

Opportunities for Strengthening Families in the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge

Executive Summary

The \$500 million federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) state grant competition is intended to propel a handful of states to dramatically improve the quality of early learning and development programs serving high-need children. The RTT-ELC Application for Initial Funding (CFDA Number 84.412), released August 23, 2011, signals the Obama Administration's recognition that parents are important partners in any effort to promote children's optimal development.

In many places, the RTT-ELC criteria align closely with the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework. RTT-ELC includes two critical features that create opportunities for states seeking to broaden or deepen their Strengthening Families work:

1. **Family engagement.** The application identifies “family engagement strategies” as one of the key building blocks to a high quality Early Learning and Development System¹ and offers states opportunities to incorporate them into their Program Standards, Tiered Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems, Comprehensive Assessment System and Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework for all Early Learning and Development programs and professionals.
2. **Parent Partnerships.** RTT-ELC also emphasizes the importance of involving and supporting parents as decision-makers and leaders at all levels, and includes criteria by which states will be assessed for their efforts and plans to do so.

States have an unprecedented opportunity to use RTT-ELC to broaden and deepen their Strengthening Families efforts statewide using the three “levers for change” that facilitate implementation of the Protective Factors Framework at the program level and statewide – policy and systems, parent partnerships, and professional development. This document identifies 10 objectives (see p. 2 below) that states can consider including within their RTT-ELC applications. Strengthening Families leadership teams can use this information to:

- Call attention to existing Strengthening Families work and identify “easy points” the state can earn by including information and data about Strengthening Families-related policies, funding and cross-agency collaboration within the state's baseline data in the RTT-ELC application
- Propose concrete policies and actions that the state can include in its RTT-ELC State Plan to broaden and deepen Strengthening Families statewide

¹ Where applicable, Capitalized Terms in this document are those specifically defined in the Race to the Top Early Learning Fund Application for Initial Funding (CFDA Number: 84.412). See Appendix A of this report for relevant definitions, excerpted from the application.

Strengthening Families: Ten State Objective Opportunities in Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge

State Strengthening Families Objective		
Lever for Change	Policy and Systems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incorporate Strengthening Families into Statewide Program Quality Standards 2. Incorporate Strengthening Families into a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) 3. Contribute to Design of and Participate in Monitoring Systems Established to Guide Implementation and Evaluate Impact at the Program and State Level 4. Use Strengthening Families to Support Family Friend and Neighbor Care 5. Engage New Partners, Link Programs, Leverage Resources 6. Connect with K-3 Education
	Parent Partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Involve Parents in State Planning and Implementation 8. Support Parents as Leaders and Decision-makers
	Professional Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Incorporate the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factor Framework into an Early Learning and Development Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework 10. Train More Early Childhood Educators on the Protective Factors and Strengthening Families Program Strategies

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Overview

CSSP, in partnership with the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, submitted comments to the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services recommending that the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (ETT-ELC) grant opportunity value parents as their children’s first teachers and signal to states the importance of engaging parents as decision-makers and leaders. The RTT-ELC Application for Initial Funding criteria reflect this dual message in many areas, creating multiple opportunities for states to adopt policy and systems changes that will facilitate broader and deeper implementation of CSSP’s Strengthening Families Approach.

The final RTT-ELC application establishes a broad vision and roadmap for states to develop a high quality early learning and development system, while offering flexibility over how to build that system based on an individual state’s unique situation and priorities. In their applications, states must demonstrate a commitment to building coordinated systems, aligning resources and policies, and increasing access to high-quality early learning and development programs for children who need them most. To this end, the application establishes a single Absolute Priority: Promoting school readiness for Children with High-Needs. There are two Competitive Priorities for which states can receive up to 10 points each (out of 300 possible points) related to the inclusion of all programs in a Tiered Quality Ratings and Improvement System (QRIS), and understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry. Two invitational priorities, for which states do not earn extra points, address sustaining program effects in the early elementary grades and encouraging private sector support.

