# Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Program: Data Implications

On August 22, 2011, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS) jointly released the final application for the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) program, including priorities, requirements, definitions, and selection criteria.

RTT-ELC is a competitive state grant program designed to reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development.

Several aspects of the RTT-ELC program have implications for state data systems and would support effective data use. It also establishes definitions for Essential Data Elements for early learning and development data systems. This document summarizes these provisions.

## 1. Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to compete for RTT-ELC funds, a state must demonstrate, among other criteria that it has binding agreements among all agencies participating in the grant that will use, among other program standards, "effective data practices including gather Essential Data Elements and entering them into the State's SLDS or other early learning data systems, using these data to guide instruction and program improvement, and making this information readily available to families."

## 2. Grantee Requirements

A state that receives a grant must:

- Implement statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) that includes the 12 America COMPETES Act Elements, per the requirements of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).1
- Comply with all federal, state and local privacy laws; and
- Provides researchers with appropriate access to data to analyze the State's quality improvement efforts and answer key policy and practice questions.

## 3. Selection Criteria and Grant Activities

RTT-ELC requires state applications to focus on five key areas of reform:

| CORE AREAS Applicants must address all selection criteria | A. Successful State Systems |
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| | B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs |
| FOCUSED INVESTMENT AREAS Applicants must address some selection criteria | C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children |
| | D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce |
| | E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress* |

**Summary of RTT-ELC:**

- ✓ The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge program will be jointly administered by ED and HHS
- ✓ $500 million available for state level grants
- ✓ States are eligible for four-year grants ranging from up to $50 million to up to $100 million (maximum grant size based on relative population of low-income young children)
- ✓ Application requires Governor signature; Attorney General signature certifying compliance with state laws; and MOUs with and signatures from required state agencies 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.
- ✓ Applications are due October 19, 201 1. Awards will be announced in December 2011.
- ✓ 37 states have submitted notices that they intend to apply for grants

*One of two ways that a state's proposed plans can meet the selection criteria for Area E is through "*building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.*"

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1 There is significant alignment between the 12 COMPETES Act Elements and the DQC 10 Essential Elements, which is described in more detail here: *Alignment between the DQC's 10 Essential Elements and the America COMPETES Act's 12 Elements.*

In each of those areas, the application requires states to provide evidence or establish baseline and annual targets for performance measures. Some of these requirements have data implications or might necessitate statewide data systems.

| Area | Criteria | Evidence & performance metrics |
|---|---|---|
| A. SUCCESSFUL STATE SYSTEMS | (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development | **Evidence**<br>• If data is available:<br> ○ The status of children at kindergarten entry, including data on the readiness gap between children with high needs and their peers<br> ○ program quality across different types of Early Learning and Development Programs<br>• Number of children with high needs participating in each type of early learning and development program for each of the past 5 years<br>• Description of whether kindergarten entrance assessment results are included in the state's SLDS.<br>• Description of all early learning and development data systems currently used in the state (in terms of the defined Essential Data Elements – see next page) |
| B. HIGH-QUALITY, ACCOUNTABLE PROGRAMS | (B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide, Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) | **Evidence:** List of existing standards for "effective data practices" and description of which programs in the state current use them |
| | (B)(2) Promoting participation in the state's QRIS | **Baseline and annual targets for:** Increasing the number and percentage of early learning and development programs participating in the statewide QRIS |
| | (B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality early learning and development programs for children with high needs | **Baseline and annual targets for:**<br>• Increasing the number of early learning and development programs in the top tiers of the QRIS<br>• Increasing 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 QRIS |
| C. PROMOTING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN | (C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs to improve school readiness | **Evidence:** Data, or a plan for deriving data, regarding existing and projected numbers and percentages of Early Childhood Educators who receive training and support in meeting the health standards<br><br>**Baseline and annual targets for:**<br>• number of children with high needs screened<br>• number of children with high needs referred for services who received follow-up/treatment<br>• number of children with high needs who participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well child care<br>• of these participating children, the number or percentage of children who are up-to-date in a schedule of well child care |
| E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress | (E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry | **Evidence:** the extent to which the state has a statewide kindergarten entry assessment that 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 |
| | (E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies | See next page |

## 4. Requirements for Building or Enhancing an Early Learning Data System

If the state plans to use RTT-ELC funds to building or enhancing an early learning data system to meet Area E, the state must have a high-quality plan to meet the following requirements.

