



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # AR-5002

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Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
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CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

A. Successful State Systems

Table with 3 columns: Core Area, Available, Score. Row 1: (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development, 20, 13

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

- (a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;
(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;
(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and
(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

The state has a history of investment in programs and services for Children with High Needs but there has been some decrease in funding and in the number of children served over time. While the state currently serves approximately 50% of three and four-year-old children living in poverty, it only serves approximately 10% of infants and toddlers living in poverty. The application minimally addresses programs and services for children with disabilities through Part C and B 619 and many of the initiatives described in the application do not apply to these programs. For example, Part C and Part B 619 programs do not participate in many elements of high-quality health promotion practices (Table (A) (1)-8. Part B and C programs also do not participate in the ERS assessment of environmental quality and adult-child interaction. The state also does not contribute state dollars to Part C programs and or services and the overall application does not focus on this population thus limiting the number of Children with High Needs served through RTT-ELC. Arkansas has only partially met the criteria to demonstrate past commitment to Early Learning and Development by increasing the financial investment and number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs. It fails to include children with disabilities in the focus on Children with High Needs. The descriptions of the current status of components of a high quality early learning and development system indicate that the key areas are partially in place. Examples of partial implementation from the narrative and Tables are provided below. Arkansas developed Early Learning and Development Standards and a development rating scale many years ago (1991) and has updated the standards throughout the years. However, the most recent update was 2004. They have established a Comprehensive Assessment System but recognize that there are areas that should be improved and that the system does not address all programs. The state does not indicate that they are participating in Child Find screenings as required by IDEA. The state has a mandatory Kindergarten Entry Assessment in place that can be used to drive instruction at both classroom and state levels. However, the assessment is not aligned with the state Early Learning and Development Standards and does not address physical well-being and motor development. It also does not have evidence of technical adequacy or validity for English Language Learners. Arkansas also has developed effective data practices that are able to examine data on the status of children at kindergarten entry. They have been able to document that Children with High Needs do not benefit from

kindergarten as well as peers with higher socio-economic-status. They have addressed these issues in their plan. The state does not present data on program quality and child outcomes across different types of Early Learning and Development Programs. Arkansas does not currently have a system in place to identify and track the number of Early Childhood Educators receiving credentials and certification at higher education institutions in the state and does not know if preservice programs are aligned with the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework (Table (A) (1)-11). Table (A)(1)-2 The percentage for children in foster care is incorrect. Table (A)(1)-3 Does not list the source and year for IDEA part C and B 619 data or Title 1 data. The numbers included on this table do not match the numbers on Table (A)(1)-5. Far fewer children are indicated on Table (A)(1)-5 than in Table (A)(1)-3 so it was not possible to determine how many children with in Part C and B 619 and Title 1 programs were being served. The data on A (1)-3 for children participating in Part C and B,619 programs also does not match the number of children identified on Table A(1) – which lists the number of children from 0-3 and 3-5 with disabilities. More children are identified as participating in programs (A) (1)-3 than are identified as having disabilities (A) (1)-2. This limits the understanding of the extent to which children with disabilities are addressed in the current state system.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	18

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

Arkansas has developed an ambitious yet achievable reform agenda that builds on progress to date and that is responsive to needs identified in A-1. For example, the state proposes to raise the minimal licensing standards for child care homes and centers to the first level within the state TQRIS and to provide technical assistance and supports to assist programs in meeting Program Standards and to increase in TQRIS levels across time. Arkansas intends to increase the number of community child care centers participation in TQRIS by 20% per year and to increase participation by state-funded pre-K programs to 100%. The proposed agenda is likely to increase the number of Children with High Needs in high quality programs resulting in improved school readiness. The primary focus of the proposed plan however is on Children with High Needs who are at-risk due to family poverty levels. The State Plan indicates that Arkansas plans to build on current programs and partnerships in the state and to expand participation in the TQRIS by providing incentives and tying child reimbursement funds to levels of quality within the TQRIS. The application provides a rationale for addressing selected criteria in Focused Investment Areas C, D, and E. For example, the application builds on the Comprehensive Assessment System by addressing the Screening and Formative Assessment practices and incorporating Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions (C-2), two areas that were identified as needs in section A-1. However, the application does not fully address the screening component because it does not discuss how Child Find screening, required by IDEA will be incorporated within the proposed screening program. The state also plans to provide supports to effectively engage families such as mental health consultation and expanding the adoption of Strengthening Families and tying the use of this program to levels of quality in the TQRIS. The application also responds to the need to improve the professional development (PD) system (D-2) by developing a tracking system for PD, providing incentives for participation in PD, and developing web-based PD training. Finally, the application addresses the need to improve the Kindergarten Entry Assessment and Comprehensive Assessment System by expanding the domains addressed evaluation the technical adequacy of the assessment, and developing a data assessment system to facilitate school's use of data and the state's ability to assess the impact of programs on child outcomes (E-1). Overall, the State Plan does not address how children with special needs (receiving services through IDEA) and English Language Learners will be addressed. Primarily, the proposed plan focused on children who live in poverty as Children with High Needs.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	7

