworks. Beyond missing domains, there was limited alignment of the standards across age groups and lack of alignment with standards for English language learners and children with disabilities. 2. With the exception of the infant-toddler standards, the research or evidence basis for developing the standards or crosswalks to early learning standards of national early childhood associations is not addressed. 3. Examination of the content of the guides and references was restricted based on RTT-ELC guidelines to reviewers to use only evidence provided in the actual application excluding web-linked materials. The plan activities and identified resources specifically address the identified weaknesses in the alignment of standards across ages groups and increased alignment with standards for English language learners and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. Alignment with developmentally appropriate and evidence based practice for children with disabilities is not addressed. This omission is noteworthy given the number of programs funded under Part B of IDEA and, particularly, the inclusion of children with disabilities in other programs. The inclusion of Pre-K guidelines in the development of the state's Common Core Standards, specifically in math and literacy, ensured alignment between preschool and K-3. The AIR analysis independently confirmed math and literacy as the domains with the greatest alignment across age group guidelines. Licensing requirements for all early education and care programs, including after school programs, group childcare centers and family child care homes, require adherence to the standards. TQRIS Tier 3 requirements specify the use of a curriculum aligned with the early learning and development guidelines and teacher competency in understanding and use of the guidelines. While workforce core competencies do not reflect incorporation of either early learning standard, alignment is either required or evident in standard related professional development, integration of the new standards into teacher preparation programs, and the requirement of sponsored and contracted professional development activities to align with the standards. Responding to the weakness of the alignment of the standards and their use across programs, the plan emphasizes effective professional development resources as the mechanism for enhancing knowledge and effective use of the standards. However, more explicit linkage to TQRIS would strengthen confidence that these alignment weaknesses would be resolved beyond more external studies. The current professional development infrastructure, the regional Educator Provider Support grantees and the Readiness Centers are established mechanisms for initial training and on-going support for understanding the current standards as well as future revisions. These resources are currently viewed as resource centers for information for early childhood educators. EPS grantees align training with specific state initiative requirements. The State has substantially implemented a set of quality early learning standards, including the mandated use in licensed programs. Overall the response to

the criterion was of high quality, acknowledging weakness in the standards or their alignment and identifying a solid plan for addressing them.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	10

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

- (a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;
- (b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;
- (c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and
- (d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(2)
<p>The stated outcomes of this component align with the associated reform objective of designing and implementing a comprehensive assessment system birth through grade 3 to measure and improve child outcomes. These outcomes are linked to weaknesses in the current assessment system. However, the narrative descriptions of identified key strategies/tasks and list of additional objectives do not provide a coherent plan for implementation. Although key elements are identified with timelines, the organization of the activities and strategies and the narrative do not document a clear path for achieving the overall goal of a comprehensive system. Key elements supporting implementation of the plan include 1. Identification of a statewide screening instrument and designated support for implementation at the community level (reasonable and clear targets projected for implementation and outcomes) 2. Identification of evidence-based formative assessment instruments that are linked to the curriculum; however, the expectations for use statewide are not clear from the narrative or the program standards for the TQRIS 3. Inclusion of the KEA development in the design of the comprehensive system 4. Activities specific to the alignment across age groups of the early learning standards including alignment of the Pre-K core to the common core across domains identified as critical for school readiness The following elements are less clearly defined or did not align with effective implementation of a comprehensive assessment system 1. A convincing rationale for the investment in training educators in normative assessments to validate the formative assessments and the specific instruments to be used was not presented. It would appear that the linkage to KEA and the Pre-K common core would be stronger validation of child outcomes specifically related to school readiness. 2. The environmental rating scales of adult child interaction are included on the diagram of the system, yet no explanation of the role of these assessments in the comprehensive child assessment system is provided. 3. The unified plan for working with ECE to expand their knowledge and skills in assessment is not identified in relation to the comprehensive assessment system or linked to the program advancement support in the TQRIS. 4. The approach for integrating and aligning assessments to avoid duplication and data sharing is not sufficiently addressed, particularly given the choice of formative assessments used statewide and the lack of discussion of cross agency responsibilities for screening. 5. Given the strategy for tying the use of screening and assessment tools to the tiered QRIS, a more detailed and integrated plan for training was needed. While elements of the comprehensive assessment system have been implemented and weaknesses identified, weaknesses identified in the plan's organization and specific elements do meet the criterion as a high quality plan. As a result, the State's response was scored as partially implemented and a medium quality response.</p>

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(4)

Table A19 documents a range of family engagement activities both within and across program type. The TQRIS levels document an appropriate progression of standards of family engagement, including reference to culturally and linguistically appropriate information. Expansion and specific targeting of funds to existing statewide networks such as the Educator Provider Support partnerships or the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Program, are effective strategies for increasing the integration of culturally relevant strategies in the program standards and their effective use in programs. The plan does not explicitly address an on-going strategy for increasing ECE to implement family engagement strategies. The narrative notes the intent to establish a cohort of trainers in each of the six regions defined by the EEC. The focus of the coaching and guidance to be provided emphasizes working with diverse families, an identified weakness in the current standards. More general parent, family and community engagement training is to be in collaboration with the national Head Start center. However, training in family engagement strategies as a part of the TQRIS program progression is not addressed. A strength of the plan is the leveraging of existing resources which maximize the plan's ability to impact change in family engagement practice statewide. Specific strategies are identified for collaboration of key resources in the refinement of program standards to more explicitly include culturally relevant best practice, ECE and paraprofessional professional development and the direct support of families. The resources, such as the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Program and Educator Provider Support partnerships grantees, and cross agency programs, support effective implementation of initiatives that will move the reform agendas goals for increased cultural relevance of family engagement strategies. The breadth of participating state agencies, including the Office for Refugees and Immigrants, document this commitment with appropriate roles and responsibilities identified in the MOUs. The plan's strategies for leveraging these resources with targeted grant supported reform investments creates sustainable change across agencies for the inclusion of evidence-based family engagement support meeting the needs of the state's diverse population. The plan identifies specific outcomes that meet the overall goal of the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate support to families. Although a comprehensive set of activities are described addressing the areas identified in the criterion, there is limited evidence of the coherence seen in a high quality plan. Key strategies are identified supporting the overall goal; however, there is limited interface between the strategies, specific outcomes and the narrative discussion of proposed activities. The linkage of the activities to the timelines identified for other reform initiatives is not addressed.

**D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce**

*The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.*

*The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:*

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	30
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--</p> <p>(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;</p> <p>(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;</p> <p>(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (D)(2)

The plan specifies an overall goal and aligned specific outcomes and strategies for impacting professional development, career advancement and compensation. While the narrative expands understanding of the reform agenda and presents activities specifically addressing the criterion indicators, there is no linkage to the description of key strategies earlier in the document. There are strategies identified in the initial section which are not addressed in the detailed narrative, thus becoming "stand-alone" items – for example the investment in an IHE's development of an Advanced Certificate in Early Education Research and Policy Leadership, designed to create leadership within the early childhood field at the post graduate level. Thus, the plan does not provide the structural coherence found in high quality plans. Fiscal resources documented that the budget aligns with the workforce plan with the following exceptions: (1) support for the Advanced Certificate (1.5M over 4 years) and (2) Building an Early Educators Fellowship, a leadership institute for administrators and community providers to support alignment of ECE with K-3ed (375,000). The relationship of these projects to the overall plan as articulated in the narrative is not clear nor is the rationale included in the budget sufficient. The following elements of the plan support achievement of the stated outcome for expanding access to professional development and incentives for advancement include: 1. The plan's implementation strategy uses the state's established early childhood professional development infrastructure – the Educator Support grant recipients and the Readiness Centers. Both programs increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of professional development through sharing resources, demonstrating economies of scale, and linking to continuing education units and college credit/enrollment. 2. Professional development targets are directly linked to the reform initiative elements, particularly supporting TQRIS advancement: standard and assessment alignment, social emotional development, English language development, formative assessment and data usage, family engagement and STEM. 3. Significant fiscal state support (2M or 50% of the allocation for this initiative) has been allocated to support the proposed professional development in addition to the requested federal funding. 4. Beyond the geographic access of the EPS and Readiness Center networks, increased access is achieved through professional development delivery incorporating a range of formats/strategies appropriate to the topic and level of competency development to be obtained – college credit courses aligned with the workforce competencies, on-line instruction and resources, and peer coaching and modeling. The policies and incentives have a high probability for impact on career advancement and retention due to a specific focus on gaps or weaknesses in the current compensation structures and linkage to TQRIS advancement. 1. Resolution of credit transfer issues through a IHE mapping strategy and resulting database 2. Request for direct grant support (.50 FTE) for in DHE to improve the outcomes of the Early Childhood Education Transfer Compact 3. Continuation of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program supporting pursuit of associate or bachelor degrees in early childhood (over 5,000 awarded since 2006) Strategies specific to compensation reform are aggressive and innovative although the degree of success in securing legislative and/or other support is not clear -- 1. Access to program professional development resources from TQRIS will require an MOU outlining benefits including compensation for staff who receive state supported training. 2. 15% refundable tax credit for early educators providing financial support for low-income staff in the field 3. The state's Early Education and Out of School Time Career Ladder included proposed salary levels on each tier with increments to be added within the levels to recognize increased knowledge, skills and responsibilities. Limited detail was provided regarding the date of implementation or the impact that it has had on advancement or retention. One component of a system for reporting aggregated data on ECE development, advancement and retention is in place –Professional Qualifications Registry. Annual registration is required for staff in EEC-licensed settings. The extent to which the system includes data categories addressing development and advancement is not clear. Once implemented, the TQRIS will provide the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the statewide EC workforce given the data included and the range of types of programs participating. The targets for increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and the related increase in the number of ECE credentialed by an aligned institution are reasonable, but not ambitious, and achievable based on three specific reform initiatives that enhance career advancement based on degree completion and address barriers: the TQRIS career advancement incentives, the IHE mapping project and the ECE transfer compact. Performance measures for increasing the number of ECE progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the workforce framework are reasonable and achievable given the projected implementation of the TQRIS, increased access strategies and incentives. While the increases are reasonable, they are not ambitious. The projected outcome is that less than ¼ of the total workforce will hold a credential that aligns with the framework. What is not addressed is the total number who currently hold a credential. The State has substantially implemented an effective infrastructure supporting workforce competency. Although the State has provided a substantive response to the criterion and its related elements, the identified weaknesses document a medium quality response.