RTT-ELC will focus on *five key areas of reform*:

Core Areas are those which ***all states*** must address in their applications:

- A. Establishing *Successful State Systems* (65 points) by building on the state’s existing strengths, ambitiously moving forward the state’s early learning and development agenda, and carefully coordinating programs across agencies to ensure consistency and sustainability beyond the grant
- B. Defining *High-Quality, Accountable Programs* (75 points) by creating a common tiered quality rating and improvement system that is used across the state to evaluate and improve program performance and to inform families about program quality

Focused Investment Areas are those in which states must meet a minimum specified number of selection criteria within each area:

- C. *Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children* (60 points) to develop common standards within the state and assessments that measure child outcomes, address behavioral and health needs, as well as inform, engage and support families
- D. *Supporting A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce* (40 points) by providing professional development, career advancement opportunities, appropriate compensation and a common set of standards for workforce knowledge and competencies
- E. *Measuring Outcomes and Progress* (40 points) so that data can be used to inform early learning instruction and services and to assess whether children are entering kindergarten ready to succeed in elementary school

[For a more detailed breakdown of the priorities and criteria, see *Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge: Summary of Requirements, Priorities, and Selection Criteria* from the Early Learning Challenge Collaborative, available [here](#).]

Opportunities to Support Strengthening Families

According to the RTT-ELC application, “This competition represents an unprecedented opportunity for States to focus deeply on their birth through five early learning and development systems and build a more unified approach to supporting young children *and their families* — one that increases access and quality and helps ensure that children enter kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they need to be successful.” The priorities and selection criteria aim to establish a comprehensive approach with a focus on “*giving families the information and support they need to encourage their child’s development and learning* and to select the best program for their child.” (RTT-ELC Application for Initial Funding, p. 3, emphasis added)

RTT-ELC includes two critical features that create opportunities for states seeking to broaden or deepen their Strengthening Families work:

1. The application identifies “family engagement strategies” as one of the key building blocks to a high quality Early Learning and Development System.
2. RTT-ELC includes opportunities for supporting parent leadership and involvement at the program and state level.

In many places, the RTT-ELC criteria align closely with the Strengthening Families Approach, Protective Factors Framework, and Program Strategies. States therefore have an unprecedented opportunity to broaden and deepen their Strengthening Families efforts statewide. The following sections identify the opportunities within RTT-ELC to use the three levers for change that are the key to implementing, growing and sustaining Strengthening Families over time:

- Policy and Systems
- Parent Partnerships
- Professional Development

Each section below identifies potential objectives that states may want to pursue, highlights the relevant RTT-ELC application criteria and language to each objective, and offers suggested points that Strengthening Families leadership teams and state RTT-ELC planners may wish to consider as they participate in developing the State RTT-ELC Plan (State Plan) and budget request for their RTT-ELC application. Appendix A provides a matrix that aligns the state objectives with the relevant RTT-ELC application language and required supporting evidence.

Lever: Policy and Systems

RTT-ELC includes opportunities for states to integrate Strengthening Families into policies and systems that support high quality Early Learning and Development Programs.

State Objective 1: Incorporate Strengthening Families into statewide program quality standards

RTT-ELC Application:

Under Core Area A: Successful State Systems, RTT-ELC will assess the extent to which a state has or plans to establish “family engagement strategies” that are applicable to the full range of early learning and development programs including subsidized child care, early intervention, Early Head Start, Head Start and prekindergarten programs.

Within Focused Investment Area C: Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, states can choose to address “Engaging and supporting families” (C)(4) as one of two minimum selection criteria in their State Plans. Under this section, a state must address how it will provide, “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; . . .”

Also, under Section (C)(3), states must describe their plans to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of High Need Children by, among other actions, “promoting children’s physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;” and “ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur”.

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- As depicted in Table 1 below, RTT-ELC’s description of family engagement strategies closely aligns with the seven Strengthening Families Program Strategies. States can make a clear case for using Strengthening Families as a framework and basis for a set of family engagement strategies.