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--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(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--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(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 providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

The organizational structure for managing the grant builds on existing interagency structures at state and local levels. The Division for Child Care and Early Childhood Education will serve as the Lead Agency and the roles and responsibilities are clearly identified. Decisions and activities will be carried out with shared governance with the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission/State Advisory Council (ECC). The proposed governance structure has the potential to facilitate interagency coordination, facilitate decision making, and lead to long term sustainability because it builds on effective systems that currently are in place. This EEC/State Advisory Council partnership includes representation of federal and state funded early childhood programs. However the application does not fully identify when and how the state will involve representatives and stakeholders. For example, the application states that the ECC can add ad hoc members to represent members who currently are not represented on the council but it does not identify what additional members will be added and when or why they would be added. The EEC does not include representation from higher education, early intervention (IDEA), and Part B of IDEA. It also includes only one parent, thus limiting the input of family members. The application identifies the responsibilities of the Lead Agency, state agencies, and the ECC, and provides evidence of commitment through MOUs with those agencies. The state does not have a MOU with one state partner: Arkansas Dept. of Health although there is a letter of support. The application includes an organizational chart and scope of work for each agency. The state also provided letters of support for the proposed State Plan from a number of intermediary organizations and local early learning councils. The state provided strong evidence of leveraging existing funding from state agencies and participating organizations such as funding from the CCDF Block grant, Head Start, Maternal and Child Health Block grant, Division of Children and Family Services, and Arkansas Department of Education.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	14

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

- (1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;
- (2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and
- (3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

Arkansas has made use of existing funds from federal, state, and local funds to support the project in addition to the requested RTT-RLC funds. For example the CCDF Block grant funds the Better Beginnings, the state TQRIS program. Other state funding for the proposed plan will be provided by the Maternal and Child Health Block grant, Head Start, Title IV, and Arkansas Better Chance, the state-funded pre-k program. Many of the projects described in the application and for which funding will be used are to develop, implement, and evaluate systems so that by the end of the four year grant, the systems will be in place and supported as part of ongoing programs that are currently funded through state and federal funds. Funding requests are tied to specific projects and activities within projects as well as partners or agencies that will complete projects. Each project includes a timeline for spending funding and completing projects. The budget seems adequate to support the proposed activities for each partner. For example, the state requests four coordinators to oversee budget projects and to make modifications to the Traveling Arkansas' Professional Pathways (TAPP) computer system. Reasonable and necessary costs include funding to develop and provide a set of professional development trainings for the initial levels of quality within the TQRIS, the purchase of and training on new assessment materials such as the CLASS, and independent evaluation of the ARBB TQRIS. Many of the projects will be completed by independent contractors. The application does not identify the qualification of independent contractors or how contractors will be selected or specific activities to complete assigned projects. The application does include details regarding the amounts of funds budgeted for the various RTT-ELC partners and agencies as indicated in the narrative and budget tables. For example, the Projects table includes responsible agency or staff as well as timeline and resources (including funding) needed for specific activities within the proposed projects. Sustainability is addressed by building on existing programs that already are funded by other funding resources. For example, the state will use RTT-ELC funding to support the adoption of and transition to the new Kindergarten Entry Assessment. Once the assessment is in place, it will be sustained by state funding through the Arkansas Department of Education.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	6

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--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;

(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;

(4) Family engagement strategies;

(5) Health promotion practices; and

(6) Effective data practices;

(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 standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