**E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress**

*The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points*

*The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows*

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

- (a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- (c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;
- (d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and
- (e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (E)(1)**

There is no mandated kindergarten entry readiness assessment; however, the decision has been made to allow districts flexibility in using one of three currently used formative assessments or another state approved alternative. The KERA will be composed of items across these assessments that form a valid and reliable common metric of school readiness. The rationale for this approach is based on the balance of local flexibility and state regulation. However, the validity and reliability of the item analysis approach is not adequately documented in comparison to use of a common measure aligned with developmental benchmarks for kindergarten readiness. The summary table (Table (E)(1)-1) outlining an integrated plan with goals and activities, timeline, roles and responsibilities, and financing was not found in the application materials including the Appendices. However, the narrative identifies the scope and sequence, including broad timeframes for the phased development and implementation of the KERA. Strengths of the proposed development plan are 1. The quality of the formative assessment tools as the basis for the common metric – the identified research-based assessments tools have documented reliability and validity and are used nationally to assess early learning skills 2. The inclusiveness and scope of the analysis of the tools alignment. The review will include evaluation of the alignment with the state's early learning and development standards (including the Pre-K Common Core), Head Start's Child Development and Early Learning framework, and the degree to which the tools are appropriate for English Language Learners and children with disabilities. The validity of the common metric (uniform progress score of school readiness) is based on the quality of the assessment tools' alignment with these standards. 3. The phased implementation plan including a pilot study of to test the common metric across a large sample of schools as the initial step. The statewide phase-in will be complete in 2014-15. The phased strategy allow for continuous improvement of the assessment process, validation of the metric and effective provision of technical assistance to the districts. 4. Integration with the P-20 system, the expanded State Longitudinal Data System, is facilitated by a signed MOU permitting the uploading and sharing of data across state education departments. 5. Grant funds support the validation of the common metric; funding for implementation will be derived from current state aid (use of these funds for KERA is permissible) and repurposing the allowable use of Kindergarten Expansion Grant funding. Although the formative assessment components that that form the basis for the State's approach to KERA are currently being used in the local education districts. The KERA is minimally implemented given the planned change and lack of a current mandate. Although issues have been raised regarding the formation of the KERA from an item analysis of formative assessments, the overall plan is high quality based on the identified strengths and clear steps in the development and implementation plan and timelines.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and

practices rather than top down regulation.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	Yes

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

- (a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or
- (b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

**Comments on (P)(3)**

(E)(1) was addressed with a score that represents 80% of the maximum points for that criterion.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

**Comments on Absolute Priority**

The application builds on a strong statewide focus on increasing the quality and access to early education and care. Prior strategic initiatives, fiscal investments, policies and state governance structure alignment documented the significant commitment to the state's early learning agenda. The application identifies strategic initiatives and investments that have the greatest impact on moving and/or accelerating the achievement of an infrastructure supports program quality, a seamless early learning system and the integration of data across systems. Strengths of the reform agenda and plan are clearly stated goals, the broad support of the early education agenda across significant stakeholder groups, a governance infrastructure that supports effective and efficient implementation, sustainability and continuous improvement, MOUs documenting sustainable commitments, and strategic leveraging of fiscal resources.

Note: this response has been amended by the reviewer. Because the reviewer gave 60% of available points in criterion E(1), he/she has amended this response to "no". Amended March 20, 2012.



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 3:43 PM

### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;

(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;

(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and

(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(1)

The applicant has legislation, policies, and practices in place that demonstrate its strong commitment to Early Learning and Development Programs. In 2005, the State became the first state to create a separate agency to oversee early education and care (EEC) and it has served the State well. In 2008, the State passed An Act Relative to Early Education and Care that created an effective, coordinated system of early education and care as well as their Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program (UPK), a state advisory council and outlined the roles and responsibilities of the Early Education and Care (EEC) Board, Department and Commissioner. The applicant's financial investment was described in light of the nation's recession and is evidenced in reductions to early childhood programs from 2009 to 2010. Despite these reductions, spending on state-funded pre-school rose overall from 4.6 million in 2007 to 7.4 million in 2011. Data was not provided on the number of Children with High Needs served in 2011 in state-funded pre-school but numbers in other programs show an increased number of children served from 2007 to 2011 providing evidence and support for their investment in early childhood. The applicant currently has implemented The Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Pre-K which further defines their existing preschool guidelines, and these are quite strong. Currently the applicant has the requirement that participants of their TQRIS use evidence based tools for assessment and is working to develop a statewide system of screening and assessment for children from birth to third grade that will include a Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The applicant has the highest number of early childhood programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and almost 25% of the state's licensed programs participate in the TQRIS. The commitment to the development of Early Childhood Educators is evidenced through Educator Provider Grants, Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program, and the Professional Qualifications Registry. Similarly the Early Childhood Education Transfer Compact has made education more accessible. The applicant is first in the nation for providing health care for its residents and has numerous programs in place for health promotion including The Massachusetts Children at Play Initiative, Connected Beginning Training Institute (social-emotional health), and a state-wide strategy for vision screening. The applicant also supports family engagement through locally based programs through Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Programs, Early Childhood Resource

Centers and Promise Neighborhood Support Grants. Overall, the State has demonstrated a strong commitment to early care and learning and this is evidenced in their high quality efforts to date. As a result, the response was scored in the high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	19

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(2)
<p>The State's history of providing resources and financial investment demonstrates the State's commitment to early learning that has improved program quality. The applicant's EEC board developed a five year strategic plan in 2009 with considerable stakeholder feedback which is impressive. The goals included strengthen the State's early childhood infrastructure and lay out a clear plan that creates an ambitious and achievable plan that improves and supports quality statewide, increases family support, access, and affordability, creates a diverse workforce system, and creates and implements a communications strategy. The applicant builds upon their current plan and acknowledges their gaps in system-wide data collection and Kindergarten Assessments to create a reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable through their selection of Focused Investment Areas to address these gaps. The applicant has provided a clear plan to maximize the number of Children with High Needs enrolled in quality programs through mandatory participation in TQRIS by programs receiving state financial assistance. More specificity is needed to explain how they will encourage participants to join the TQRIS beyond the mandatory participants. They will implement a common measure to assess children at Kindergarten and link data to share information across agencies. The applicant has provided evidence that they will provide training and technical assistance as well as financial incentives to early learning programs and provide technical assistance and training. Overall the State articulates a clear and connected plan where each part together creates ambitious and achievable goals. As a result, the response was scored in the high-quality range.</p>

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	9

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant.

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or

other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (A)(3)**

The applicant currently has eleven members who comprise an Early Education and Care board which include key stakeholders responsible for implementing An Act Establishing Early Education for All. MOU's, project roles and responsibilities were provided by the applicant in detailed organizational charts, tables and narratives (including an Organizational Chart for Grant Management and EEC Staffing Responsibilities for Grant Management). The applicant provided clear descriptions of the governance structure and how the EEC is in a position to facilitate the activities of the grant. Sixty-two detailed and persuasive letters of support were provided, including forty-nine Early Learning Intermediary Agencies with significant detail in their support from key stakeholders demonstrating collaboration and commitment. Although the State's response was strong, dispute resolutions are not described in detail and "appropriate enforcement actions" needs further explanation. As a result, the response was scored in the substantially implemented high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	15

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(4)**

The State Plan clearly presented a budget that demonstrates how existing funds will be used and the activities that support the State Plan. The State included innovative family engagement strategies that were innovative and tied to specific activities that included partners and demonstrate local implementation. The applicant details in a clear manner the funds-state, federal, and private- committed to expanding and strengthening their systems while acknowledging that some systems are still developing. The applicant has provided evidence that they are invested in birth to third grade and that they will sustain new initiatives created through this funding through a three pronged approach that includes using funds for onetime costs (e.g. data collection, infrastructure building). The applicant is using collaborations between several state agencies and public and private sector that will integrate and crossover into several different early childhood programs. The applicant also plans to build upon activities in its first RTT proposal to expand its already existing readiness centers. These activities combined with their strong history of sustaining early childhood programs demonstrates that the number of Children with High Needs served in Early Learning and Development Programs will be maintained. The State's budget table and narratives clearly details the amount of funds allocated to different partners and activities with costs that are reasonable and adequate to support the activities described in their plan. Overall, the State's response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the high-quality range.

## B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

### Comments on (B)(1)

The State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted some pieces and have a compelling High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that has tiered Program Standards, is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs and has standards that reflect high expectations. The State's Universal Pre-K program is sufficiently rigorous given its criteria that programs be licensed or license-exempt; use an approved evidence-based formative assessment tool; use Massachusetts standards and curriculum, frameworks for preschool; provide full-day/full year services; and be accredited (or have a B.A. teacher). In January 2010, the state increased their quality requirements with new licensing standards, including quality measures which provide a strong foundation for the tiered QRIS system the state began implementing in 2011. The state has also provided evidence that the new TQRIS aligns with professional development core competencies, and environmental and program assessments. The tiered QRIS has five distinct indicators of quality which constitute the tiered QRIS standards: curriculum and learning; safe, healthy indoor and outdoor environments; workforce qualifications and professional development; family and community engagement; leadership, management and administration. The State articulates four levels of quality and each level of rating reflects higher levels of quality which build upon previous tiers in enough detail to see the differences between levels. The State plans to build a fifth level of quality linked to best practices and measures of child growth in the program, aligned with the Kindergarten Assessment, by 2015 using RTT-ELC funds. This is definitely an area of need in order to identify the gains made by enrollment in early childhood program. Overall, the State's response to the selection criterion was extremely strong. As a result, the response received a score in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	15	13

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(2)**

The state plans to ensure that high needs children are in the highest quality programs that meet their full-day, full-year learning needs by requiring 100% of publicly funded programs to participate in the tiered QRIS by 2014 and by supporting them in their advancement. The State has set ambitious and achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of programs that will participate in TQRIS. They do an excellent job of ensuring greater compliance by defining publicly funded as programs that receive subsidies through state contracts, accept subsidy vouchers from families, or receive state aid such as through a stipend in the form of services, materials, and technical assistance. The State has some policies and practices designed to help families find high-quality care via Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&R) that they state work closely with EEC to help families find safe, affordable, high quality early childhood education and care. It's not clear how families access these centers or if they really do provide support to the greatest need families. The State also proposes to spend \$12.2 million on program supports, online training, and technical assistance for early childhood programs to increase participation and help programs advance on the tiered QRIS by providing funds. A specific strategy on increasing affordability for individual families besides the CCR&R's was not presented. Greater detail on affordability issues, transportation, etc. is needed. Overall, the response to the selection criterion scored in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	14

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(3)**

The State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and have plans to implement a High-Quality Plan for rating and monitoring quality through the State's Early Education and Care (EEC) agency and have developed and implemented a system for rating and monitoring the quality of early learning and development programs participating in tiered QRIS that measures classroom and group environment using age/setting appropriate Environmental Rating Scales. To ensure consistency among the measurement tools used across the system, the Environment Rating Scales used include: Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ITERS-R), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (FCCERS-R), The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS). The State also does a good job of measuring process and structural quality indicators and the following tools are used (again differentiated based on program type): Program Administration Scale (PAS), Business Administration Scale (BAS), The Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT), The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett-CIS), and Strengthening Families Self-Assessment tool. The monitoring and training process is managed by the EEC for the tiered QRIS levels and the State plans to formalize and expand the system by bringing it in-house by 2014 though the development and consolidation of the training process with guidelines and training methods. Upon launching the tiered QRIS in 2011, the early learning and development programs' information is not public and the state is waiting until the TQRIS is validated. Beginning in 2014, the EEC plans to develop a communication and community engagement strategy to share information about program quality ratings and licensing with families online, but specifics are not sufficiently provided, particularly for families who are not online. Overall, the State's response to the selection criterion was strong, and some more information on the communication plan was needed. As a result, the response was scored in the substantially implemented, high quality range.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	20	18