Table 1. Cross-Walk of Strengthening Families Program Strategies and RTT-ELC Description of Family Engagement Strategies

Strengthening Families Program Strategies:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support | 5. Value and Support Parents |
| 2. Strengthen Parenting | 6. Facilitate Children’s Social and Emotional Development |
| 3. Respond to Family Crises | 7. Observe and Respond to Early Warning Signs of Abuse and Neglect |
| 4. Link Families to Services and Opportunities | |

RTT-ELC Family Engagement Strategies	Alignment with SF Program Strategy
Parent access to the program	SF program strategy 1, 5
Ongoing two-way communication with families	SF program strategy – All
Parent education in child development	SF program strategy 2
Outreach to fathers and other family members	SF program strategy 1, 2, 5, 6
Training and support for families as children move to preschool and kindergarten	SF program strategy 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Social networks of support	SF program strategy 1
Intergenerational activities	SF program strategy 1, 2, 6
Linkages with community supports and family literacy programs	SF program strategy 4
Parent involvement in decision making	SF program strategy 1, 5
Parent leadership development	SF program strategy 1, 2, 5

- For Focused Investment Area C, the 60 available points will be divided equally among the selection criteria that the state chooses to address. States that have robust policies and infrastructure already in place to support implementation of Strengthening Families may be in the best position to argue for the selection of (C)(4) Engaging and Supporting Families among the chosen criteria in this area as an “easy win” for gaining points for existing policies and efforts. In

this case, Strengthening Families leaders can propose using RTT-ELC to further expand these efforts. Even those states without deep implementation to date, Strengthening Families offers a framework, tools, resources, and examples from other states to pursue the criteria with a clear plan.

- Respective to Section (C)(3), the Strengthening Families Program Strategies that facilitate children’s social and emotional development are aligned to the criteria, therefore states choosing to pursue this Focused Investment Area can emphasize this connection to support incorporation of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors into their program standards.

State Objective 2: Incorporate Strengthening Families into a Quality Ratings and Improvement System (QRIS)

RTT-ELC Application:

Under Core Area B: High Quality, Accountable Programs, a state must have in place, or plan to develop, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards which include the state’s family engagement strategies. Also under Core Area B, the QRIS must have standards that are measurable and “reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children.”

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

Strengthening Families leadership teams can use the following points to call for adoption of the Strengthening Families Approach to inform their state family engagement strategies under Section B:

- Strengthening Families is grounded in research and has national recognition as an initiative that is changing program practice on ground to build on family strengths, buffer risk, and promote better outcomes for children and families.
- The Strengthening Families program self-assessment offers a ready-made tool to measure their implementation.
- Many examples already exist of states’ incorporation of the Strengthening Families Approach into QRIS standards.

State Objective 3: Monitor implementation and evaluate impact at the program and state level

RTT-ELC Application:

Under section E: Measuring Outcomes and Progress offers, states can choose “Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies” as the Focused Investment Area addressed in the State Plan. Under (E)(2)(d) states can address the extent to which the State Plan, “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. . .”

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- Within Section (E)(2), states have an opportunity to incorporate use of the online Strengthening Families data tools to capture program-level and aggregated state-level information on how programs are implementing the Strengthening Families Program Strategies. The Strengthening Families online tools can serve an important role in helping programs deepen Strengthening Families implementation, keep track of their work and evaluate its impact on parents and staff.

For administrators working with multiple programs within a state or a locality, the online tools can provide aggregate data to target technical assistance and support and assess the impact of Strengthening Families across programs.

State Objective 4: Use Strengthening Families to Support Family Friend and Neighbor Care

RTT-ELC Application:

States choosing to address the family engagement standards under Focused Investment Area C are also asked to address how they will promote 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.”

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

Research shows that FFN providers often have similar needs and characteristics of the parents of the children in their care. As many states are demonstrating, the Strengthening Families Protective Factors are useful for framing and informing strategies to support FFN providers. Creative approaches include through Play & Learn groups, Community Cafes, free training and workshops, and stipends and support for FFN providers to participate.