Arkansas has established a three level TQRIS system that includes basic standards for the education and training of staff, family engagement, and health promotion at all levels. However, many elements of the current TQRIS system are not present or are not at a high quality level. For example, the Early Learning and Development Standards and Comprehensive Assessment Systems are not addressed at the initial level of quality and effective data practices are not addressed at any quality level. The state has not established differentiation of the levels of quality within the TQRIS and impact on child outcomes at the different levels of quality. Some of the components of the Comprehensive Assessment System are not reported separately and so implementation cannot be evaluated. The state has articulated plans to increase the quality of the TQRIS and to expand it across programs including establishing Tier 1 as the basic requirements for a program license. They also will expand the system by adding three additional tiers with the final tier correlated to the NAEYC accreditation standards. They have aligned the current AR-BB level 3 with NAEYC, NAFCC, and Head Start but levels 1 and 2 are not so aligned. Through the RTT-ELC, the state plans to increase the screening element of the TQRIS but it will only be required at the proposed higher quality levels of the TQRIS. Screening of child development and learning would not be administered to children at levels 1, 2 and 3, limiting the comprehensive nature of the assessment system. Plans for including children in Part C and B 619 are not clear and baseline data for the number of programs receiving Part B and C funding services are not provided. Although the target is to increase participation of these programs, there is no plan for identifying baseline levels so it is difficult to identify how many programs will constitute 100% (the number of programs was not provided in Table B2c).

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	12

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

(1) State-funded preschool programs;

(2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;

(3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;

(4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and

(5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

Arkansas has partially implemented a High Quality Plan to promote participation in the TQRIS and has developed a High Quality Plan to maximize program participation in the TQRIS. Arkansas has established a 3 level TQRIS but it currently is not required for licensure. It plans to require licensure for level one through legislative rule changes. The state provides incentive funding to improve program quality and professional development training. It also provides refundable credit for taxpayers who place their children in quality-certified child care programs, and provides pre-K programs at no cost to families with low income. The proposed new levels within the TQRIS are aligned to pre-K regulations at level 4 and to NAEYC standards at level 6. The state has reciprocity agreements with programs that already have high national standards that match the standards and levels of the TQRIS. The state does not have baseline data on number of programs that are funded by IDEA Part C that are participating in the TQRIS. It does not know how many programs in the state are being funded by IDEA part B 619, and Title 1 of ESEA. The application does not address why this information is not available and does not articulate plans for identifying those programs. The application states that the number will increase as they require that all programs participate in the TQRIS by 2015. The state does not include a plan for determining baseline levels and tracking these children and families. This indicates lack of collaboration with agencies and programs administering IDEA and ESEA funds. Table (B)(2)(c) does not include targets for increasing the number of centers per year.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	14

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

- (a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and
- (b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)

The state has substantially implemented a high quality program and has proposed a High Quality Implementation Plan. Strengths of the application are described below: Arkansas has established a protocol and schedule for training and approving program monitors including high expectations and monitoring of inter-rater reliability and provision of initial and ongoing monitor training. The state employs assessments of environmental quality and quality of leadership and management of center-based and family child care programs. The Measures of Environmental Quality in the ERS (ECERS, ITERS, and FCCERS-R) have good technical adequacy. The state uses web-based information systems to provide information for families and others regarding program quality, licensing status, AR-BB level status, and information on health and safety of programs. They provide programs with letters for families and banners to advertise their status. They have plans to add the CLASS to the existing assessments to increase focus on adult-child interactions and to evaluate the quality of teacher-child interactions. They intend to evaluate the differentiation of quality across the existing levels of the TQRIS. The section does not address the specific needs of children with disabilities and who are English Language Learners.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	10

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

- (a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);
- (b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and
- (c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--
 - (1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and
 - (2) 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 Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

Arkansas has partially implemented a High Quality Plan and has developed a medium-quality plan to develop and implement a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs. Arkansas has several initiatives for improving the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the TQRIS including an ongoing professional development system and free access to technical assistance, incentive grants for entering into the AR-BB and a new bonus program for moving to new quality levels within the AR-BB TQRIS. The states propose several additional initiatives that will be developed or expanded throughout the state such as expanding the Resource and Referral systems to support the new training initiatives, to develop Child Care Collaboratives that will work toward common goals, identify gaps in service and plans to address those gaps, link to the statewide resource directory (which also will be expanded to include a parent portal), and to expand Special Quest, and Project PLAY. Early Learning and Development Programs funded by IDEA, Part C and programs funded by Title 1 of ESEA are not addressed in Table (B)(4)(c)(2). The state indicated that a study has been conducted with providers of children with disabilities who indicated that they believe the AR-BB and associated assessments are not appropriate for the care they provide. The application states that they will provide training to these programs but the plans for increasing their participation are not well articulated. Most of the targets for increasing the number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS and the number and percentage of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the TQRIS are ambitious and achievable. However, baseline data and targets are not provided for increasing the number of Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title 1 of ESEA and the number of children served through Part C of IDEA. As a result, the State Plan does not address the various types of children in the state who are considered Children with High Needs. This section does not describe (part b) proving supports specifically designed to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs. It focuses primarily on increasing the number of high quality programs that will be available to families but this will do little good if families are not able to access those programs. It does describe resource directory which provides information about resources for families and caregivers who access that site.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	5