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (B)(4)

The State has excellent policies and practices in place that provide support for early learning and development programs serving high needs children to continuously improve. These include: subsidized programs, Tiered QRIS Improvement Program, EEC Partnership with Together for Quality, Educator Provider Support Grants and Readiness Centers, and state-driven professional development. The state supports working families by requiring TQRIS participation from all programs receiving state funding or aid. The State's subsidies and vouchers directly support high needs families' placement of their children in high quality programs because all programs which accept subsidies and vouchers are required to participate in the tiered QRIS. The State does not provide specifics on how they provide specific supports to working families. The State has a good plan in place setting ambitious and achievable targets for increasing the number and percentage of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS through mandatory participation and supports including signed MOUs with agencies providing services to high needs children to encourage greater program participation in the TQRIS. As a result, the response was scored in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	15	15

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality

Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (B)(5)**

The applicant has a strong High-Quality plan developed using exploration of other states' (Colorado and Missouri) validation of their TQRIS to design a research study that would build off of the lessons learned by those states. This provides a good base to compare program quality (tier levels) with child outcomes. In addition to examining child outcomes, the proposed research plan provides a clear path to examine the TQRIS in relation to: child need and risk factors, understanding the characteristics of the components that make up the system, ensuring adequate scope and sequence in and between the TQRIS levels, and improving quality. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was very strong and received a score in the high-quality range.

**Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)**

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C).
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D), and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

**C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;

(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and

(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(1)**

The State has spent considerable time on their standards from K-12 and now expanding their strong efforts in birth to third grade ages. The States' existing standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards. The State currently has supports in place to promote its Early Learning and Development Standards across programs. The State has conducted preliminary studies and plan on building upon them to shore up some deficits identified in standards that are culturally and linguistically appropriate across age groups (particularly infants and toddlers) by hiring a vendor to examine the development of English Language Development Standards. The State has done an excellent job of providing evidence that their Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated throughout activities and this is evidenced in their three sets of early childhood standards. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

- (a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;
- (b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;
- (c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and
- (d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(2)
The basis of the State plan is to complete the design and implementation of the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development (MELD) Assessment system, which will measure a child from birth to grade three, and a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA). The State currently has solid evidence-based early childhood screening, formative and environmental assessment tools and tools that measure adult/child interactions. The State has also provided significant evidence that they have included stakeholders and programs in the selection of instruments and approaches through focus groups and community advisory meetings. The State has already provided significant professional development supports and training and has in place plans to train individuals to administer and use assessments and their subsequent data. This is strengthened by their existing relationships with Institutions of Higher Education. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the fully implemented, high-quality range.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	18

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(4)
The State has acknowledged that it has work to do in providing support to families of Children with High Needs and have created a High-Quality plan to address identified gaps in their current system. They have a plan to develop guidelines for English Language Development. The State has an existing infrastructure of numerous agencies serving families working collaboratively and this is a considerable strength of this application and their ability to promote family engagement. This increases the number and percentages of educators trained. Outreach through the public access television station, WGBH, museums, and other community agencies are strengths of their family engagement plans as it leverages existing resources. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.

**D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce**

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	40

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--

(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;

(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;

(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and

(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (D)(2)
The State plans to devote ten million dollars of the RTT-ELC budget to build upon some of its existing resources including close relationships with Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), WGBH, and public-private partnerships. This is a strong indicator of its commitment to improving a strong workforce. The State plans to address transfer issues between IHE's and develop programs to prepare educators to teach English language learners and the demand for bilingual and multilingual early education and care professionals. These are significant areas of concern in early childhood and the State's plan to address them is strong. Additionally, the state plans to coordinate with IHEs in developing delivery of online early childhood education courses which addresses numerous geographical and financial issues often prohibiting early care professionals from obtaining degrees. This will increase the number of educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials. The Professional Qualifications Registry provides an excellent venue for responding to the needs of programs and educators and publicly reporting aggregate data. Their ability to leverage some of the resources, centers, and systems created for their successful RTT bid puts them in a good position to implement policies and incentives that strengthen the workforce and support development, advancement, and retention. The State's goals are ambitious and achievable given the resources the State has. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the fully implemented, high-quality range.

**E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress**

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness.

(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;

(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;

(d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and

(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (E)(1)

By 2014-15, the State will have participating public elementary schools use one of three pre-approved formative assessment tools or another approved one, that is shown to be evidence-based, aligned with the state's tiered QRIS but it is not clear why a common tool is not being used or the validity of different measures and how they are comparable. The State will prioritize local control, and they will develop a common metric of children's school preparedness from the three pre-approved formative assessment tools. More information regarding the creation of this common metric is needed given the possibility of a variety of tools being used. The process will be contracted with an IHE. The State has provided evidence that their plan is funded with State resources other than those available under this grant. Given the questions raised, it is unclear how the KEA will be reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data and it's appropriateness for a variety of populations. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was good and was scored in the substantially implemented, medium-quality range.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

(a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;

(b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;

(c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;

(d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and

(e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (E)(2)

The innovative use of a Data Advisory Working Group is an excellent method to create and maintain a data system that is comprehensive but also can be used to meet the needs of the key stakeholders, agencies, etc. who can then use the information to improve their practice and develop policies. The state has several different systems that collect data but has a High Quality plan to align and strengthen them. The State plan has all of the Essential Data Elements that generates information that can be used for continuous improvement and lead to better outcomes for children. The alignment of systems enables uniform data collection by all of the participating programs that provides common language and strengthens uniformity across the state. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.

	Available	Score
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Total Points Available for Selection Criteria

280

267

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10
<p>Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--</p> <p>(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and</p> <p>(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.</p> <p>Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation</p> <p><b>Comments on (P)(2)</b></p> <p>The State has a High-Quality plan that includes all programs in their licensing and inspection system that are not otherwise regulated. The State's plan to conduct a study to ascertain best methods, and incentives to get programs to participate in the Tiered system is a good one as it results in data driven practices as opposed to top-down directives that may not be successful. The state has numerous programs and policies in place that support raising public awareness. Overall, the response to the selection criterion was extremely strong and was scored in the substantially implemented, high-quality range.</p>		

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met, or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p> <p><b>Comments on (P)(3)</b></p> <p>The State earned a score of at least 70% of the maximum points available for selection criterion (E)(1).</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting</p>	

Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

#### Comments on Absolute Priority

The State has articulated a clear and cohesive plan for promoting school readiness for Children with High Needs. The State has an existing infrastructure of numerous agencies serving families working collaboratively and this is a considerable strength of this application and their ability to promote family engagement. Their existing successful collaborative relationships are evidenced in over 60 letters of support, strong MOU's and clear work plans. These partnerships include key stakeholders across the state and represent many different agencies and organizations. Beginning with their EEC, the state has existing legislative policies in place to support the alignment and strengthening of their existing TQRIS and have strong data driven procedures and plans in place to make strategic improvements that are supported by those necessary to ensure that their activities are implemented with a high degree of fidelity.



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

## Technical Review Form Page



Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: **Reviewed**  
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 9:11 AM

### CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

#### **A. Successful State Systems**

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	20

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;

(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;

(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and

(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### **Comments on (A)(1)**

The applicants demonstrated a strong commitment to early learning and development programs with significant financial investments in children and families with high needs. Similar to many states they have experienced some decreased funding in some areas during the economic slow down. Nevertheless, they have continued to upgrade early childhood learning and development programs and begun to identify and improve services to several high needs communities. Moreover, this has resulted in more children being served in Early Head Start and Head Start and in Programs receiving CCDF funds as shown in Table (A)(1)-5. The applicants also reviewed recent legislative initiatives, Early Education and Care and Achievement Gap, which align with recent national efforts to better coordinate early childhood development programs horizontally with varied cross sector programs and vertically with subsequent school programs. Recent policy reforms in 2005 established a Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to better plan and manage state resources. Similar to other states Massachusetts has developed and implemented early childhood standards but they recently went another step forward and merged Common Core standards for Pre-kindergarten. With respect to comprehensive assessment they have developed some state based systems that rely on Ages and Stages screenings and one of three formative assessments (i.e., Work Sampling System, High Scope Preschool, Creative Curriculum) for state funded preschools (including Head Start). The State has well developed Health Promotion including a significant home visiting program and Family engagement strategies. With workforce development, they have begun alignment of professional development, Tiered QRIS, and early childhood educators' competencies. Recently the state has required educators working with young children to register in a statewide Professional Qualifications system. An Early Childhood Transfer Compact should allow greater access to training opportunities and at least 5,000 of scholarships are made available. Some initial steps have been taken to develop a common kindergarten entry-level assessment with some school districts committed to participation and \$200,000 to design an Kindergarten Entry Assessment. Recent work has been performed to implement a Massachusetts Early Childhood Information System and to align that vertically with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has demonstrated significant efforts and commitment to enhancing its early childhood learning and development programs and system. Hence, reviewer awarded 20 points for this subsection.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

- (a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;
- (b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and
- (c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(2)**

The applicants have delineated a comprehensive reform agenda that is based on their recent work in early childhood learning and development. Their summary of the plan is clear, achievable, and should enhance children with high needs school readiness abilities. The Massachusetts Early Learning Plan is based on eight aims to improve statewide child outcomes during the RTT-ELC grant period and beyond. The applicants' reform agenda is focused on their eight aims outlined below: 1) Tiered QRIS Validation, Universal Participation and Quality Improvement; 2) Standards Validation and Alignment; 3) Measuring Growth through the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development Assessment System (MELD) from Birth to Grade Three; 4) Universal Engagement of Families and the Public Using Evidence-Based Practice; 5) Ensuring Competency through Workforce Knowledge, Skills and Practice-Based Support; 6) Measuring Growth by Developing a Common Measure for Kindergarten Entry Assessment; 7) Implementing the Early Childhood Information System (ECIS); and 8) Pre-K to Grade Three Alignment for Educational Success Schools. For each aim, the applicants developed a reasonable Goal, Desired Outcomes, and Key Strategies for achieving the aim in their plan. The State's chosen areas for Focused Investment Area were (C)(1) refinement and use of high quality early learning standards, (C)(2) effective use of Comprehensive Assessment, and (C)(4) engaging families; (D)(2) improving early childhood educators' knowledge, skills, and abilities; and (E)(1) status of children's learning and development at kindergarten, and (E)(2) enhancing an early learning data system to improve practices, services, and policies. The applicants' choices were well justified in that they were aligned with their recent efforts and with areas of needed improvement. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has articulated their rationale for enhancing its early childhood learning and development programs and system and this should improve school readiness outcomes for children receiving services. Hence, the reviewer awarded 20 points for this subsection.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	9

