

HOW ARE EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE GRANT RECIPIENTS TARGETING INFANTS AND TODDLERS?



In December 2011, nine states (California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington State) were awarded four-year Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grants ranging from approximately \$44 to 70 million to improve their early learning and development (ELD) systems. All of the grant recipients' plans will positively impact infants and toddlers through a variety of broad strategies such as: expanding participation in tiered quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), increasing access to high quality professional development, expanding and aligning early learning standards, and strengthening screening practices.

Some states targeted very young children specifically by including proposals focused on infants and toddlers. For example, North Carolina identified improving the quality of infant-toddler programs and increasing the number of high-quality infant-toddler slots as goals for their Transformation Zone. Rhode Island plans to develop early learning standards for infants and toddlers that, together with the existing preschool standards, will serve as the foundation for workforce competency frameworks, curricula, and child assessments. Maryland and Ohio are collaborating on a comprehensive assessment system that includes development of a new formative assessment for children birth to three. A snapshot listing some of the proposals states included in their plans that will benefit infants and toddlers is below.

California

- The state will invest the majority of its ELC funds (85%) in 16 regional consortia that will develop and implement local QRIS. The consortia have flexibility in terms of how the QRIS are designed, but all of them must be grounded in the state's Infant/Toddler and Preschool Early Learning Foundations. The consortia will share lessons learned and best practices with other communities across the state.
- The number of early childhood courses offered by state community colleges that are aligned throughout the community college system (meaning that a standard course is available at every college) will be increased. One of the new courses will focus on the Infant/Toddler Early Learning Foundations. Web-based training resources will also be developed by the state.
- In partnership with state home visiting efforts, Program for Infant Toddler Care (PITC) training will be targeted toward home visitors.

Delaware

- Delaware is redesigning its QRIS. Shifting away from a building block system to a hybrid/combination system, programs will now enter by meeting initial

threshold requirements and then will select indicators on which to earn “Quality Points” across four dimensions of practice. The state also recently adopted a tiered subsidy reimbursement for ELD programs participating in the QRIS to encourage participation. Programs at level five will be eligible to receive 100% of the market rate.

- Additional clinicians for the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program will be hired, doubling capacity so that all licensed programs will have access to consultation.
- A coordinated technical assistance (TA) infrastructure will be created with a TA Advisory Committee, STARS TA centers, and expansion of the STARS Plus pilot. STARS Plus is an intensified TA model that focuses on serving clusters of high need ELD programs in making quality improvement. ELC funding will allow 15 additional cohorts of 8-10 programs each to participate.

Maryland

- In collaboration with Ohio, Maryland will develop a new formative assessment for children birth to three. The two states will also develop training modules and professional development for the administration of this and other screening instruments.
- Two new Community Hubs will be created to provide comprehensive services to pregnant women, children from birth to kindergarten and their families, and child care providers. Hubs provide services such as parenting education, health education and access to health care, employment readiness activities, and facilitate access to services by offering service coordination, transportation, and meals.
- Training will be offered to pediatricians on developmental screening practices and to primary care providers to build their mental health capacity, including early childhood mental health detection and intervention.

Massachusetts

- ASQ/ASQ-SE toolkits will be provided to the 107 Coordinated Family & Community Engagement grant recipients and organizations involved in home visiting. By 2013, the state expects these organizations will be responsible for screening 50% of the birth to five population. A program that provides pediatricians with the tools and training they need to utilize the ASQ/ASQ-SE will also be expanded.
- The Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers, Preschool Learning Guidelines, and the Pre-K Common Core will be reviewed and aligned. Coaching and mentoring will be offered to ELD programs on how to embed the guidelines into curricula and classroom activities and link them to assessments.

- 500 stipends in the form of supplies, services, and TA (ranging in value from \$5,000 to \$10,000) will be provided to family child care, center-based and after school programs participating in the tiered QRIS to help them achieve higher levels of quality. Programs must agree to increase compensation for early childhood educators to receive funding.

Minnesota

- A variety of strategies will be employed to increase participation in Parent Aware, the state's QRIS, such as school readiness scholarships and individualized coaching to help programs develop a quality improvement plan before joining the QRIS. A new accelerated pathway to rating for Head Start, accredited center and home-based child care, and School Readiness programs will also be implemented.
- Additional support and incentives to expand high-quality ELD opportunities will be provided to school districts receiving Title I funding in the Target Communities. Four communities that have high childhood poverty and significant community infrastructure on which to build have been identified as Target Communities.
- Free and low-cost training toward the Minnesota Child Care Credential will be offered to cohorts of early childhood professionals working in Parent Aware-rated settings that serve a population of 25% or more high-need children.

North Carolina

- A Transformation Zone made up of rural, distressed counties with high needs in the northeast section of the state will be targeted for community building, infrastructure development, and implementation of evidence-based programs. Communities will work with coaches to choose which approved evidence-based programs they want to implement. Three options on the list focus on infants and toddlers: infant toddler specialists; high-quality infant toddler slot development, and universal home visiting with referrals.
- A full-time infant toddler specialist will be hired for the Transformation Zone to help programs improve the quality of settings serving infants and toddlers.
- Additional slots to serve infants and toddlers in high quality programs in the Transformation Zone will be created. In addition to TA, ELD programs will be eligible for slot development grants and higher subsidy rates for serving infants and toddlers. The goal is to create an additional 125 full-day and 110 half-day slots for infants and toddlers in 4- or 5-star settings.
- A policy requiring that subsidy management agencies maintain separate waiting lists for infants and toddlers, preschool age children, and school age children will be enacted to ensure children are provided equivalent access to subsidy between the three age groups.

Ohio

- Ohio and Maryland are collaborating on a comprehensive assessment system that includes development of a new formative assessment for children birth to three. The two states will also develop training modules and professional development for the administration of this and other screening instruments.
- The Infant Toddler Guidelines will be reviewed to strengthen the foundational skills relative to approaches to learning and aligned to the Pre-Kindergarten standards. The Pre-Kindergarten Content Standards are currently undergoing revision to incorporate all domains of school readiness.
- A pilot eliminating family co-payments for families receiving child care subsidies who choose highly rated ELD programs will be implemented.

Rhode Island

- Early Learning Standards for Infants and Toddlers will be developed. Along with the Preschool Early Learning Standards, they will form the basis for program standards, workforce knowledge and competency frameworks, curricula, and child assessments.
- Program quality improvement contracts (ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000) will be offered to ELD programs serving high numbers of children receiving child care subsidies.
- Watch Me Grow will be expanded to provide reliable developmental screening in primary health care settings in communities with large numbers of high-need children.

Washington State

- A tiered subsidy reimbursement for licensed centers and family child care homes participating in the QRIS will be implemented.
- Coaching and quality improvement awards will be offered to ELD programs that have been rated in the QRIS.
- Training on Early Learning and Development Benchmarks (birth to five), which are currently being revised, will be developed.

All of the ELC applications, along with the score sheets and reviewers' comments, are available on the U.S. Department of Education website. Download them [here](#).

*Author: Jamie Colvard, State Policy Analyst, ZERO TO THREE
January, 2012*