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

The state plans to examine the kindergarten readiness indicators of child development across the current levels of the TQRIS and the impact on child development (for four-year-old children) across the levels. They only identify language, literacy, and early mathematics as constructs to be assessed. The application does not identify other areas of kindergarten readiness that will be assessed. Specific information on criteria the state will use to select assessment measures and research designs and measures of progress are not provided. The state did not include a plan to examine other measures of child outcomes for different ages of children (e.g., infants, toddlers, and three-year-olds) across the different levels.

Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E)

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address

so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	30	17
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--</p> <p>(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;</p> <p>(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;</p> <p>(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and</p> <p>(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(2)
<p>The state has a partially implemented system and has proposed a medium quality plan to support the implementation of a Comprehensive Assessment system. The application describes the addition and expansion of Screening and Formative Assessments and the CLASS assessment. These will be implemented at the proposed new levels within the TQRIS. Although each of these is available for programs that are at levels 1, 2, and 3 to use, they are not required and so do not impact the quality of existing TQRIS levels. This in turn, does not present a comprehensive model that addresses the needs of Children with High Needs at the basic levels. This is especially critical in the area of screening, in that all TQRIS levels should be engaged in screening children's learning and development. The adoption of state-wide Screening and Formative Assessment tools for the to-be-developed levels 4-6 will increase communication and use of assessment outcomes across providers and programs and lead to standardized training for providers. The Ages and Stages screening tool has technical adequacy and increases family engagement in the screening process. The application indicates that staff in Early Learning and Development Programs will receive professional development regarding the purposes and uses of the screening and formative assessments, as well as environmental assessments and the CLASS. The application focuses on helping teachers use their assessment outcomes to guide instruction as well as using data at the state level to improve programs but a plan for providing training is not articulated. The application outlines ambitious but achievable goals related to the data reporting system regarding child outcomes and the Traveling Arkansas' Professional Pathways (TAPP) professional development program.</p>

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	30	13
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(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; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(4)

The state has partially implemented system to engage and support families and proposes a medium-quality plan to engage and support families. Arkansas has several initiatives and resources from existing programs in place to support family engagement such as Strengthening Families training for administrators, Family Map Inventory, Family Connection, and TIPS for Great Kids. The state points out that these often are underutilized and they propose a number of professional development activities designed to increase the use of these programs. These primarily are targeted to programs at Levels 4 or higher although there will be bonus funds available to programs that implement these family engagement activities and programs. Thus, these initiatives do not clearly impact family engagement at levels 1, 2, and 3. There is not a clear progression of standards for family engagement across levels. The application does not address the needs of families who have children with disabilities or the cultural or linguistic appropriateness of the standards for family engagement or the strategies and programs employed to increase engagement and support families. They do describe strategies and programs that will assist families in supporting their children's education and development such as the TIPS for Great Kids and Family Map but they do not provide evidence of the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of these strategies or their utility for families who have children with disabilities. The application describes various levels of training, associated with different levels of the TQRIS that will be provided to administrators and staff. They identify ambitious and achievable goal of having all staff complete a Strengthening Families webinar course and administrators complete a six-hour seminar for level 4. However, the professional development training is aimed at levels 4-6, thus the application minimizes training at levels 1-3.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	20

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--

- (a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;
- (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;
- (c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and
- (d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--
 - (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
 - (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.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