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

- (a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

- (1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;
- (2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;
- (3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
- (4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

- (b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the

governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (A)(3)

The applicants provided their organizational chart and discussed how participating agencies will be involved in supporting the Massachusetts Early Learning Plan. The recent restructuring by the Governor allows for the Department of Early Education and Care, an existing cabinet level office to manage proposed plans fiscally and programmatically. In addition, it affords the lead agency the ability to interact and collaborate with other key state level agency personnel and private agencies (e.g., Department of Public Health, Department of Children and Families, Children's Trust). A strength of the proposal is that the applicants have planned to hire a person to work on issues around immigrant and refugee families with young children and their families. The present commissioner serves some other important roles (e.g., Director of Head Start Collaborative Office) and some mandated Advisory Groups (Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council via Head Start Reauthorization) are already within the Department of Early Education and Care limiting duplication of efforts. The applicants delineated governance-related roles and responsibilities in Table (A) (3)-1 of the major participating state agencies. In addition, the applicants provided both Memoranda of Understanding with major partners and many letters of intent and support from 49 intermediary organizations. The roles and responsibilities of Part C, however, was unclear in the Massachusetts Plan with a single sentence stating "HSSC is also a member of the state's interdisciplinary Coordination Council" and the roles and governance-related roles and responsibilities in Table (A)(3)-1 were noted as "N/A" in this subsection. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has shown how they have aligned and coordinated early childhood learning and development programs across the state. Hence, the reviewer awarded 9 points for this subsection.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	12

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(4)**

The applicants wrote a general narrative about how federal and other funds will be used to support their early learning and development programs and initiatives that exist and those that are proposed in this RTT-ELC proposal. Although they mentioned total amounts, expended by the State they never directly tied those expenditures to well-specified efforts of the Department of Early Education and Care (proposed Head Agency and agency overseeing early learning and development programs and initiatives). It was less clear how existing funds will be used to support activities of the RTT-ELC Massachusetts Plan. Their budgets and accompanying budget justifications were not very informative as evidence for this subsection and most often only included general costs overall, for state agencies, and for a number of projects (which were a required format). For example, in their budget justification narrative the applicants simply noted that certain amounts will be spent across the life of the grant period and that personnel or vendors will be hired to perform tasks leaving most money not well aligned to other aspects of the project or agency. Moreover, personnel costs rarely accounted for most of the funding requested leaving many of the expenditures not well explained in the Budget Justification or this subsection. For example, \$44,818,772 of the \$50,000,000 requested was proposed for the Department of Early Education and Care, which is the lead agency and that is appropriate given the charge and responsibilities of that cabinet level agency. Nevertheless, when you get down to the agency level \$37,960,777 (almost 85%) of the lead agencies requested funding is contractual and not well specified. At the proposed Project Level requested monies were not well specified beyond presenting the personnel to be hired. This presentation of information does not allow this reviewer to determine important issues like reasonable and necessary costs of significant costs beyond the employment of personnel in proposed projects. Finally, although not directly demonstrated (cannot promise state or federal funds 4 years out) the State does argue convincingly that they have a strong track record of funding early childhood reforms. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts budgeting for RTT-ELC proposal was partially responsive to the budget information requested in this subsection. Hence, the reviewer awarded 12 points for this subsection.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (B)(1)**

The applicants with the Department of Early Education and Care board approval last year integrated in early learning and development standards; comprehensive assessment system; early childhood educator qualifications; family engagement strategies; health promotion practices; and effective data practices into their QRIS tiered system. With respect to standards, in addition to early learning standards, it is important to note that the State includes common core standards that should promote better understandings of important early learning and development guidelines and practices. The tiered QRIS is well developed, has been cross walked with other national indicators of excellence, and an initial evaluation study has been completed to support its use in enhancing the quality of early learning and development programs. The applicants have planned the next logical step by assessing how well the quality rating system differentiates programs at varying levels. The applicants plan to further refine the system and link it more directly to child outcomes by 2015. Finally, the Massachusetts TQRIS

is linked to its licensing system. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has recently been carefully developing its TQRIS and has proposed the next logical step. Hence, the reviewer awarded 10 points for this subsection.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	13

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (B)(2)

The applicants have set ambitious and achievable goals to expand participation of TQRIS. Their plan focuses on mandating all early learning and development programs that receive state funding to enroll in the TQRIS by 2014 and then receive additional state support through stipends (e.g., services, materials, professional development). This statewide policy to systematically enroll state funded early learning programs and provide subsidies for participating programs should be effective in increasing participation in the TQRIS system. They also developed reasonable performance measures in tabular form. The applicants do discuss collaborating with United Way but do not elaborate how that will increase services for concentrations of high needs children and families. More specificity about how the collaboration will focus on high needs children and families and what policies and practices might benefit those families (e.g., extended hours of operation, year-round services) was needed. They also discussed using already existing agencies such as Child Care Resource and Referral to support participation but that already should be the work of those agencies. Finally, the applicants noted that they will give state-supported programs 18 months to advance across TQRIS levels but do not specify what happens when programs do not meet these benchmarks. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has delineated a plan for greater participation in a statewide TQRIS. Hence, the reviewer awarded 13 points for this subsection.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	13

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(6)

The applicants have implemented a rating and monitoring plan for their existing quality rating system. They plan to use several well-known and psychometrically sound rating scales (ECERS, CLASS, and Arnett Caregiver Scale). Nevertheless, they also proposed several less familiar scales (e.g., Business administration Scale, Program Administration Scale) that are less clearly aligned, or at least they did not elaborate on how they are aligned, with the implementation of high-quality early learning and development program practices with high needs children and families. The training regimen needed and required for raters to employ the proposed tools in a reliable and valid manner was briefly discussed but not well elaborated beyond the mention that it will be implemented and that 50 individuals have entered training. The applicants do plan to provide public information on the quality ratings to parents enrolled and who may enroll in early learning programs. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has partially developed and is planning for a monitoring system for their early learning programs. Hence, the reviewer awarded them 13 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	15

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs, transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(4)

In this subsection, although the applicants have address how they will move more programs into QRIS and they did not explicitly address how the anticipated enrollment enhances their quality by simply admitting them in the QRIS. Although the State will require many early learning programs to meet Level 2 standards it appears to be assumed that continuous improvement will then transpire (e.g., "Programs receiving contract subsidies and vouchers to serve high needs children are required to participate in the tiered QRIS, which places them on a path to continuously improve and advance in quality through training, technical assistance, financial rewards, and incentives. Additionally, the state has required these programs to meet Level 2 standards in the tiered QRIS." Moreover, the tabular information for Table (B)(4)(c) does not reflect significant increases in tier 3 and 4 programs across the life of the proposed project. Indeed, the scaling up is not shown on that table. The professional development and financial incentives beyond what the state already is doing, which was addressed in prior subsections, were simply not well explained and are unclear in this subsection. In addition, the applicants failed to address issues such as full-day, extended hours, and transportation for high needs children and families in this subsection. The movement of early learning programs into higher tiers of the proposed TQRIS is somewhat modest although achievable. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has been only partially responsive to how best to move enrolled early learning programs to higher tiers of their TQRIS. Hence, the reviewer awarded them 15 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	11

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school

readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (B)(6)**

The applicants' evaluation study for validating the effectiveness of their TQRIS is not well specified and at times confusing. They plan to validate tiers by comparing self-assessments with external evaluators and follow-up qualitatively to better understand differences. This part of the plan is reasonable. Nevertheless, the validating tiers section is much less clear. They discuss using unspecified outside measures of program quality but some of those have already been used in their own system at least those that have some known psychometric properties (e.g., ECERS, CLASS). Without a reasonable outside measure, their attempts to validate the TQRIS are limited. With respect to child outcomes, they discussed using PPVT, Woodcock Johnson, EVT along with some unspecified measures of executive function, formative measures, and a yet to be developed kindergarten entry assessment. Yet it remains unspecified how these measures will be employed to judge child change based on different tiers of program quality. The applicants also noted that the general analytic approach will be comparing child outcomes to program quality in the TQRIS. The sampling challenges extend much beyond the wide program parameters and stratification they discussed (i.e., 100-200 programs). For example, how many children per program enrolled in the evaluation will participate. It is also very unclear how the non-participating programs could represent a comparison given that most programs will be entering the TQRIS. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has only been partially responsive to how they will validate their TQRIS. Hence, the reviewer awarded them 11 points.

**Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)**

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C).
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points

**C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	18
The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--		
(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;		
(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;		
(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and		
(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		
<b>Comments on (C)(1)</b>		

The applicants have developed and refined three sets of early learning standards (i.e., infant and toddler, preschool, Pre-K common core for literacy and math). They also upgraded their childcare licensing requirements to include those standards and integrated the standards into their existing QRIS. Given a large number of English language learners, the applicants plan to focus improvements on early learning standards for dual language learners. In addition, their focus here was based on an outside evaluation of their standards. Their literacy and math standards have also been reviewed by outside entities. Nevertheless, discussion and evidence of the cultural and linguistic appropriateness was limited although their examples from the Infant and Toddler Standards were helpful. Finally, the applicants have planned to expand their professional development with on-line courses and mentoring, which was not well described. The applicants also plan to have a Massachusetts Institution of Higher Education examine their three sets of standards, especially with respect to the alignment with the three approved formative assessments (Work Sampling, Teaching Strategies, COR of High Scope). The State has Workforce Core Competencies and a professional development system in place to work on standards and educators competencies. They have established and plan to enhance their Educator Provider Support programs and Readiness Centers in Institutions of Higher Education. Finally, the applicants are working with United Way to disseminate appropriate information about early learning standards to the statewide community. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has shown how they have been developing and refining high-quality early learning standards. Hence, the reviewer awarded them 18 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	13

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

- (a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;
- (b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;
- (c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and
- (d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (C)(2)
<p>The applicants overall stated goal for this subsection is "to complete the design and implementation of the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development Assessment System, which will measure a child from birth to grade three including a Kindergarten Entry Assessment to measure and improve child outcomes." They plan to expand assessment services by administering the Ages and Stages Questionnaire screening universally but with a focus on high needs children in the state. They also plan to continue to measure children's progress in higher tiers by using one of several formative assessments and encourage the use of formative assessment for instruction by supporting early learning programs movement to at least tier three. They will provide professional development geared toward educators' better understanding assessment in general and formative assessment in particular. Their plan seems to evolve around seven enumerated statements in this subsection. Unfortunately, the statements are not developed in the sense of high-quality goals or objectives. The proposed validation study with normative assessments was not well articulated with respect to why it is needed. Granted one can correlate any measure but formative and normative assessments are developed for entirely different purposes and do not necessarily lend themselves to that kind of concurrent validation. The association does not necessarily integrate the assessments any better than now. The plan in this subsection is simply not very clear with respect to creating a comprehensive assessment system. Moreover, much of the plan appears to be purchasing screeners and formative assessments for early learning programs with much less money allocated for assessment professional development (Project 4). The applicants do plan to enter resultant data into a statewide data system. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has only been partially responsive to the issue of supporting comprehensive assessment systems in this subsection. Hence, the reviewer awarded 13 points.</p>