- Include the following **7 Essential Elements of an Early Learning Data System:**
  1. a unique statewide child identifier or another highly accurate, proven method to link data on that child, including kindergarten entry assessment data, to and from the statewide longitudinal data system and the coordinated early learning data system (if applicable);
  2. a unique statewide early childhood educator identifier;
  3. a unique program site identifier;
  4. child and family demographic information;
  5. early childhood educator demographic information, including data on educational attainment and state credential or licenses held, as well as professional development information;
  6. program-level data on the program's structure, quality, child suspension and expulsion rates, staff retention, staff compensation, work environment, and all applicable data reported as part of the state's tiered quality rating and improvement system; and
  7. child-level program participation and attendance data.
- **Enable uniform data collection a**nd easy entry of the essential data elements by participating state agencies and participating programs;
- **Facilitate the exchange of data** among participating state agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards2 to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- **Generate 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
- **Meet the data system oversight requirements f**or ensuring the quality, privacy, and integrity of data contained in a data system, including--
  - **A data governance policy** that identifies the elements that are collected and maintained; provides for training on internal controls to system users; establishes who will have access to the data in the system and how the data may be used; sets appropriate internal controls to restrict access to only authorized users; sets criteria for determining the legitimacy of data requests; establishes processes that verify the accuracy, completeness, and age of the data elements maintained in the system; sets procedures for determining the sensitivity of each inventoried element and the risk of harm if those data were improperly disclosed; and establishes procedures for disclosure review and auditing; and
  - **A transparency policy** that informs the public, including families, early childhood educators, and programs, of the existence of data systems that house personally identifiable information, explains what data elements are included in such a system, enables parental consent to disclose personally identifiable information as appropriate, and describes allowable and potential uses of the data.
- **Comply with the requirements of federal, state, and local privacy laws**.

The state can meet the requirements of this section by either enhancing the state's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or building or enhancing a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

These requirements are significant in that they mark the first time federal policy has described the components of an early learning data system.

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2 The Data Quality Campaign is a member of Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) Consortium that is supporting the adoption of the Common Education Data Standards. See www.commoneddatastandard.org for more information.

## 5. Criteria for RTT-ELC Early Learning Data Systems Align with ECDC 10 Fundamentals

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) (which includes the Data Quality Campaign) was created to support state policymakers' development and use of coordinated state early care and education data systems. In 2010 the ECDC published *10 Fundamentals of a Coordinated State Early Care and Education Data System* to guide this work. The RTT-ELC grant requirements for an early learning data system closely align with the *10 Fundamentals,* as can be seen below. [3]

| ECDC'S 10 FUNDAMENTALS | RTT-ELC'S REQUIREMENTS |
|---|---|
| **1:** unique statewide child identifier | **Essential Data Element 1:** a unique statewide child identifier or another highly accurate, proven method to link data on that child, including kindergarten entry assessment data, to and from the statewide longitudinal data system and the coordinated early learning data system (if applicable) |
| **2:** child-level demographic and program participation information | **Essential Data Element 4:** child and family demographic information |
| | **Essential Data Element 7:** child-level program participation and attendance data |
| **4:** Ability to link child-level data with K-12 and other key data systems | **Additional requirement:** system must be interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System |
| **5:** unique program site identifier with the ability to link with children and the ECE workforce | **Essential Data Element 3**: a unique program site identifier |
| **6:** Program side data on structure, quality, and work environment | **Essential Data Element 6:** program-level data on the program's structure, quality, child suspension and expulsion rates, staff retention, staff compensation, work environment, and all applicable data reported as part of the state's tiered quality rating and improvement system |
| **7:** unique ECE workforce identifier with ability to link with program sites and children | **Essential Data Element 2:** a unique statewide early childhood educator identifier |
| **8:** individual ECE workforce demographics including education, and professional development information | **Essential Data Element 5:** early childhood educator demographic information, including data on educational attainment and state credential or licenses held, as well as professional development information |
| **9:** state governance body to manage data collection and use | **Data oversight requirement 1:** A data governance policy that identifies the elements that are collected and maintained; provides for training on internal controls to system users; establishes who will have access to the data in the system and how the data may be used; sets appropriate internal controls to restrict access to only authorized users; sets criteria for determining the legitimacy of data requests; establishes processes that verify the accuracy, completeness, and age of the data elements maintained in the system; sets procedures for determining the sensitivity of each inventoried element and the risk of harm if those data were improperly disclosed; and establishes procedures for disclosure review and auditing |
| **10:** transparent privacy protection and security practices and policies | **Data oversight requirement 2**: A transparency policy that informs the public, including families, early childhood educators, and programs, of the existence of data systems that house personally identifiable information, explains what data elements are included in such a system, enables parental consent to disclose personally identifiable information as appropriate, and describes allowable and potential uses of the data |

3 Only one of the ECDC's 10 Fundamentals was not included: Fundamental 3 "Child-level data on development." On July 11, 2011, during the public comment period regarding RTT-ELC's proposed requirements, members of the ECDC submitted comments urging ED and HHS to include *"child-level data on development and learning from birth to kindergarten entry"* in the list of essential elements to provide state leaders and local stakeholders with information necessary to understand how young children are progressing before kindergarten.