There currently is a partially implemented plan in place to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators. The state provides free or low-cost professional development or workshops for Early Childhood Educators and has established a system (Traveling Arkansas Professional Pathways) to provide training and guidance to ECEs and to track professional development on line. The state also has a career lattice (SPECTRUM) but the relationship between SPECTRUM and TAPP is not clear. The current standards are aligned with the state's Workforce and Competency Framework. The state has a history of coaching/mentoring that will continue and it has established three levels of credential: Foundational, Intermediate, and Advanced that are associated with levels within the TQRIS. Arkansas does not have a common core training course or protocol for all staff at the minimal levels of knowledge and skills and does not consistently monitor quality or content of professional development trainings. The state plans to develop a common core training course or protocol for all staff at the beginning levels within the Workforce and Competency Framework and TQRIS and that allows for individualization to meet identified needs at higher levels within the TQRIS. The proposed higher levels will include college degree/coursework that is supported by incentive and professional development grants. The application points to the need to maintain and reward inservice training due to financial constraints of enrolling in

college courses. They also provide differential reimbursement rates to programs that do hire staff with higher qualifications. They will offer scholarships for staff in high need areas of the state. The state will use the TAPP system to provide oversight of training content and maintain a data base of training completed by staff. Arkansas also will evaluate the impact of training on participant knowledge and skill. The application states that the DCCECE will publicly report aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention but it does not describe a plan for doing so. It does not identify where data will be reported, how often, how it may be accessed, etc. The state did not set ambitious yet achievable targets for (a) increasing the number of post secondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, (b) increasing the number of early childhood educators receiving credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional providers and (c) to increase the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials as should have been indicated on performance measures tables (D)(2)(d)(1) and (2) and in the section narrative.

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	40	24
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium; a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--</p> <p>(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p> <p>(d) 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; and</p> <p>(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)
<p>The state has partially implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment and it proposes a Medium Quality Plan to implement a common statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The currently uses a statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment (QELI) that is aligned with the state's Early Learning and Development Standards (as outlined in the LINK for teachers and parents) but it does not cover all essential domains of kindergarten readiness (e.g., it does not address social-emotional development, motor skills, and physical well-being). The state is working with a consortium of states to develop or purchase a new Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The state plans to phase in the Kindergarten Entry Assessment beginning in 2014 and the plan supports this timeline (E1c). The application includes a list of quality criteria that the consortium will use in selecting a new assessment. These include: the assessment will be aligned with Early Learning and Development Standards as well as the Common Core standards and will have technical adequacy. One of the key criteria of a new assessment is that it will be delivered by computer if possible. It is not clear that this is applicable to each of the essential domains of kindergarten readiness and a computer-based assessment would not be considered developmentally appropriate. The state does not identify math or adaptive skills as domains that will be included on the new assessment and so does not include all Essential Domains of School Readiness in their plan to adopt a new assessment (E1a). The application does not identify how the state will determine the technical adequacy and appropriateness of the proposed assessment for use with children who are English learners and children with disabilities (E1b). Currently information from the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (QELI) is housed in the longitudinal data system maintained by the Arkansas Research Center. This system will continue to be used during the RTT-ELC project (E1d). Currently, there are no protocols or practices for accessing and using the data to make decisions. Professional development training will be provided for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators to help them access and use data to drive instruction. The majority of this initiative will be funded with state and federal resources although the application states that some RTT-ELC funding may be used to purchase the new assessments, provide professional development training, and make technological advancements (E1e).</p>

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	173

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	4

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and

(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (P)(2)

Arkansas fails to meet 2a because it does not have in place a licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the state and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children in a provider setting, nor does it have a plan to put such a system in place. Not all licensed programs currently participate in the voluntary TQRIS however the state plans, through legislation, to require all licensed programs to participate in the TQRIS by aligning program requirements for licensing with requirements for level 1. The state currently is increasing requirements for licensing to more closely match level 1 so that when legislation is passed to require participation in TQRIS, all licensed the majority of programs will be rated at level 1 or higher. State regulated, registered programs will not be required to participate but incentives will be provided to promote participation in the TQRIS (2b).