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	16

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;

(b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and

(c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(4)**

The applicants have a goal to "to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support to families, especially families of children with high needs, to promote school readiness." Objectives include a proposal to strengthen their Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) projects, provide information in multiple languages, establish regional trainers to provide coaching to practitioners working with diverse families, and partner with a National Head Start Training Center. The partnership with Head Start however was not well articulated. The applicants presently have several standards in their QRIS Center Standards that address working with families in their communities and language (e.g., interpreters, attending community activities) standards. Basically, they intend to strengthen an existing network of programs, Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) projects. In addition, the applicants discussed hiring six regional trainers to actively support with coaching strategies practitioners working with diverse families. This strategy should allow them to leverage existing resources with additional personnel. The applicant did specify some strategies for increasing the number of early childhood educators trained and supported to implement family engagement strategies. Specifically, they plan to use their Educator Provider Support (EPS) personnel to train and promote workforce competencies in culturally and linguistically appropriate practices along with six new regional trainers, and develop six courses in native language of paraprofessionals. Their plan also indicates that they will identify core elements of successful practices in Massachusetts and then provide \$1,000,000 for wraparound zones for high needs families. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts has been responsive to the issue of better engagement and support for high needs families. Hence, the reviewer awarded 16 points.

**D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce**

*The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points*

*The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:*

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	36
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--</p> <p>(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;</p> <p>(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;</p> <p>(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (D)(2)**

The applicants reported a Professional Quality Registry for enhancing the workforce development system. Nevertheless, it is not clear what the nature of the information in the registry is and how that will assist in enhancing competencies of practitioners or be particularly informative to the public or policymakers. They noted that their plan is based on four major workforce initiatives: (1) access to effective professional development (practice-based support); (2) career advancement and professionalization through role expansion; (3) finance and compensation reform; and (4) evaluation of impact on classroom practice. With respect to professional development, the applicants noted the eight Massachusetts core competencies, which are excellent and presented in Appendix R. Moreover, they reported that these competencies have been linked to state-funded and approved training integrating them into approved professional development. The existing six regional Educator Provider Support (EPS) grantees are responsible for competency training, degree attainment, and advancing up levels of the QRIS. The important role of the EPS is to align professional development activities, share resources, and build local capacity for workforce knowledge. They also serve as a means to obtain continuing education units and college credits. This regional system appears to provide a needed infrastructure for expansion of professional development with RTT-ELC. The EPS will target professional development activities areas of need (e.g., formative assessment, social emotional development, family engagement, working with high needs children and families). The recently funded professional development system is also receiving consultation from the CAYL Institute to better individualize technical assistance and professional development. The strength of the professional development plan is that (1) an infrastructure is in place; (2) the applicants are focusing on coaching and mentoring strategies; and 90 coaches will be used to provide practice-based trainings. Why the State chose not use a common kindergarten assessment tool, other than continued selection of one of several curriculum based assessments was never justified and it is unlikely formative, curriculum based assessments will achieve a purpose of having an adequate kindergarten entry assessment. With respect to policies and incentives to facilitate career advancement and perhaps promote retention the applicants have targeted (1) transferring early childhood education credits between IHEs; (2) engaging the field at all levels, and (3) support for specific gaps in knowledge and skill. It is unclear and perhaps even less likely that the transfer problems outlined by the applicants will be resolved by a to be agreed upon and implemented Early Childhood Education Transfer Compact even with a .5 dedicated person working in the Department of Higher Education. The average of 1,000 scholarships a year to obtain an associates or bachelor's degree was a good incentive. Nevertheless, with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Workforce Development System, simply recommending salaries increases will not necessarily provide additional compensation to employees. It is particularly unclear about the tax credit, especially since it is only a bill in the legislature and it is not clear what the lowest paid paraprofessionals might be paying in state income taxes. The performance goals for aligning institutions of higher education and Workforce Knowledge and Competency are appropriate are ambitious. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts plan to support early childhood educators to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities was responsive to the criterion in this subsection. Hence, the reviewer awarded 36 points.

#### E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	12
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--</p> <p>(a) is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p> <p>(d) is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and</p> <p>(e) is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		
Comments on (E)(1)		

The applicants have proposed to use one of three formative assessments (or another approved tool from application), Work Sampling System, Teaching Strategies-GOLD, or High Scope COR that are currently used in pre-kindergarten state-funded early childhood programs in Massachusetts. On the positive side, these assessments have been aligned with state standards. The use of three different assessments (note the applicants also mentioned another in development assessment for kindergarten to grade two assessment) simply does not respond to the general concept of a valid, reliable, and appropriate measure for a common statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The applicants indicated that they "will contract a qualified IHE to produce a common measure of school readiness." The difficulty with this approach is although those assessments do provide teachers with information that can inform day-to-day classroom instruction they are much less adequate to transform into a common index that can be interpreted as high-quality kindergarten entry information that will relate to child change scores with subsequent statewide assessments across longer periods of time. Those assessments as informal curriculum based assessments were never intended to do that, and to the reviewer's knowledge cannot do that very adequately. In addition, to the reviewer's knowledge, they have not been validated for special populations nor did the applicants address that issue (e.g., English language learners). The evidence base and psychometric information the applicants argue for are simply not very strong and in the reviewer's professional opinion use of multiple measures with less well-known psychometric properties will not achieve the assessment purpose. Moreover, sufficient psychometric assessment needed to better validate the proposed measures, even sophisticated item analyses, will not provide timely information during the grant period. The state does plan to initiate the assessment before the deadline and enter information into their early childhood data system. They plan to pay for the assessment with non-RRT-ELC funding. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts' plan to develop a kindergarten entry assessment is only partially responsive to the criterion in this subsection. Hence, the reviewer awarded 12 points.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (E)(2)
The applicants reported using essential data elements from in common data elements for early childhood systems and plan to establish a separate Early Childhood Information System (ECIS). Moreover, they have established an interagency Data Advisory Working Group to begin to address issues related to the ECIS. Although they noted that they want to link their system to the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and P-20 in the Massachusetts Department of Education, it is simply not clear, nor was it explained, why a separate ECIS system is needed, even if it is interoperable. Given that they received initial Race to the Top funding and the data system was a designated priority, building a separate data system for young children is redundant and unwarranted. The essential data elements, participation of state agencies and local programs, and compliance with privacy laws could all be managed in a single statewide system. This reviewer is not convinced that a second system will facilitate timely exchange of data among state participants. In the reviewer's professional judgment, Massachusetts plan to develop a kindergarten entry assessment is only partially responsive to the criterion in this subsection. Hence, the reviewer awarded 12 points.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	230

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
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Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	8
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Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and

(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (P)(2)**

With respect to the competitive preference for including early learning programs in a statewide TQRIS the applicants have presented a clear plan that can move unregulated programs into the Massachusetts system by 2015. The plan includes licensing of presently unregulated programs and any programs that receive state funding. Moreover, the proposed changes will enhance the present system of early learning programs. Hence, the reviewer awarded 8 points.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

**Comments on (P)(3)**

The applicants do not currently have a Kindergarten Entry Assessment nor was their plan for a future one compelling. They basically proposed to use existing prekindergarten curriculum based assessments in kindergarten. Hence, the State did not meet the part (a) or part (b) of the Competitive Preference Priority 3.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

**Comments on Absolute Priority**

The applicants have a strong commitment to early learning programs and provided a rationale for their reform agenda in their RTT-ELC proposal. They have begun and plan to continue to align agencies working with high needs children and their families. They addressed the majority of the criteria in the subsections well and have presented a coherent plan that should increase the quality of their early learning programs. They have the infrastructure and planning mechanisms to improve the quality of their early learning programs especially by further development of their TQRIS and promoting enrollment in the system, further alignment of their early childhood programs and support systems, and support for their workforce development. Their chosen focus areas were aligned with state needs and should also improve and better coordinate early childhood learning programs and supports throughout the state. Improvement of the areas addressed by the applicants should better prepare young children for school success. In the reviewer's professional judgement, the Massachusetts' RTT-ELC application has clearly met the Absolute Priority for this competition.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

Technical Review Form Page



Application # MA-5017

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 8:40 AM

**CORE AREAS (A) and (B)**

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

**A. Successful State Systems**

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	18
<p>The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--</p> <p>(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and</p> <p>(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (A)(1)**

The State of Massachusetts Financial Investment in Early learning and Development Programs since 2007 has increased substantially. The State-funded preschool began with \$4,631,237 in 2007, and is currently budgeted in 2011 for \$7,424,449. The State spent \$554 million on early learning and development in 2007 which was increased to \$589 million in 2008. The 2012 budget total is \$543 million which also includes required match, maintenance of effort and state contributions to specific health related programs. According to the applicant, the state required match dollars met or exceeded the required amount due by the state as presented in Table (A) (1)-4. With the help of funds from the American Recovery Investment and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the state expanded its services and support for High Needs Children. High needs children include those with the lowest incomes, need special education assistance and qualify under other federal and/or state aid. From 2007 to 2011, the state increased opportunities for slots for access to early learning development programs from 53,787 to 75,483. In 2005, the legislature passed a seminal Act to establish a coordinated system for early education and care. The Act established a state advisory council on early education to create quality performance standards for continuous program improvement and to coordinate and align all learning education duties for purposes of accountability. Legislation was also passed to create the Executive Office of Education to oversee three state agencies; Early Education and Care (EEC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and the Department of Higher Education (DHE). With the announcement of this executive office, the Governor released a 10-year action agenda for establishing a child-center system to assure that all children will succeed in school. Several agenda items relate to moving to annual state funding levels for universal early childhood education services. Between 2009 and 2011, the EEC re-bid all major funding streams for early education and care to be under its management and control. The state is also continuing to refine its definition of high needs children to ones that have multiple risk factors linked to poor school and life outcomes. With this broader definition, the state implements strategies that engage and build on families, of communities and strengthening the workforce to improve the success of children. Also much work is established with the support and engagements of not-for profit organizations. Currently the state has developed and implemented Massachusetts Early Learning Development Standards for Infant, Toddlers and Pre-school. The integrated continuum of

standards covers the domains recognized nationally for quality development, and contains how programs can best affect quality learning. The state also has adopted Common Core Standards for Pre-Kindergarten along with Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Pre-K. An Early Learning and Development Assessment System is being developed to inform development and program learning, to address the needs of individual children and groups related to gender, language and ethnicity. The state is also working to improve screening tools that will expand to the use of its Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) by all types of early learning development programs. The Tiered QRIS system began with a pilot program in 2010 and is grounded around four ratings levels. The state of Massachusetts has presented evidence of a high level of commitment by all parties engaged in the development, implementation and support of the plan. Although the state financial investment has not substantially increased for early learners over the last seven years, there has been an increase in grants to community and universities that have significant roles to play to ensure that early learners and particularly children with high needs are ready for Kindergarten. The established infrastructure led by the Early Learning Cabinet has the potential to provide the leadership and authority to effectuate a high level of coordination, which will be extremely critical for the state's goals to be realized. Full points were not awarded, because currently there is not a universal pre-k formative assessment tool; and, the steps to validate the alignment of the three that are currently being used, are likely to be a complicated. Finding the right comparative analysis tool(s) and then applying them to determine the degree of alignment to three other sets of standards will be very time consuming and it may be difficult to achieve a common "formal per-k assessment for all children," within the proposed timeline.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	19

