

Pennsylvania's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant



In December 2013, Pennsylvania won a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant of \$51.7 million over four years. This grant builds upon Pennsylvania's successes to provide more at-risk children such as children living in low-income families, English language learners, children with disabilities and developmental delays, and children experiencing homelessness, with high quality early learning opportunities to close the achievement gap.

More information is available on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website at <http://www.education.pa.gov/Early%20Learning/Race%20to%20the%20Top/Pages/default.aspx#.VeRIVfIVhHw>.

Early Childhood Education Community Innovation Zone Grants

Providing Pennsylvania's children with quality early learning experiences is a collaborative effort of families, schools and communities that can produce a huge return on investment for all. Pennsylvania offered 50 Community Innovation Grants to at-risk elementary schools and neighborhoods.

The first phase of the grants were awarded in 2014 to 12 communities with exemplary programs in place and willing to mentor phase two grantees. Thirty-eight additional grants were awarded in 2015. Grantees will receive intensive supports and local grants to increase family engagement, strengthen relationships between early childhood providers and schools to build birth – 3rd grade alignment, and strengthen community collaborations.

Keystone STARS

Keystone STARS reversed a ten-year trend in declining quality in child care.¹ With more than 10 years of experience, now is the time for further refinement and expansion of the program. In 2015 the University of Pennsylvania and William Penn Foundation released an inquiry of Keystone STARS which will help inform future revisions. A priority of the RTT-ELC grant is to increase the number of regulated child care providers in rural counties. Outreach and information to promote registration or licensing as a child care provider and participation in STARS is ongoing. As of December 2015, more than 57 child care facilities have enrolled and designated at least STAR 1, representing 21 of the 33 moderate-high and high risk targeted counties.

Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood

Pennsylvania's Learning Standards from birth through second grade are the foundation upon which all state-funded early childhood education programs build quality. As Pennsylvania has refined its academic standards for Kindergarten-12th grade, it will refine its Learning Standards for Early Childhood to align with these new expectations for children at kindergarten entry, with greater attention to cultural, developmental and linguistic appropriateness. Revised Infant/Toddler and Pre-kindergarten Early Learning Standards were released in early July 2014. Revised Kindergarten, First and Second grade standards will be released in 2016.

¹ "Evaluation of Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Quality Rating System in Child Care Settings," December 2006. Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Departments of Education and Public Welfare | 333 Market Street, 6th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126 | www.dhs.state.pa.us | www.education.state.pa.us

Comprehensive Assessment Systems

Pennsylvania offers a comprehensive system of assessments such as early developmental screening and ongoing assessment of children's progress, program quality, and the quality of adult-child interaction. With the Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge grant, Pennsylvania will focus on improving access to, quality and application of birth-Pre-K assessment systems.

Workforce Development

Pennsylvania will increase the effectiveness of professional development and technical assistance and expand access for programs serving children with high needs through initiatives such as an improved professional development registry, STAR-level specific professional development packages delivered face-to-face and on-line, developing a an infant/toddler credential and a master consultant certification. The new Professional Development Registry launched in July 2014. Eighteen higher education institutions were awarded mini-grants in 2015 to align over 300 early childhood education courses with the Pennsylvania Core Knowledge Competencies for Early Childhood and School-Age Professionals. Online courses launched in early 2016.

Pennsylvania's Kindergarten Entry Inventory

Until 2014, Pennsylvania estimated children's skill levels entering kindergarten based on district-specific tools, but there was no consistent statewide measure to identify a child's cognitive and non-cognitive skills levels or evaluate aggregate data for continuous quality improvement in P-3 alignment. Over a three-year period, Pennsylvania has piloted and refined a reliable Kindergarten Entry Inventory. As part of its Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, Pennsylvania is expanding the Kindergarten Entry Inventory statewide at no cost to school districts and developing professional development and supports to inform instruction, professional development, and P-3 alignment. In 2015, 1,016 teachers from 306 schools (50 districts; 15 charter schools) finalized Kindergarten Entry Inventory (KEI) observations for 21,168 children, a 34% increase in the number of children from Cohort 1 (2014.)

Measuring Outcomes and Progress

Pennsylvania embraces accountability in its early childhood education system to ensure children are receiving the best quality early childhood education possible and experience the best possible results. Pennsylvania is expanding the state longitudinal data system to include children enrolled in subsidized child care; improve the online provider application and renewal process to make it more intuitive and user-friendly in a mobile-friendly design; enhance the online attendance and payment tracking for subsidized child care – to also include a mobile-friendly design; and expand web-based tools available to early learning programs, families and the communities to access information about OCDEL's programs.

Governor's Institutes for Educators Pre-K to Grade 3

Week-long Governor's Institutes will bring early learning professionals from birth-5 and K-3 settings together in teams to focus on instructional strategies to promote a comprehensive set of early learning standards; and support teams to develop an action plan to implement Pre-K to Grade 3 strategies in their local settings. In 2015, Sixty-two teams participated in a series of four Institutes.

For more information on Pennsylvania's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, please contact Debra Reuvenny at dreuvenny@pa.gov.