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

Comments on (P)(3)

Application did address selection criterion E-1 however it did not provide sufficient response to receive 70% of the available points.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

Comments on Absolute Priority

The application meets absolute priority 1. Arkansas has developed an ambitious yet achievable reform agenda that builds on progress to date. The proposed agenda is likely to increase the number of children with high needs in high quality programs resulting in improved school readiness. The application articulates plans to expand and improve several components of the comprehensive assessment system as part of the RTT-ELC system. The state will increase quality by mandating that all licensed programs participate in level 1 of the TQRIS. Arkansas has made use of existing funds from federal, state, and local funds to support the project in addition to the requested RTT-RLC funds and it has included plans to sustain the programs after the grant funding has ended. The primary focus of the proposed plan however is on Children with High Needs who are at-risk due to family poverty levels and does not sufficient address other categories of Children with High Needs and their families.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # AR-5002

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 6:06 PM

CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

A. Successful State Systems

Table with 3 columns: Criterion, Available, Score. Row 1: (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development, 20, 14

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

- (a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period.
(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;
(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and
(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

The applicant gives a medium-quality response to this criterion. The applicant strongly demonstrates a commitment to early learning and development through the presentation of the various statewide programs serving high needs children, early childhood programs, and promoting high quality early childhood care and education. The applicant discussed the creation of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education in 1997 and the many services/agencies/programs that were created afterwards - from 1997-2009. (a)The applicant does a good job discussing the commitment to a financial investment, especially in the state-funded Pre-kindergarten program (Arkansas Better Chance for School Success), but this contradicts the information in Table (A)(1)-4, where funding appears to be level with the exception of a \$7 million dip in 2010. The total funding amount in 2007 compared to 2011 does support the narrative by showing a 4% increase in funding (2007 vs. 2011). Due to "unknown" data in Table (A)(1)-2 and Table (A)(1)-3, it is impossible to calculate the amount of the investments in relation to the size of the state's population of Children with High Needs from 2007 to 2011. There is no narrative discussion on financial investment in relation to number of Children with High Needs served. (b)It appears by the data presented in the tables (A)(1)-5 that the number of Children with High Needs served in the state is increasing in Federally-funded programs but has decreased in 2011 in the State-funded programs. It is unclear how the applicant came up with the 14% increase in the number of children served by the state-funded preschool (as noted in the narrative). (c) The applicant presents four different acts of legislation that support Early care and education - Act 49, Act 636, Act 1132, and Act 825/2003. All four of these acts strongly support policies and practices that enhance quality and support healthy growth in children. (d)The applicant clearly meets this component of the criterion by demonstrating the history and creation of the Early Learning and Development standards, the Comprehensive Assessment System (including the screening, formative assessment, environmental quality, and adult-child interactions), health promotion practices (a description of the Nutrition and physical activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) and how it is used, the administration of the Special Nutrition Program (SNP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Special Milk Program (SMP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), family engagement strategies (the Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative, the use of the Strengthening Families

program, the use of the Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Parent-Provider Partnerships program, and home visitation programs) While the applicant presents a statewide use of the Kindergarten Assessment tool (the QELI) required by (Arkansas) law to administer to every child entering kindergarten or any first year first grade students, there are elements of the domains that are not assessed, nor is there evidence of validity and reliability (table (A)(1)-12). Therefore the applicant states that they are searching for a more comprehensive tool. The applicant indicates that while they have a longitudinal data system in place, they are looking to improve the system with RTT funds. The applicant did not demonstrate a strong professional development system for educators. As shown on the table ((A)(1)-10, the state does not have a way to track educators with credentials or if the credentials are aligned with workforce knowledge and competencies. The applicant also identifies the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, Children's Initiative Fund (focus on Early Childhood), P-20 Education Council, School Readiness Data Initiative, the State Early Childhood Interagency Team, and Public-Private Partnerships. Each of these initiatives are described as independently influencing Early Learning and Development Programs, however the applicant adequately identifies the next step of implementing statewide consistency as part of their High-Quality Plan. Due to the vague and inconsistent information provided for components "a" and "b", this response is considered a medium-quality response.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

The applicant gives a high-quality response to each of the components in this criterion. The applicant presents an ambitious, yet achievable plan to increase the number of Arkansas Better Beginnings (AR-BB) participating programs by 20% per year (approximately 60/year) through 2015. This plan will increase the number of high-quality programs available to serve Children with High Needs, thereby improving outcomes statewide and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers. The plan presented constitutes an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving the goals, by connecting the TORIS to licensing to the data system and to reimbursements for child care services. By having all of these components connected, it is a realistic goal for a statewide system to be put in place and sustained. The applicant provides specific and clear information to show that the Focus Investment Areas chosen will help them meet the set goals and support this system based on research on early childhood education and quality related to child outcomes. (C2) will build on the existing assessment system already in place. The current system assesses quality environments and appears to be a sound foundation to build upon. The new system would include:

- Screening in addition to the currently used Program and Business Administration Scales (PAS/BAS) tools. The applicant proposes to use this information to help identify high need children and get them needed services earlier.
- Formative assessment - The applicant presents an assessment that currently does not guide instruction and proposes to implement a program that will inform instruction and planning.
- Adult-child interactions - The applicant provides information from longitudinal studies to support the need for a more comprehensive tool to measure the relationships in the classroom. The currently used ERS does not evaluate specific criteria for interactions. This Focused Investment Area is an important piece of the overall system. The proposed addition of these three tools will greatly impact the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs. (C4) will allow the applicant to build upon the current standards in place. The applicant states that while the current standards are modeled after the Head Start programs, they are not as strong and effective. The applicant has identified the Strengthening Families initiative as one they will use to further this goal. This Focused Investment Area will increase outcomes for Children with High Needs, as research shows children thrive in programs that involve and support families in culturally sensitive ways, promoting positive relationships between parents and children and supporting general family well-being. (D2) focuses on the Professional Development System. The applicant identified this as a weaker area in which gaps needed to be addressed. The applicant proposes to improve the system in order to track education attainment, staff turn-over, and progress of children entering kindergarten (as related to the two previous components). The applicant also presented the need to improve the career lattice to relate professional development opportunities with Key Content Areas and Core Competencies. This Focused Investment Area is a critical piece of the overall system. In order to have high quality programs and high outcomes for children, it is essential to have educated, informed, confident teachers. (E1) The applicant has identified that the current Kindergarten Assessment does not assess all essential domains and proposes to replace or enhance the current assessment. As stated above, the Kindergarten Assessment will help guide the system by helping to improve classroom instruction, program quality and in turn, outcomes for Children with High Needs.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	8

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--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(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--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(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 providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

The applicant provides a high-quality response to this criterion. The applicant strongly meets criterion (a) by demonstrating the governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability. Although little information was provided regarding the actual method and process for making difficult decisions or resolving disputes under this proposed governance structure, the applicant describes in detail the collaboration and governance roles/responsibilities of each partnering state agency involved with this funding (Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education; Arkansas Department of Education; Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities; Arkansas Early Childhood Commission/State Advisory Council; Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services), the purpose and membership of the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, its guidelines and purpose, and its membership, demonstrating how it is aligned with the RTT-ELC goals. The applicant has provided an organizational chart for the lead agency, the Department of Human Services, and the proposed Race to the Top program. In addition to the partners listed above, the applicant states that activities will be presented to representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders as appropriate for input and updating purposes. The applicant strongly meets criterion (b) by providing and making clear connections of the commitments between all of the Participating State Agencies to effectively implement the State

Plan. This includes the governance structure of the grant, the MOUs with eight partner agencies outlining the terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each individual Participating State Agency (including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan), agreeing to the "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs (stated in the MOU but will be presented upon funding of this proposal). The applicant obtained and included letters of support from 14 support agencies (Early Learning Intermediary Organizations; local early learning councils; Early Childhood Educators; the Arkansas Early Childhood Association; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State and local leaders) who will be indirectly involved with the program. The applicant presented a partially-implemented plan currently in place.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	14

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

- (1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;
- (2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and
- (3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

The applicant gives a high-quality response to component (a) in this criterion. (a)The applicant strongly demonstrates with detailed information, how existing funds are currently being used to support early learning and development in the State plan (Child Care Development Fund Block Grant, MCH Block Grant, Title IV-E, Arkansas Better chance Program). The applicant gives a high-quality response to component (b) in this criterion. The applicant documents 5 projects to be accomplished as part of the High-Quality State Plan. Each project includes details about the programs currently underway that the State Plan to build upon with RTT-ELC funds and includes a detailed corresponding Budget that is adequate to support the activities described in the High-Quality State Plan including costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities. The budgets provided include funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs. The specific activities to be implemented with these funds are consistent with the High-Quality State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan. The projects are clearly presented in narrative form, followed by descriptive tables and corresponding budgets. While the narrative details given are adequate to support the activities described in the High-Quality State Plan, it is unclear how the indirect dollar amount is determined and how the Personnel costs are determined, given that they are consistent (exactly the same amount) throughout each project. More detail in this area would have been helpful to determine the efficiency in use of RTT-ELC funding for each project. The applicant gives a high-quality response to component (c) in this criterion. The applicant consistently demonstrates throughout the proposal how RTT funds will be used to build capacity in existing programs and put educators, programs, and other professionals in a position to best take advantage of ongoing state funds, thereby ensuring that each program can be sustained after the grant period ends and the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs will be maintained or expanded. Table (A)(4)-1 illustrates the existing Federal, State, private, and local funds to be used throughout the RTT-ELC funding period to achieve the outcomes in the High-Quality State Plan.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
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(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System