State Objective 5: Engage New Partners, Link Programs, Leverage Resources

RTT-ELC Application:

In the Introduction section, the RTT-ELC application states that the grant is will “support States that demonstrate their commitment to integrating and aligning resources and policies across all of the State agencies that administer public funds related to early learning and development.” (Introduction, p. 6)

Under RTT-ELC Core Area A: Successful State Systems, required partners at the planning and implementation table include those agencies that administer child care subsidies, early intervention, prekindergarten, maternal and child health, and Head Start state collaboration resources. The State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care, the State’s Child Care Licensing Agency, and the State Education Agency are also required. Other State agencies may also participate, but are not required, such as the agencies that administer or supervise the administration of Child Welfare, Mental Health, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

Also under Core Area A: Successful State Systems, states will be assessed on their history of financial investment over the last five years (2007 – 2011) in Early Learning and Development Programs, and on the extent to which the State Plan will use existing funds across a broad range of Federal, State, private and local sources.

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- As states have found, Strengthening Families can serve as a platform for coordination across diverse initiatives since it is based on research, used by different disciplines and focuses on goals held in common by several departments and agencies. For state Strengthening Families leadership teams seeking to engage new partners and/or share the Strengthening Families approach with other agencies, RTT-ELC presents an opportunity to do so around a concrete set of tasks.

- Given the application's emphasis on family engagement, collaboration and integration of policies and resources, Strengthening Families leadership teams have an opportunity to make a strong case for the incorporation of Strengthening Families efforts into the State Plan. For those already at the table, the wide range of additional participating agencies and stakeholders may present an opportunity to reach new audiences and spark interest in Strengthening Families among new potential partners.
- The required financial history under Core Area A presents an opportunity for Strengthening Families leadership teams to highlight the innovative approaches to financing Strengthening Families implementation efforts and recommend inclusion of Strengthening Families financing in the RTT-ELC plan. The funding streams identified include traditional early learning and development funding streams (state funded preschool, early intervention, state contributions and match to CCDF, TANF spending). However, states can demonstrate how they are using other sources, such as CBCAP, child welfare, home visiting, and other funds to support Strengthening Families implementation in early learning and development programs and systems. This not only raises the "total" state investment, but also demonstrates a track record for strategic leveraging of available resources.

State Objective 6: Connect with K-3 Education

RTT-ELC Application:

If a state opts to include a focus on Priority 4 (Invitational) – Sustaining Program Effects in the Early Elementary Grades, points to focus on include the Departments' interest as stated in criteria (b) *Ensuring that transition planning occurs for children moving from Early Learning and Development Programs to elementary schools;* (c) *Promoting health and family engagement, including in the early grades;* and (e) *Leveraging existing Federal, State, and local resources.*(p 26)

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- Strengthening Families offers a powerful approach to support positive transitions and sustain the gains and strong parent-teacher relationships from high quality Early Learning and Development Programs. Emerging evidence associates Strengthening Families with improvements in the skills, relationships and confidence parents need to be effective advocates for their children during and after their children's transition to kindergarten. Among the five Protective Factors that are the foundation of the CSSP's Strengthening Families approach, research suggests that the three most particularly related to school transition are the family's social connections, the family's knowledge of parenting and child development, and the child's social and emotional competence.
- Strengthening Families is based on changing the attitudes and perceptions of both parents and teachers and creating new ways of linking families to other resources they can use to help their children. The emphasis is on small but significant changes in daily practices that are often low- or no-cost to programs or schools. It therefore can be incorporated and used effectively by any school district without a large expenditure of funds.
- Several tools already exist that can be easily adapted to the school environment to support successful implementation. These include the Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment, which could be adapted for schools and classrooms; and the use of the Community Café technology to create conversations between and among parents, teachers and school administrators that build on the Protective Factors, engage parents and create positive relationships between school and parents.

Lever: Parent Partnerships

RTT-ELC includes an emphasis on involving parents and families in state planning and implementation, and on supporting parent leadership development at the program and state level.

State Objective 7: Involve Parents in State Planning and Implementation

RTT-ELC Application:

Under Core Area A: Successful State Systems, all states are required to describe the extent to which they have (or plan to establish) strong participation and commitment to the State Plan by key stakeholders, including parents and families, in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the RTT-ELC grant. Required evidence includes letters of intent or support from “family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations and community-based organizations).”

