



First Five Years Fund

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge: Summary of Draft Requirements, Priorities, and Selection Criteria

On July 1, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services released draft requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. The Department of Education is accepting comments from the public until July 11, 2011, at 5:00 pm Eastern. The full document is available at www.ed.gov/early-learning/elc-draft-summary

Grant Size and Grant Period

The maximum amount each state may apply for is based on their relative population of low-income young children. The Departments can exercise discretion to ensure participation by states with high-poverty rural populations. The grant period is from December 31, 2011 to December 31, 2015.

Category 1	Up to \$100 million	CA, FL, NY, TX
Category 2	Up to \$70 million	AZ, GA, IL, MI, NC, OH, PA
Category 3	Up to \$60 million	AL, CO, IN, KY, LA, MO, NJ, OK, PR, SC, TN, VA, WA, WI
Category 4	Up to \$50 million	AK, AR, CT, DE, DC, HI, ID, IA, KS, ME, MD, MA, MN, MS, MT, NE, NH, NM, NV, ND, OR, RI, SD, UT, VT, WV, WY

Absolute, Competitive, and Invitational Priorities

Absolute priorities—must be addressed in application

- **Using early learning and development standards and kindergarten entry assessments to promote school readiness.**

States must coordinate learning standards, program standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development, and administer a kindergarten entry assessment.

- **Using tiered quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to promote school readiness.**

- States must implement and validate a QRIS with plans to increase participation in the QRIS, improve program quality, and educate parents and the public about program ratings—with a goal of increasing the number of high-need children in high-quality programs.

Competitive preference priority—applications addressing this can earn extra points

- **Including all early learning and development programs in the QRIS**

States are encouraged to extend licensing requirements to otherwise non-regulated care and to have all licensed or regulated programs participate in the QRIS.

Invitational priorities—areas of interest that do not earn applicants extra points

- **Sustaining program effects in the early elementary grades**

States can work on aligning K-3 standards with early learning standards, transition planning, family engagement, and achieving grade-level reading and math ability by third grade.

- **Encouraging private sector support**

The departments are interested in states' private sector financial and in-kind support.

Selection Criteria

These are the focal points of the application—states will address them in their narratives, and they will form the basis for reviewers' evaluations. For each criterion, states are asked to demonstrate prior progress or articulate a plan for achievement.

A. Successful State Systems

- Articulate an **ambitious yet achievable reform agenda** for improving program quality and child outcomes, with a clear path and consistent plan for achieving the state's goals.
- Establish **performance measures** that are disaggregated and include baselines, annual targets, and final goals for increasing the number and percentage of high-need children in high-quality programs and improving performance on kindergarten entry measures.
- Demonstrate **past commitment and investment**, including policies, practices, and access.
- Establish a **governance structure** that will support interagency coordination and integration. Articulate roles and responsibilities, decision-making, and scopes of work.
- Assure **broad local stakeholder commitment**.
- Build or enhance an **early learning data system**, which can be an extension of or aligned to an existing statewide longitudinal data system, that enables uniform data collection and exchange and generates timely, relevant, and accessible information for programs.
- Develop a **budget** that demonstrates how other federal, state, local, and private resources (including CCDF quality dollars) will align with, supplement, support, and sustain the plan.

B. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

- Develop, use, and promote commitment to **early learning and development standards**—defined as a set of guidelines describing what children should know and be able to do—across programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate and cover domains of language and literacy, cognition, approaches to learning, physical, and social and emotional development.
- **Incorporate learning standards** into program standards, curricula, assessments, workforce competencies, and professional development, and align them with K-3 standards.
- Implement **developmentally appropriate assessment systems** that include screening, formative assessments, and quality measures of environments and of adult-child interactions and educate programs and providers on its purposes, uses, and interpretations.
- Administer a statewide **kindergarten entry assessment** that is aligned with early learning standards, covers a corresponding breadth of domains, appropriate for all children, is reported to statewide data systems, and can be implemented by the 2014-15 school year.
- Address **health, behavioral, and developmental needs** by establishing standards and targets for screening and follow-up, promoting physical, social, and emotional development in program standards, and training and supporting providers to meet those standards. Promote ongoing health care, improved nutrition, and physical activity.
- **Engage and support families** by including family engagement in program standards, training providers in family engagement strategies, and leveraging home visiting programs and other existing resources to promote family support.

Selection Criteria (continued)

C. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

- Develop and adopt a tiered **QRIS based on common tiered program standards** that are linked to licensing and clearly, measurably, and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels and demonstrate high expectations for excellence.
- **Maximize participation in the QRIS**, with goals of having all publically-funded programs participate at an increasing rate as well as increasing the number of high-need children who are in programs that are in the QRIS and in its top tiers.
- Provide **supports to working families** to access high-quality programs that meet their needs for timing, duration, transportation, meals, and family support services.
- **Rate, monitor, and improve programs** participating in the QRIS using valid tools, trained monitors, and sufficient frequency. Make ratings readily available and easy to understand.
- Provide **incentives for continuous improvement** through training and technical assistance, financial rewards, subsidy reimbursement rates, or provider compensation.
- **Validate the QRIS** by linking ratings to children's learning outcomes.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

- Develop **workforce knowledge and competencies** (expectations for what educators should know and be able to do) that promote learning and improved child outcomes and correspond to a progression of credentials and degrees, professional development opportunities, and incentives for advancement.
- Set targets for **increasing retention rates** and the percentage of educators who progress through credentials.
- **Partner with higher education** and professional development providers to align their programs with the workforce competencies.

Program Requirements

- States must continue to participate in early intervention, CCDF, and home visiting programs and may not spend funds on direct delivery of health services.
- They must set aside 1 percent of grant funds for technical assistance activities, participate in any evaluation that ED or HHS chooses to fund, provide researchers with access to data, and make their work available to the public.
- They must have their longitudinal data system in place as per their agreement with ED, and they must comply with privacy laws.
- Funds must be used to supplement, not supplant, any federal, state, or local early learning funds.

Signatories and Assurances

- State agencies required to participate in developing the plan and sign the application include those that administer or supervise child care subsidies, IDEA early intervention, state preschool, home visiting, Title I, Head Start collaboration, the state early learning council, maternal and child health, child care licensing, and the State Education Agency.
- For each of those entities, the Lead Agency (one of the agencies mentioned above designated by the Governor as the fiscal agent) must attach a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) describing their level of participation in the grant and assuring the agencies will execute the policies and practices in the plan.
- To be eligible to apply, states must have an operational State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care.