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

- (a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;
- (b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and
- (c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(2)

Comments on (A)(2) The state plan include ambitious goals that are aimed at improving program quality, improving outcomes for high needs children and closing the achievement gap between children with high needs and their peers. The plan is to be implemented under the leadership of the Secretary of Education and the Early Learning Education Advisory Council (EEC), chaired by the Executive Director of the Business Roundtable. The plan is to build on the collaborative work by members of the EEC which is made up of parents, educators, early learning experts and representatives from the various state programs that provide services to children 0-5. The plan has identified a triangular faceted overall strategy that has as the context community and family. The pillars are teacher quality, program Quality (QRIS) and Child Assessment. The faceted framework provides a thoughtful way for elements of the system to work to improve all early learning. The Massachusetts tiered QRIS will serve as the framework to build a statewide family engagement strategy, to expand the availability of culturally and linguistically resources, to guide development, compensation, and training for the early learning workforce and improve early learning programs to help pre-k-school children enter kindergarten more ready for success. The plan is also aimed at strengthening the data systems to better inform local and state practice and decision making. The state currently allows programs to choose between three different assessment tools to determine school readiness at pre-school entrance. While this may support local decision making, correlating items from the three tools will require the use of a comparative analysis process where the results and the alignment of performance of the various tool results will be complicated and a challenge to accomplish. The projected ambitious outcome is that all 275 children in early learning and development settings are screened, prioritizing the 55,762 high needs children that receive financial assistance. A projected 800 educators in programs at level three and four in the tiered QRIS will be required to use formative assessment. The state's plan has described numerous strategies that will be expanded to address closing the achievement gap. These include for example, the review of model English Language and development standards and gathering input on an English learners' set of guidelines, separate, yet aligned with existing standards will be extremely helpful for those working with English learners and the families of early learners. The state is also planning to produce multicultural brochures to help culturally and linguistically diverse families. Overall the state's response is framed around collaborating with families and the public along with educators to achieve the plan's goals. The focus of the plan was drawn from the Governor's ten year vision and from the recommendations of the Early Education Council. The goals of the plan demonstrates a recognition that while educators and care providers have a role to play, success in getting children ready for kindergarten will not occur without the involvement and support of families and others in the community. The score reflects the understanding that the state has a set of excellent building blocks toward development and implementation of an improved system of assessment and learning for all pre-k children, and to increase learning for high needs children. The plan did not address implementing strategies and or outcomes to leverage ways to expand and increase a workforce that is inclusive of the cultural and linguistically diverse children population that is served in the state.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	10

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

- (1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;
- (2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;
- (3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
- (4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

- (1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;
- (2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and
- (3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

- (1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and
- (2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (A)(3)

A major strength of the Massachusetts Plan, is that of the already established infrastructure that has one agency to oversee all of the early education programs. The Department of Early Education and Care has been in place since 2005 and operates on a unified government model. The plan presented excellent evidence through charts and pictures to describe the infrastructure and how it works. A strong element of the plan is that the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Department of Housing and Community Development each collects information on children that they serve and are supporting sharing of information that is not restricted by policy or law into the planned Longitudinal Data System. The major funding streams for all early education and care are under this control. The Departments of Early Education and care (EEC), Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), Higher Education and the University of Massachusetts system report to the Executive Office of Education (EOEE). Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infant and Toddlers Standards are all geared to describe what programs, and the workforce should focus on to create healthy development of infants and toddlers. The Pre-K Common Core Standards for Massachusetts are the same as the Common Core Standards. Very persuasive letters are provided with signatures of state and local school boards, private and faith-based organizations and representatives from the business community. Large and small school districts, legislators, early learning care and professional education associations' letters were

also included. The letters offer support for the application and/or plan, and also identify ways that the specific organization will contribute to the plan. For example, the Boston School Superintendent listed areas that the district will provide or do including assessing children's growth and to provide a valid and reliable common measure to determine school preparedness that can be aggregated to present relative readiness gaps. Letters were also included from not-for profit agencies that support infants and toddler agencies. State agencies signed letters also that give assurances to coordinating and collaborating on services and resources toward implementation of the plan and identified resources and responsibilities they will assume to implement the plan. The Early Learning Act of 2008, the Governor's ten-year vision to ensure that all children are successful, and subsequent actions and legislation have laid excellent the necessary groundwork for the state to become more successful in the preparedness of all children to be more successful and ready for kindergarten. The established Executive Education Office as a cabinet level entity to oversee the three critical agencies of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Early Education will assure that coordination, alignment of resources and services will be delivered coherently and focused to achieve the goals presented in the proposed plan. The Early Learning Council which is made up of all state agencies, professional organizations, educators, and health and family providers help to ensure that program elements of the plan are of high quality. The strategies outlined for achievement of goals are heavily directed toward improving and expanding services for children with the greatest needs. In addition, the quality of the letters of support and commitment of resources from local, state, federal, not-for profit agencies, professional organizations and the business community demonstrate that there is strong statewide commitment to implement and sustain the proposed plan.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	15

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF, Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used.

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

#### Comments on (A)(4)

Comments on (A)(4) Massachusetts Early Learning Plan presents a clear description of the participating state agencies and the dollar amount that each is to contribute toward implementation of the plan. These resources are included in the Memorandum of Understanding from each program or agency director. The EEC's funding comes from 17 state and federal appropriations and in 2012 will be \$543 million. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) benefited the early learning and development programs by adding an additional \$23.97 million to help advance wrap-around services for children educationally at risk. Other support from Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, United Way of Massachusetts, the Irene. & George A. Davis Foundations, the CAYL Institute, BARR Foundation and universities signed letters indicating that they will contribute funding, training or other resources to support implementation of the MA Early learning Plan. The costs projected within the plan are reasonable to support implementation of proposed goals, with targeted strategies for increasing services for High Needs Children to access early learning development programs. The 53,787 slots were available in 2007 for high needs children, currently the slots have increased to 75,483. Head Start/Early Head Start children slots have increased from 12,495 to 16,540 and children served by Title I funds have increased from 8,387 to 10,710 in 2011. These increases demonstrates that the state is doing well to better meet the needs of high needs early learners. The clear direction and support targeting resources to assist high needs children is the reason for the high score. The organizational structure and expressed commitment by state and federal programs, universities, foundations, and local school communities' will be a strength in the implementation of the plan. Evidence was presented to show that over the next four years, the state plans to allocate an additional \$4 million to sustain efforts resulting from the plan, to effect early learning programs in 1-3 elementary grades. Overall, the alignment of state and federal funding sources, foundations, community and not-for-profit agencies' resource commitments will also help to assure that the ambitious state plan is implemented and sustained after the

grant funding has ended.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(1)
<p>Massachusetts had made excellent progress in the development and adoption of a statewide common Tiered QRIS. Beginning in 2011, all early learning programs including head-Start, center-based programs and public schools are to implement the QRIS. The QRIS system was developed in FY 2007 with input and involvement of early learning educators and providers from 12,112 programs that serve children from birth to school age. The system currently has four levels of quality and plans to increase the levels to five. The fifth level of quality would be linked to best practices and measures of child growth in the program, aligned to the kindergarten readiness assessment. This is an ambitious and highly needed level that can be used for scaling up successful practices. The implementation of the QRIS began with a pilot study to validate that the system was of high quality. The Early Education Council worked to ensure that the system was aligned to licensing regulations, professional development core competencies, and environmental and program assessments. Early learning Standards have been developed and are used statewide for infants and toddlers, and preschool programs. The standards are interrelated in organization, and address domains of development and how programs and educators should best interact with children to advance success in the preparation for school. The Massachusetts early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers, Massachusetts Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences, and the Pre-K Common Core Standards for math and literacy have been in place since 2010. To ensure that the standards are used and integrated in programs, the childcare licensing requirements mandate that programs adhere to the program standards and are used as a foundation for the tiered QRIS. The QRIS program is used to guide curriculum and professional development and to assist English language development programs. To ensure that all Essential Domains of School Readiness are culturally and linguistically appropriate, the plan include the hiring of American Institute for Research (AIR) to do an analysis to answer the alignment questions, and to offer how the standards should be used relative to dual language programs. The plan calls for using part of the RTT-ELC funds to develop the fifth level. The fifth level is to identify best practices and evidenced strategies that are effective for success of groups of children with high needs.</p>

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	15

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;

(3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;

(4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and

(5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(2)

Policy has been adopted which requires that all federal and state early learning programs must adhere to the state standards in order to receive state subsidies. This is an excellent policy to implement to increase the use of the QRIS by programs across the state. The state projects that Head Start participation in the QRIS will increase from 33% in FY 12 to 66% in FY 13. The state also expects all Child Care, Pre-K School Child and Education programs to increase their usage to 100% by 2013. By participating in tiered QRIS, programs receive support in training and resources to advance excellence in all areas. The Tiered Quality Rating System use is directly linked to families of High Needs Children, by allowing them to place their children in high quality programs through the state's voucher program. There is also a phased-in requirement for programs to participate in the tiered QRIS. The state's application includes the use of a number of techniques to increase understanding and the importance using the tiered QRIS. The validation study outlined in the plan focuses on examining the tiered QRIS relative to child need and risk factors, and ensuring that there is breadth and depth at all levels of the system. The (B)(c)(1) grid shows that 1,345 programs are currently covered by the Tiered Quality Improvement Rating and has a targeted goal to reach 8,647 programs by the year 2015. There are 1111 programs in Tier 1, 86 in Tier 2, 84 in Tier 3, and 9 in Tier 4. Targets for the number of programs in Tier 1 are projected to be at 1022 by 2015. The plan addresses ways that the state will require that all programs that all publicly funded, including Head Start, Pre-School Child Care Education, Title I of the ESEA, CCDF funded programs, toddler learning programs and so on, use the TQRIS by 2014. These targets are ambitious, but can be achieved, given the infrastructure and policies that are in place as described in the proposed plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	13