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

Strengthening Families state leaders can call on existing parent advisory councils at the program, community or state level to offer letters of support to the State Plan in exchange for incorporation of policies and actions within the Plan that will build Protective Factors and empower parents as decision makers and leaders. States can also use RTT-ELC as an opportunity to establish formal roles for parents in state level decision making bodies, for example, by establishing a statewide Parent Advisory Council or designating seats for parent representatives on the Early Learning Advisory Council or similar coordinated governance body, and by establishing or strengthening systems for developing parent leadership.

State Objective 8: Support Parents as Leaders and Decision-makers

RTT-ELC Application:

As mentioned above, Within Focused Investment Area C: Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, states can choose to address “Engaging and supporting families” (C)(4) as one of two minimum selection criteria in their State Plans. RTT-ELC includes in its definition of family engagement standards, “social networks of support,” “parent involvement in decision-making” and “parent leadership development.”

Under section C, states must document where they already or plan to coordinate efforts and use existing resources “to promote family support and engagement statewide, including through home visiting programs and other family-serving agencies and the identification of new resources that will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide.”

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- Parent Cafés and Community Cafés, parent advisory committees, social activities, parent education and leadership training – all of these activities that states and programs are implementing under the mantle of Strengthening Families align with RTT-ELC’s definition and required evidence of family engagement strategies.
- States can highlight the creative financing efforts they are using to support Strengthening Families implementation, from such sources as federal CBCAP and/or state child abuse

prevention dollars, federal home visiting grant funding, federal Child Care Development Fund quality set-aside funds, etc.

Lever: Professional Development

State Objective 9: Incorporate Strengthening Families within an Early Learning and Development Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework

RTT-ELC Application:

Under Focused Investment Area (D): A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, states can choose option (D)(1) to develop a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials. RTT-ELC defines this Framework such that it should incorporate knowledge and application of culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies for working with families as well as effective behavior management strategies that promote positive social emotional development and reduce challenging behaviors. The framework applies to Early Childhood Educators, which RTT-ELC defines as any professional working in an Early Learning and Development Program, including but not limited to center-based and family child care providers; infant and toddler specialists; early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators; home visitors; related services providers; administrators such as directors, supervisors, and other early learning and development leaders; Head Start teachers; Early Head Start teachers; preschool and other teachers; teacher assistants; family service staff; and health coordinators.

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- These parameters offer opportunities for integrating the Strengthening Families Approach into the family engagement aspects of their Workforce Knowledge and Competency Frameworks. They also accommodate a broad range of professionals that states may already be reaching with their Strengthening Families training and professional development efforts.
- States opting to address section (D)(2) to support Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities can use RTT-ELC to support and expand incentives and supports for training on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors and other related content. The best case can be made to do so when Strengthening Families is clearly incorporated into the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. If so, the state can also use RTT-ELC to support improvement and career advancement along a pathway that includes Strengthening Families advanced training, specialization or other designation of professional expertise

State Objective 10: Train more Early Childhood Educators on the Protective Factors and Strengthening Families Program Strategies

RTT-ELC Application:

Focused Investment Area C (4) requires states to address how they plan to train and support early childhood educators to implement the state-developed family engagement strategies.

Strengthening Families Points to Consider:

- States that offer PCAN training or other training curricula that incorporate the Strengthening Families approach can propose expanding or adding this training to its plan to meet this requirement. States should give consideration to how the family engagement strategies and the trainings it proposes align to the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework under Focused Investment Area D, discussed above.

Appendix A: Relevant Definitions

Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge

Definition of Terms relevant to Strengthening Families (Excerpts from Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, Application for Initial Funding, CFDA Number: 84.412)

Children with High Needs means children from birth through kindergarten entry who are from low-income families or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, including children who have disabilities or developmental delays; who are English learners; who reside on “Indian lands” as that term is defined by section 8013(6) of the ESEA; who are migrant, homeless, or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.

