

Race to the Top/Early Learning Challenge Application
Summary of Illinois Plan
10/19/11

(A)(1): Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development

Illinois' list of investments, innovative policy and practice, and intentionality in early learning are a source of pride in our state. There is also stark recognition that thousands of Illinois children enter kindergarten each year without the developmental foundation for success. It is for these children that hundreds of parents, teachers, policy makers, elected officials, professionals, and advocates have participated in creating Illinois' blueprint for reaching our vision of all children entering kindergarten safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed. Illinois has a tremendous foundation on which we continue to build, day-by-day and year by year. The State's Early Learning Challenge Plan will allow Illinois to make the "big leap forward" in systems building that is required to bring our vision to fruition.

(A)(2): Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda

Illinois' Vision

- Illinois comprehensively supports learning from birth through kindergarten entry and beyond.
- A system of universal supports for every child and family, as well as targeted interventions every child with high needs should receive to support early learning and development and school readiness.

Early Learning and Development System Needs

- Lack of integration of the child care and early education systems
- Under-enrollment of Children with High Needs
- Shortage of high quality child care
- Insufficient effective, personalized instruction in Early Learning and Development Programs
- Lack of data integration and availability to support effective systems

Overall Goals for Improving Child Outcomes and Closing the School Readiness Gap (by 12/31/15)

- Increase the percentage of children who enter kindergarten demonstrating "full readiness" on the KIDS Kindergarten Entry Measure to no less than 80% of all children and 65% of Children with High Needs within five years of statewide implementation of KIDS.
- By December, 2015, increase to at least 75% the percentage of Children with High Needs who have at least one year of participation in a high-quality (Star Level 4 or 5) Early Learning and Development Program prior to kindergarten entry.

- By December, 2015, increase to at least 40% the percentage of Children with High Needs who have two years or more years of participation in a high quality Early Learning and Development Program prior to kindergarten entry.
- By December, 2015, increase to at least 15% the percentage of Children with High Needs who receive five years of high quality early learning services before kindergarten, including home visiting services or Star Level 4 or 5 early care and education in the infant and toddler years.

Strategic Reform Priorities

1. Deepening the integration of state supports to create a unified framework for all early learning and development programs
2. Connecting the most at-risk children with the supports and services they need
3. Increasing program quality: from adequate to good and from good to great

(A)(3): Aligning and Coordinating Early Learning and Development Across the State

- Early Learning Challenge Leadership Team:
 - Core Leadership Group: ELC Co-Chairs, State Superintendent, Secretary of DHS, Director of DCFS, and the Illinois Head Start State Collaboration Office Director
 - Policy and Implementation Advisory Group: Representatives of communities, programs, and private sector leadership nominated by ELC
- ELC Outcomes Measurement System
- Coordinated Early Learning Budget Proposal
- Stakeholder Engagement and Involvement
- Public reporting on Plan's implementation, aligned to P-20 Council report card redesign
- New "B-8 Interagency Implementation Center" integrates early learning management staff across agencies into a coordinated structure
- "Quality Consortia" provide coordinated implementation supports for key reforms:
 - Consortium for Workforce Development
 - Consortium for Quality Improvement
 - Consortium for Community Systems Development
 - Consortium for Early Learning Research
- Illinois Early Learning Challenge Intergovernmental Agreement includes commitments by ISBE, DHS, DCFS, Early Learning Council, and OECD to implement the plan

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

- Leveraging existing funding streams
- Focus on one-time systems building, not new programs or services
- Establish evidence regarding the effectiveness of the system needed to inspire and inform future resource commitments
- History of public-private partnership and broad-based support

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

- Illinois Birth to Five Program Standards
- Redesign of Quality Counts
- Implement the new Quality Counts Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and revise as necessary after two years of implementation
- Revise Quality Counts criteria for Family Child Care Homes and integrate Quality Counts into the Day Care Licensing system

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

- Enroll all Head Start and PFA sites by 7/1/12
- Enroll all City of Chicago-funded child care centers on an accelerated timeframe
- Revised licensing regulations include automatic enrollment after 7/1/12 upon initial licensing or renewal
- Increase access to of high-quality full-day, year round child care, especially in Concentrated High Need Communities
- Complete a study of true cost of care at various star levels and revise reimbursement policies and rates to better reflect these true costs Remove policy barriers to high-quality service delivery
- Address gaps in availability of facilities for high quality programs