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (B)(3)

Comments on (B)(3) Implementation for rating and monitoring the quality of the early learning programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating program, began with the revised licensing regulations. These strong regulations include the use of measures such as increasing the number of professional development hours, exercise, health and nutrition program requirements, and reading and medication training. One-third of the required professional development training is dedicated toward addressing children who have special needs and may require environment, communication and or curriculum adaptation in order to succeed in their program. New York University has been working to train administrators and educators on administering norm referenced tools relative to social and emotional development. Currently the state requires the use of three different formative assessments for state-funded pre-k schools, and Head Start. All programs must use evidenced-based formative assessments to inform instruction, provide a basis for professional development, and to communicate with parents. All three assessment tools are considered to be reliable; however, the plan does include the need to employ another validation process on the three tools. The proposed Massachusetts Early Childhood Information System (ECIS) is to provide data analysis horizontally, cross-agency and be interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal DATA System (SLDS). At levels 2, 3, and 4 all programs are required to complete the appropriate Environmental Rating (ERT) tool for each classroom setting. At level 2, the program completes ERS as a

self-assessment, which must be conducted within 12 months of the tiered QRIS submission date. At Level 3 and 4, a reliable outside evaluator must complete the ERS. Additional measuring indicators are used as quality indicators also. Teacher-child interactions and program administration and leadership are measured by a reliable rater using appropriate and approved tools. One of the tools that is used to help assess quality, is the Program Administration Scale(PAS) which assesses quality in areas of human resource development, personnel cost, operations, classroom/group environment and program planning in Center-and School-based programs. Beginning in 2011, the state began implementing its Tiered QRIS pilot program to ensure accountability and metric for high quality teaching and learning. The state currently offers four rating levels and provides real-time guidance and technical assistance to professionals in early learning and after school programs to improve program quality. As of this fiscal year, approximately 2,500 or 2/4 of the state's 12,000 licensed programs participate in the Tiered QRIS. The state has awarded \$14 million in grants to communities toward Family Engagement Programs to provide information, outreach strategies and direct assistance on child development and connecting quality rating information. The Early Education Council (EEC) provides three Promise Neighborhood Support grants of \$5,000 each, to increase partnerships with "hard-to-reach" families. The grants are to create access to programs more equitably, multilingual, and to assure that accurate information is received by families to support early literacy development. Overall, the state does have in place good plans to expand valid and reliable monitoring, so this criterion was scored in the high quality range.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	20

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (B)(4)

One of the state's goals is to increase the number of early learning and development programs rated in the top tiers of 3 and 4. Currently 1,345 programs are covered by the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, and are targeted in the proposed plan to increase to 8,647 by the year 2015. High Needs Children participating in the top tiers is at 89% and the goal is to increase that percentage to 100% by 2015. These are ambitious targets, but are achievable and focus the vision of the Governor's to increase learning for children of high needs and to close the achievement gap between high needs children and their peers related to entering kindergarten ready to learn. The state plans to use contract subsidies and voucher agreements to increase requirements for increased quality for programs with high needs children, each year of the plan. The use of vouchers is an excellent process to use with families of high needs children to access programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System. State policies and practices provide significant support for early learning and development programs for children with high needs to continuously improve. The Tiered QRIS Improvement Program, the EEC Partnership with "Together for Quality", and EPS Grants to Readiness Centers for state - driven professional development are aimed at increasing high quality early learning and development for children with high needs. The tiered QRIS has been aligned with a program titled: "Strengthening Families," which serves as a framework for teachers, directors and Family Care Providers and Assistants. The program provides concrete strategies on how to engage families in ways to make social connections, access resources, and gather understanding about services available to assist them in ways to impact on their children's learning. The new requirement, that mandates that programs that serve low-income children will be a tremendous incentive toward achieving the goal that 100% of all high needs children will be in programs in the top tiers by 2015. Because of the voucher system, parents of high needs children will be able to use this information from TQRIS to select the best preschool school for their child. While the plan includes excellent strategists to support and engage families through the community outreach and training activities, there is no mention of strategies to increase and train individuals in the workforce to be more diverse and multilingual. Extensive training on each of the core areas of the TQRIS is being offered in partnership with IHE's online, in multiple languages to develop and expand monitors, to be used through the regional structure already established in the state. The MA response to this criterion is based on evidenced practices, research, and a laser focus on engaging families, and directing resources to children with high needs to increase their readiness for kindergarten.

	Available	Score
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(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	14
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The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

**Comments on (B)(5)**

The recognizes the need for high quality evaluation to validate and confirm the benefits of the QRIS. The Early Education Council has articulated a strong emphasis on the need to collect and analyze information systemically and empirically, to provide feedback about state policies and practices, and about program progress that serve early learning children. To validate the effectiveness of the MA State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, a study will be done utilizing lessons learned from other states and particularly Colorado and Missouri that have undertaken validation studies on their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems. The plan presents an excellent rationale for securing an outside evaluator, the University of Massachusetts Donahue, to validate the effectiveness of the QRIS. Eight well formed research questions have been presented in the plan that encompass accuracy of the system in self-assessing, the association between child need/risk and program level and whether high needs children are more likely to be in a particular program level, the relationship of the five tiered component measures and are their meaningful differences between each program level, is there an association among program level and concurrent child outcomes, which tiers QRIS components contribute most to child outcomes, are there subgroups for children for whom the correlation between measures of child-care quality and child outcomes are stronger, and whether early education and care quality improve over time. The study is to utilize a random sample of QRIS participants as well as non-participating programs. Data will be secured from various resources, including demographics, progress and learning outcomes, analysis of current measures of Kindergarten Readiness; and, as soon as the universal tool is used in 2013, its results will be incorporated. Because the state currently uses three formative assessment tools to measure kindergarten readiness, correlating items and selecting a tool to do a comparative analysis for purpose of alignment, will be a challenge and may cause the projected timeline for implementing "the universal pre-k assessment to be delayed, because of this, the score is reduced. The state has presented a very clear research design to determine whether the state's TQRIS reflect is a quality tool for determining whether the system will drive improvement of programs.

**Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)**

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

**C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	20	18

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;

(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and

(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(1)**

Comments on (C)(1) The state is ahead of most states and has already adopted high quality early learning and Development Standards. These include Pre-k Common Core Standards for Mathematics and Literacy, Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers and the Massachusetts Guidelines for Pre-school Learning Experiences. The Infant/Toddler Guidelines were based on research; and, reflect values that recognize the role of families and current brain research relative to a child's development during the first three years of life. Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, according to a report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, are high quality and are aligned with the Infant/Toddler Guidelines. The Infant Guidelines cover all recognized domains of development and are widely used statewide. The American Institutes for Research was recently hired by the state to conduct a preliminary analysis and to recommend what might be done to improve the standards. The guidelines were developed with input from statewide educators and early learning experts, have been cross-walked with the Pre-K Common Standard and are available on the EEC website. The Guidelines for Preschool Early Learning Experiences covers all domains recognized at the time of their development in 2003. The pre-K Common Core Standards are cross-walked with Guidelines for Preschool Early Learning Experiences. These are distributed widely and are available on the state's website. The three above mentioned standards, continue to be expanded in use because of the professional development and training opportunities, courses online and mentoring, which helps to enable early childhood educators to further implement the standards. The proposed plan includes activities to continue to expand and validate the three sets of standards. Mapping and alignment of the standards must be ongoing and is critical to successfully implementing comprehensive assessment that is to disseminate data based on information from the three tools. Efforts are identified in the plan to ascertain that the three sets of standards are culturally and linguistically appropriate to cover all essential Domains of School Readiness.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;

(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems.

(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(2)**

Comments on (C)(2) Massachusetts intends to use its current building blocks, toward development of a comprehensive Assessment System, that is to be aligned with standards from birth to grade three, and to improve learning for 135,000 children with high needs. The overall goal for the state, "is to complete the design and implementation of the "Massachusetts Early Learning and Development (MELD) Assessment system." The MELD will measure the development of children from birth to grade three, including a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) to measure and improve learning outcomes. A common set of screening and assessment tools will be used at two different points between birth and kindergarten entry. The MELD will interface with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) that begins at third grade for all students in MA. Activities to accomplish development and implementation of (MELD) are as follows: Screening for all 275,00 children in the state's early learning and development settings, prioritizing the 55,761 high needs children; validating the formative assessment tools to determine appropriateness and the reliability of the tools to generate common statewide measures for kindergarten readiness. The existing tools, the work Sample System, Teaching Strategies-GOLD and the High Scope Assessment will be used to evaluate language, receptive vocabulary and early math skills; and, sample weights and statistical models to account for all students including English learners and students with special needs. By December 2013, the state is to have developed a screening and assessment module for children who are English learners. The state will hire an external vendor to validate the state's three main formative assessments to validate whether they align with the three current sets of state standards. The state will let grants to fund the 107 Coordinated and Community Engagement projects to expand information to families relative to program assessment tools. The state's plan describes the role of Institutions of Higher Education that will help to ensure that the formative assessments align with the birth to 5 standards. The projects are to build community level partnerships and engage families in supporting their children developmentally, with the use of appropriate learning activities. The grantees are also to help facilitate access to high quality learning environments for families and to help them understand and access information from screening and assessment tools. The applicant indicates that the early learning assessment system will include screening, formative assessments, measures of environmental quality and measures of adult-child interactions. Each of the assessments is to be reviewed to ensure that they are valid and reliable for the population of children and the purpose for which the tool was intended. The plan calls for professional development training opportunities through recently developed online courses and mentoring, that will enable all early learning educators to further implement the TORIS. The plan presents good evidence that it will do an excellent job in, finalizing development, implementation and use of a comprehensive assessment system. The plan has also presented evidence that many stakeholders and educators are included in the process of developing and validating the assessment system. This involvement will add to the system being understood and used to determine the impact that the policies and coordination efforts will have increasing school readiness for children, and particularly those who are high needs.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

**Comments on (C)(4)**

Comments on (C)(4) The applicant indicates that the state is developing culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across learning standards and programs. The plan calls for using the "Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families" as the framework. This is an excellent framework that includes elements to address parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, identification of concrete support for times of need, and children's social and emotional development. The plan recognizes the state's outstanding mechanism that identifies 107 cultural and linguistically competent community organizations that provide outreach and support to families with young high needs children. According to the applicant, the state allocates approximately \$14 million directly to 107 community agencies to provide critical information and support to families about child development and how to access resources relative to high quality formal and informal early education opportunities. The plan include four objectives that are specific to support families of high needs children. First, the plan calls for the use of research evidenced models. Second, the statewide public awareness campaign aimed at children from birth to five will be strengthen and implemented. Third, the plan calls for using the established cohort of trainers in the six state training regions, to provide ongoing coaching and guidance to practitioners and diverse families; and fourth, the plan indicates that through the partnership with the national Head Start training center, 320 individuals will be trained in 2014 to implement the parent and community engagement strategies. According to the applicant, each new strategy and proposed program is evaluated to determine its impact on children and families, particularly those who are high needs. The EEC currently has a website that will be revamped to reach parents of young children in diverse communities. The website translates brochures into multi-languages and links information to faith-based communities to reach immigrant families about screening, child care vouchers and home visiting services. The

state's K-12 RTT initiative funded creation of "Wraparound Zones," to address non-academic and out-of-school learning barriers. The DPH, working with the Department of Children and Families have established criteria to identify children who have delay or risk factors, and are focusing on assuring that families have ready access to health needs such as vision, oral health, physical fitness and proper nutrition. The plan calls for partnering with the private sector, non-profits, IHEs and the business community, to help advance family engagement in the use of the "Brain Building in Progress" public awareness campaign. Overall, the state presented a plan that includes a comprehensive approach to addressing the unique needs for high needs children. Partnering with community and faith-based agencies to enhance understanding and access to information about the three sets of state standards and how to access quality early learning programs will help the state achieve its targets to increase participation of high needs children in high level quality programs to 100% by 2013.