Early Childhood Educator means any professional working in an Early Learning and Development Program, including but not limited to center-based and family child care providers; infant and toddler specialists; early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators; home visitors; related services providers; administrators such as directors, supervisors, and other early learning and development leaders; Head Start teachers; Early Head Start teachers; preschool and other teachers; teacher assistants; family service staff; and health coordinators.

Early Learning and Development Program means any (a) State-licensed or State-regulated program or provider, regardless of setting or funding source, that provides early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry, including, but not limited to, any program operated by a child care center or in a family child care home; (b) preschool program funded by the Federal Government or State or local educational agencies (including any IDEA-funded program); (c) Early Head Start and Head Start program; and (d) a non-relative child care provider who is not otherwise regulated by the State and who regularly cares for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting. A State should include in this definition other programs that may deliver early learning and development services in a child’s home, such as the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting; Early Head Start; and part C of IDEA².

Participating State Agency means a State agency that administers public funds related to early learning and development and is participating in the State Plan. The following State agencies are required Participating State Agencies: the agencies that administer or supervise the administration of CCDF, the section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA programs, State-funded preschool, home visiting, Title I of ESEA, the Head Start State Collaboration Grant, and the Title V Maternal and Child Care Block Grant, as well as the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care, the State’s Child Care Licensing Agency, and the State Education Agency. Other State agencies, such as the agencies that administer or supervise the administration of Child Welfare, Mental Health, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) may be Participating State Agencies if they elect to participate in the State Plan.

Program Standards means the standards that serve as the basis for a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and define differentiated levels of quality for Early Learning and Development Programs. Program Standards are expressed, at a minimum, by the extent to which--

² Note: Such home-based programs and services will most likely not participate in the State’s Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System unless the State has developed a set of Tiered Program Standards specifically for home-based programs and services.

(a) Early Learning and Development Standards are implemented through evidence-based activities, interventions, or curricula that are appropriate for each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers;

(b) Comprehensive Assessment Systems are used routinely and appropriately to improve instruction and enhance program quality by providing robust and coherent evidence of--

(1) Children's learning and development outcomes; and

(2) program performance;

(c) A qualified workforce improves young children's health, social, emotional, and educational outcomes;

(d) Strategies are successfully used to engage families in supporting their children's development and learning. These strategies may include, but are not limited to, parent access to the program, ongoing two-way communication with families, parent education in child development, outreach to fathers and other family members, training and support for families as children move to preschool and kindergarten, social networks of support, intergenerational activities, linkages with community supports and adult and family literacy programs, parent involvement in decision making, and parent leadership development;

(e) Health promotion practices include health and safety requirements; developmental, behavioral, and sensory screening, referral, and follow up; and the promotion of physical activity, healthy eating habits, oral health and behavioral health, and health literacy among parents; and

(f) Effective data practices include gathering Essential Data Elements and entering them into the State's Statewide Longitudinal Data System or other early learning data system, using these data to guide instruction and program improvement, and making this information readily available to families.

Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System means the system through which the State uses a set of progressively higher Program Standards to evaluate the quality of an Early Learning and Development Program and to support program improvement. A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System consists of four components: (a) tiered Program Standards with multiple rating categories that clearly and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels; (b) monitoring to evaluate program quality based on the Program Standards; (c) supports to help programs meet progressively higher standards (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial support); and (d) program quality ratings that are publically available; and includes a process for validating the system.

Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework means a set of expectations that describes what Early Childhood Educators (including those working with children with disabilities and English learners) should know and be able to do. The Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, at a minimum, (a) is evidence-based; (b) incorporates knowledge and application of the State's Early Learning and Development Standards, the Comprehensive Assessment Systems, child development, health, and culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies for working with families; (c) includes knowledge of early mathematics and literacy development and effective instructional practices to support mathematics and literacy development in young children; (d) incorporates effective use of data to guide instruction and program improvement; (e) includes effective behavior management strategies that promote positive social emotional development and reduce challenging behaviors; and (f) incorporates feedback from experts at the State's postsecondary institutions and other early learning and development experts and Early Childhood Educators.