(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs

- Develop an integrated Quality Counts monitoring process across child care, PFA, and Head Start/Early Head Start
- Dramatically increase the number of center-based and school-based programs that are assessed through Quality Counts
- Implement a public awareness campaign to ensure parents have access to information about program quality and licensing history for all programs

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

- Develop and implement a "Roadmap to Quality" process for supporting programs interested in increasing their Star Level Rating
- Integrate training supported by ISBE, IDHS, and Head Start/Early Head Start grantees through the Gateways Registry and align trainings with credential requirements
- Increase the number of programs that braid multiple funding streams to support high quality

- Provide intensive professional development to Star Level 4 programs to raise the level of instructional quality they provide
- Intentionally recruit Children with High Needs through Community Collaborations and “Hard to Reach” pilot projects
- Expand the number of Preschool for All and Head Start slots integrated into full day, year round programs or linked to family child care
- Target any expansion funding for Preschool for All to those communities with the largest number of unserved Children with High Needs

(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System

- Detailed plan for validation study, including a rigorous child outcomes study

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

- Adopt revised Illinois Early Learning & Development Standards
- Develop tools to integrate revised Standards into all Early Learning and Development Programs
- Develop web-based supports for use of Early Learning and Development Standard
- Provide extensive training on the revised Standards

(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems

- The number of Early Childhood Educators that are highly skilled in using formative assessments to inform individualized instruction aligned with the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards is increased by 800.
- Develop high-quality training and college coursework curricula on formative assessment and standards-oriented early childhood instruction
- Establish high-quality, comprehensive professional development including establishing Professional Learning Communities in Preschool for All/Head Start/Early Head Start programs
- Develop a cadre of highly skilled coach-mentors to work with Early Childhood Educators on implementing effective, standards-oriented instruction
- The number of leaders of Early Learning and Development Programs (principals, directors, education managers, curriculum coordinators, etc.) that are highly skilled in supporting standards-oriented early childhood instruction is increased by 200.
- Strengthen the skills of early childhood program leaders to support the implementation of effective, standards-oriented instruction

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families

- Embedded in program standards, Quality Counts, and educator training
- Develop the Family Worker/Family Specialist Credential
- Community collaborations develop or link to existing SFI Network
- Strategies and action to ensure authentic parent voice in community collaborations
- Develop parent leaders as a strategy to engage "hard to reach" families

(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials

- Incorporate revised Early Learning & Development Standards into the career lattice and corresponding credential frameworks
- Incorporate TQRIS training into the Credentials Framework
- Increase the number of administrators holding the Illinois Director Credential
- Add new Gateways credentials focused on family engagement and awareness
- Increase the number of "entitled institutions" and increase the number of students obtaining their credentials through the entitled credential route

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

- Require Gateways to Opportunity Registry membership for all ECEs
- Expand trainings included and the functionality of the Gateways to Opportunity Statewide Online Training Calendar
- Support ECE career advancement through individualized career counseling and assistance
- Increase targeted supports to improve the effectiveness and professional development opportunities in critical areas of need: early math instruction; using assessments and data to inform individualized instruction; and serving culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse populations
- Expand funding through the Scholarship Program for ECEs to complete the coursework necessary to obtain ESL or bilingual approval or endorsement

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry

- RSFP for KIDS instrument to be issued by Oct. 19
- Instrument selected will be piloted in 2012-13 in a variety of districts
- Substantial statewide implementation in 2013-14
- Full state implementation in 2014-15
- Coupled with extensive PD, communications campaign, and validation study
- Include families in the KIDS process

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

- Establish the legal and governance framework for data sharing among State agencies
- Establish “primary systems” for data integration:
 - Children & Families: ISBE SIS/Illinois Common Identifier Project
 - Workforce: Gateways to Opportunity Registry
 - Program: Data Tracking Program
- Extension of Common Education Data Standards to all early childhood data
- Illinois Head Start Data Cooperative
- Data for Community Systems Project to support community collaboration
- Integrate Referral, Tracking, and Program Information Systems to Ensure All High Need Children Receive a Broad Array of Necessary Supports
- Leverage philanthropic and state investment in Illinois Shared Learning Environment to extend to early childhood programs

Competitive Priority 2: All licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs are included in the Illinois Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by no later than June 30, 2015

- Consult with a stakeholder task force on the content of the administrative rules for small day care homes
- Complete the administrative rulemaking process and obtain funding for implementation of a 3-year phased in licensing process
- Undertake outreach and education on the new requirements
- Integrate licensing and State regulation of Early Learning and Development Programs with TQRIS