#### D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	40
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--</p> <p>(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;</p> <p>(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;</p> <p>(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (D)(2)
<p>The proposal emphasizes that the state already draws on the resources of its higher education institutions (IHES) to expand and improve its early learning workforce. The plan describes the state's public-private partnerships with the "Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children" as an example of one of its quality collaborative efforts with IHEs to advance professional development and training. The initiative called "Early Education and Care and Out-of-School Time Workforce Development Task Force (Workforce Task Force), Strategies for Children" includes Wheelock College, Urban College, University of Massachusetts and the Boston-based WBGH Public TV, which have given recommendations for strategies on early learning policies and incentives. The strategies include recommended compensation levels and elements to implement the state's transfer and compact agreement for early learning workers as linkage to TQRIS and the PQ registry. These strategies are incorporated in the proposed plan. According to the applicant, standards for childhood education are some of the highest in the country. For example, the plan indicates the TQRIS workforce standards require center-based care settings to have a teacher with a B. A. in every classroom. In 2008, the State legislature codified the Early Education and Care Act directing that the EEC establish and regularly update a comprehensive database of early educators and providers through the Massachusetts Professional Quality Register. Over the next four years, the state proposes dedicating \$10 million from the RTT ELC funds to support the Comprehensive Workforce Development System. The system is to provide access to early learning professional development support, career advancement and professional role expansion along with finance and evaluation of the impact of classroom practice on children's early learning. Massachusetts has a single set of core competencies for all early education and care and for educators working with children and youth with special needs. The competencies address growth and development, partnering with families and communities, health, safety and nutrition, learning environments and curriculum, observation, assessment and documentation, program planning and development and professionalism and leadership. These competencies are linked to all state- approved and supported training and</p>

course work and evaluations. These also serve as the basis for career ladder movements in early childhood credentials. Massachusetts progressions in credential are as follows. The Child Development Associate/ECE Certificate is "Credential Type 1" in the state and there are 4,001 which represents 1% of the workforce which is targeted to increase to 11% by 2015. An Associate's Degree in ECE is "Credential 2" in the state and currently there are 1,020 which represent 2% of the state's workforce, projected to increase to 6% by the end of 2015. The Bachelor's Degree in ECE is "Credential 3," and currently is at 557, and represents 2% of the workforce, projected to increase to 3% by the end of 2015. A Post graduate Degree in ECE at the Masters and PhD. Is "Credential 4" and currently there are 103 which represents 0.2% and is targeted to increase to 1% by the end of 2015. The goals relative to increasing childhood outcomes and increasing the quality and alignment of the career paths with credentials of the workforce are extremely well presented and are attainable. The plan describes how data will be publicized through the regional education centers, to include aggregate data about all pre-k learning programs, demographics, health and wellness information, kindergarten assessment summary data and information about program license and workforce register information.

## E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows.

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	18

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

- (a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- (c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;
- (d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and
- (e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (E)(1)
<p>The Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA) will be used to describe early learning and development expectations along with proposed new tools to address closing achievement gaps at the earliest points in children's education. Formative assessment tools are to be used to establish children's school readiness and to monitor progress in kindergarten across all learning domains. Participating public schools will use approved formative assessments including the Work Sampling System, Teaching Strategies-Gold, the High Scope COR. The High Scope COR has been shown to be research based and aligned with the state's TQRIS and Curriculum Frameworks, and approved by the departments of early Education and Care and the Elementary and Secondary Education. MEKA's major intent is to guide educational practices and policies to reduce school readiness gaps and to support learning for all children. The system is also aimed at informing local practice and strengthening professional development. This new improved system is to help teachers and schools by providing new information about children's developmental status and ways to provide opportunities to address gaps in knowledge and skills. The state envisions a four year plan funded at \$3.2 million for design and implementation over time beginning with four district cohorts. Priority will be given to district participation with large proportions of high needs students. "Cohort 1" includes 6 of the 10 largest school districts and 11 of the 17 highest-need communities. "Cohort 2" will include the remaining School districts that receive state-funded kindergarten expansion grants. "Cohort 3" and 4 will include the remaining schools districts in Massachusetts. By end of the fourth year of implementation, the state projects that 64 of its school districts and 50% charter schools and 8,382 students will be impacted by MKEA. A MOU has been signed by the state's education departments to permit uploading and sharing data, including student information, curriculum planning and assessment outcomes with other state agencies that collect information on children pre-k-20. An RFP for awarding an Assessment and Measurement grant is currently open for \$2.4 million to provide professional development through the Readiness Centers to begin in 2012. As specified in agency MOU's, existing federal, state and local resources, not limited to</p>

those under Title I and Title II of ESEA as amended, and IDEA as appropriate will be used to develop, implement or provide incentives that will enhance implementation of the four year plan. All eligible state federal programs will participate in the assessment, as agreed in the letters of support. Because the state currently permits the use of three different formative tools to determine pre-k readiness, the challenge to correlate and align these into a universal assessment tool will be complicated and likely to delay the proposed timeline. Because of this challenge, the score was reduced. Available Score

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

(a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;

(b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;

(c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;

(d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and

(e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

#### Comments on (E)(2)

Massachusetts has long been recognized as among state leaders as a data-driven decision making state to ensure children's healthy development, school readiness and school success. Efforts within the state have already been implemented toward development of the state's longitudinal data system. The plan is to build an Early Childhood Information System (ECIS) that will be fully inter-operable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). Both systems are to align with other state data systems including those of health and child welfare. The Governor's Charge to state agencies to work collaboratively will be an incentive for all agencies to work together, utilizing the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) infrastructure as the main vehicle to "laser focus" on improving and creating systems for early learners. As a part of this infrastructure, EEC has the authority and responsibility to establish and maintain a comprehensive database of children, providers and the workforce. The directive, states that EEC is to collect, analyze and report on data obtained by measuring both child and program/service outcomes. The statutory framework under Chapter 15C, provides clear and sufficient authority to develop the ECIS incorporating all the essential data elements contained in the guidelines. The EEC Board and the Commissioner have the authority to approve the system requirements and outcomes as proposed with the state's application. A Data Advisory Working Group is focusing on ways to ensure that the data system meets the overall goals to collect and maintain a comprehensive data system to use for improving policy and practice. The group will also oversee development and implementation of privacy, confidentiality and security safeguards, so that the data are protected in accordance and applicable laws, Executive order 504, and MOU agreements with the various programs and departments participating in the system. The goals articulated within the plan are ambitious, yet achievable include, a)providing policy makers with information about early learning and development programs that is able to be disaggregated at different levels and by different groupings of children, b)providing programs and services with information about the children there are serving to improve teaching and learning and ways of closing the gap between children with high needs and their peers, c)providing the opportunity for state agencies to learn about where children are being served by multiple systems, and d)providing parents/families with information about learning and development programs that are available to support their children's learning. Because of the established building blocks already in place within the state, including the Early Learning Act the program policies, school code changes and the management infrastructure the plan is well done. Implementation of the plan and reaching the targeted outcomes are likely to occur due to the high level of commitments of support services and resources from organizations and agencies throughout the state. The state plan also reflect the use of evidenced and research and best practices and strategies to continue to study and modify the elements toward improvement and the targeted goals.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	270

#### Priorities

#### Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	10

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and

(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (P)(2)
The statutory framework under Chapter 15C, provides clear and sufficient authority to develop the ECIS incorporating all the essential data elements contained in the guidelines. The EEC Board and the Commissioner have the authority to approve the system requirements and outcomes as proposed with the state's application. A Data Advisory Working Group is focusing on ways to ensure that the data system meets the overall goals to collect and maintain a comprehensive data system to use for improving policy and practice. The group will also oversee development and implementation of privacy, confidentiality and security safeguards, so that the data are protected in accordance and applicable laws, Executive order 504, and MOU agreements with the various programs and departments participating in the system. The goals articulated within the plan include a)providing policy makers with information about early learning and development programs that is able to be disaggregated at different levels and by different groupings of children, b)providing programs and services with information about the children there are serving to improve teaching and learning and ways of closing the gap between children with high needs and their peers, c)providing the opportunity for state agencies to learn about where children are being served by multiple systems, and d)providing parents/families with information about learning and development programs that are available to support their children's learning. The Early Education Advisory Council (EEC) has established eight Core Competencies for Early Education and Care and Out-of-School Time Educators (Core Competencies). These competencies are linked to the three tools, a)the Infant/Toddler Early learning Guidelines, b)Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences and c)the Pre-K Common Core Standards and are utilized as a frame work for educators' development.

#### Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	Yes

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

Comments on (P)(3)
The Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)is set up to adhere to all essential learning domains of school readiness and will be used to monitor learning progress in kindergarten. Currently the state allows the use of three different formative tools. These tools are aligned to the Pre-K Common Core Standards and will be included within the Statewide Assessment System. Additional validations processes will be undertaken to assure that the three tools are aligned with the state's TQRIS; and will be used relative to dissemination of data in the longitudinal system. The state met both the criteria related to implementation of a kindergarten assessment with all the necessary domains.

#### Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

#### Comments on Absolute Priority

The state does have a high quality plan to promote early learning and development outcomes, train the workforce, measure outcomes and progress, engage families, particularly those with high need children, and collect and use data to inform program direction and determine the impact of policy on children's readiness for kindergarten. The infrastructure and existing building blocks, such as the Early Childhood Act, partnerships with community cultural organizations, the IHEs roles, the established six regional training centers, and the collaborative agreements with all state and federal programs that serve pre-k-school learners will give the state an edge in accomplishing the various activities and strategies articulated within the state plan.