Appendix B: Matrices of State Objectives, RTT-ELC Language & Required Evidence

Lever for Change: Policy and Systems

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
<p>Incorporate Strengthening Families approach into QRIS tiers</p>	<p><i>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. (10 points)</i> <i>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--</i> <i>(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--</i> <i>(1) Early Learning and Development Standards;</i> <i>(2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;</i> <i>(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;</i> <i>(4) Family engagement strategies;</i> <i>(5) Health promotion practices; and</i> <i>(6) Effective data practices;</i> <i>(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 standards³ that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and</i> <i>(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.</i></p>	<p><i>Evidence for (B)(1):</i> <i>To the extent the State has developed and adopted a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System based on a common set of tiered Program Standards that meet the elements in criterion (B)(1)(a), submit--</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>o A copy of the tiered Program Standards;</i> <i>o Documentation that the Program Standards address all areas outlined in the definition of Program Standards, demonstrate high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards, and are linked to the States licensing system;</i> <i>o Documentation of how the tiers meaningfully differentiate levels of quality.</i>

³ See such nationally recognized standards as:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2009). Head Start Program Performance Standards. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. PDF retrieved from: 45 CFR Chapter XIII - 1301-1311

http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Head%20Start%20Program/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/Head%20Start%20Requirements/Head%20Start%20Requirements/45%20CFR%20Chapter%20XIII/45%20CFR%20Chap%20XIII_ENG.pdf

U.S. Department of Defense. DoD Instruction 6060.2, Child Development Programs (CDPs), January 19, 1993, certified as current August 25, 1998 (to be updated Fall 2011). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense. Retrieved from:

http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_DETAIL_1?section_id=20.60.500.100.0.0.0.0¤t_id=20.60.500.100.500.60.60.0.0

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2011) Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and education Programs. Elk Grove Village, IL; American Academy of Pediatrics.

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
<p>Monitor implementation and evaluate impact at the program and state level</p>	<p><i>(E)(2) <u>Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</u></i> <i>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--</i> <i>(a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;</i> <i>(b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;</i> <i>(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;</i> <i>(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;</i></p>	
<p>Use Strengthening Families to Support Family Friend and Neighbor Care</p>	<p><i>(C)(4) <u>Engaging and supporting families.</u></i> <i>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--</i> <i>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.</i></p>	<p><i>Evidence for (C)(4)(c):</i> <i>Documentation of the State's existing resources that are or will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide, including through home visiting programs and other family-serving agencies and the identification of new resources that will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide.</i></p>
<p>Connect with K-3 Education</p>	<p><i><u>Priority 4: Invitational Priority – Sustaining Program Effects in the Early Elementary Grades.</u></i> <i>The Departments are particularly interested in applications that describe the State's High-Quality Plan to sustain and build upon improved early learning outcomes throughout the early elementary school years, including by--</i> <i>(b) Enhancing the State's current standards for kindergarten through grade 3 to align them with the Early Learning and</i></p>	

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
	<p><i>Development Standards across all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</i></p> <p><i>(c) Ensuring that transition planning occurs for children moving from Early Learning and Development Programs to elementary schools;</i></p> <p><i>(e) Promoting health and family engagement, including in the early grades</i></p>	

Lever for Change: Parent Partnerships

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
<p>Involve Parents in State Planning and Implementation</p>	<p><i>(A)(3) <u>Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State.</u> (10 points)</i></p> <p><i>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--</i></p> <p><i>(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--</i></p> <p><i>(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</i></p>	<p><i>Evidence for (A)(3)(c)(2):</i></p> <p><i>The State shall include the evidence listed below and describe in its narrative how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State's success in meeting the criterion; the State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• A copy of every letter of intent or support from other stakeholders. (Letters should be referenced in the narrative but must be included in the Appendix with a table.)</i>

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
<p>Support parents as leaders and decision-makers at the program and state level</p>	<p><i>providers; and postsecondary institutions.</i></p> <p><i>(C)(4) <u>Engaging and supporting families.</u></i> <i>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—</i></p> <p><i>(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;</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><i>Evidence for (C)(4)(a):</i> <i>To the extent the State has established a progression of family engagement standards across the levels of Program Standards that meet the elements in criterion (C)(4)(a), submit--</i> <i>The progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate family engagement standards used in the Program Standards that includes strategies successfully used to engage families in supporting their children's development and learning. A State's family engagement standards must address, but need not be limited to: parent access to the program, ongoing two-way communication with families, parent education in child development, outreach to fathers and other family members, training and support for families as children move to preschool and kindergarten, social networks of support, intergenerational activities, linkages with community supports and adult and family literacy programs, parent involvement in decision-making, and parent leadership development; Documentation that this progression of standards includes activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development.</i></p> <p><i>Evidence for (C)(4)(c):</i> <i>Documentation of the State's existing resources that are or will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide, including through home visiting programs and other family-serving agencies and the identification of new resources that will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide.</i></p>

Lever for Change: Professional Development

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
Incorporate Strengthening Families within an Early Learning and Development Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework	<p><u>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</u> The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--</p> <p>(a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children’s learning and development and improve child outcomes;</p> <p>(b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State’s Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>	<p>Evidence for (D)(1): To the extent the State has developed a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework that meets the elements in criterion (D)(1), submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The Workforce Knowledge and Competencies; o Documentation that the State’s Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework addresses the elements outlined in the definition of Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework in Definitions (section III) and is designed to promote children’s learning and development and improve outcomes.
	<p><u>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</u> 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</p>	<p>Evidence for (D)(2) If the State chooses to respond to this selection criterion, the State shall write its full response in the text box below.</p> <p>The State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. In scoring the selection criterion, peer reviewers will determine, based on the evidence the State submits, whether each element of the selection criterion is implemented or planned; the quality of the implementation or plan (see the definition of a High-Quality Plan for the components reviewers will be judging); the extent to which the different types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State are included and addressed; and the extent to which the unique needs of the State’s special populations of Children with High Needs are considered and addressed. Additionally, the State must provide baseline data and set targets</p>

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
	<p><i>Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</i></p> <p><i>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</i></p> <p><i>(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</i></p> <p><i>(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.</i></p> <p><i>Definition: Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework means a set of expectations that describes what Early Childhood Educators (including those working with children with disabilities and English learners) should know and be able to do. The Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, at a minimum, (a) is evidence-based; (b) incorporates knowledge and application of the State's Early Learning and Development Standards, the Comprehensive Assessment Systems, child development, health, and culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies for working with families; (c) includes knowledge of early mathematics and literacy development and effective instructional practices to support mathematics and literacy development in young children; (d) incorporates effective use of data to guide instruction and program improvement; (e) includes effective behavior management strategies that promote positive social emotional development and reduce challenging behaviors; and (f)</i></p>	<p><i>for the performance measure under (D)(2)(d)(1) and (D)(2)(d)(2).</i></p>

State Strengthening Families Objective	RTT-ELC Language	RTT-ELC Evidence
<p>Train more Early Childhood Educators on the Protective Factors and Strengthening Families Program Strategies</p>	<p><i>incorporates feedback from experts at the State's postsecondary institutions and other early learning and development experts and Early Childhood Educators.</i></p> <p><i><u>Early Childhood Educator</u> means any professional working in an Early Learning and Development Program, including but not limited to center-based and family child care providers; infant and toddler specialists; early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators; home visitors; related services providers; administrators such as directors, supervisors, and other early learning and development leaders; Head Start teachers; Early Head Start teachers; preschool and other teachers; teacher assistants; family service staff; and health coordinators.</i></p> <p><i>(C)(4) <u>Engaging and supporting families.</u></i> <i>(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;</i></p>	<p><i>Evidence for (C)(4)(b):</i> <i>To the extent the State has existing and projected numbers and percentages of Early Childhood Educators who receive training and support on the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards, the State shall submit documentation of these data. If the State does not have these data, the State shall outline its plan for deriving them.</i></p>