10

8

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--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(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 standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

The applicant gives a high-quality response to this criterion. The applicant adequately presented the current TQRIS, Arkansas Better Beginnings (AR-BB). The current system incorporates two sets of linked Early Learning and Development Standards - the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework and the Arkansas Framework for Infant and Toddler Care; A comprehensive Assessment System; Early Childhood Educator qualifications; Family Engagement strategies; Health Promotion practices; and Effective data practices. The applicant demonstrates a comprehensive and well thought out TQIRS that is growing and evolving based on National standards, child outcomes, and provider feedback. The applicant presented the original plan, introduced in 2010, which was voluntary and included support for all licensed and registered providers, however each of the three levels in the system were higher than and separate from licensing regulations. (b) This plan has all of the components required but the applicant clearly details how the RTT funds will be used to build upon these components and make it more effective with standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children. (c) The applicant identifies plans to link the AR-BB to the state licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs in Project 1 of the State Plan. The applicant documented that this would require a change in state law, but that the goal is to make minimum licensing standards part of Level 1 of the TQRIS. The response to components (a) and (b) are high-quality and partial-implementation of the TQRIS is clearly demonstrated.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	10

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of

Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

The applicant presents a strong High-Quality Plan to maximize program participation in AR-BB (the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System). (a) The applicant has enticing incentives to encourage Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) State funded Preschool programs to participate in the AR-BB. These include making the system user friendly based on stakeholder input, equipment and professional development grants for the schools, a refundable credit for taxpayers who place their children in AR-BB participating schools, marketing materials to promote the school's quality status locally and to explain the importance of quality care programs to the families who attend and prospective families, and free tuition or vouchers to pay for early childhood education for children who attend state funded AR-BB schools. The applicant gives clear, detailed plans for including Early Head Start and Head Start Programs, Programs funded under IDEA and under Title I of ESEA, and programs receiving funds from the CCDF program. (b) The applicant does not directly address the implementation of effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs; however, the applicant briefly and vaguely discusses piloting a program to offer differential reimbursement tied to AR-BB ratings for infants and toddlers and for children in the foster care system. (c) The applicant has set ambitious targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program as evidenced in Table (B)(2)(c). However, without baseline data on the number of programs currently participating in the AR-BB, it is not possible to determine whether or not the targets are achievable. The applicant has given a high-quality response to this question, demonstrating partial implementation of the TQRIS and increasing participation in the TQRIS; component (c) was not adequately addressed, regarding achievable targets.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	15

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)

The applicant provides a high-quality response to this criterion. The applicant clearly demonstrates substantial implementation of a rating and monitoring system for Early Learning and Development Programs. (a) The Applicant gives great detail on the use of the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS), the Program Administration Scales (PAS), the Business Administration Scales (BAS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The tools that the applicant is using are the most widely used tools to measure the quality of Early Childhood programs. The applicant clearly identifies the teacher-child interaction piece, measured by the CLASS tool, as the one missing factor in the evaluation tools currently used. The applicant documents a plan to add this tool to improve the rating and monitoring system with the use of the RTT funds. Each of the tools have a proven validity and reliability record and have assessor training attached to them, with acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability, monitoring, and rating of the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency. The applicant gives a thorough explanation of the reliability and validity of each instrument in appendix B1-3. (b) The applicant clearly demonstrates implementation of a system that provides quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs. The AR-BB publicly posts information on-line in an easily accessible and understandable format that gives key information such as dates of recent licensing monitor visits, citations for health and safety regulations violations, searches to identify Head Start programs, state-funded preschool programs, voucher programs and programs that offer flexible scheduling to meet family needs. The applicant has provided a comprehensive response to this criterion and therefore receives full points for a fully-implemented plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	16

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) 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 Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

The applicant demonstrates a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement a strong system for improving the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the TQRIS. (a) The applicant clearly details the current policies and practices being implemented to provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs for continuous improvement. A system of training has been established and is offered free of charge to members of the State Registry, as is free access to technical assistance. (b) The applicant gives a thorough description of the statewide online resource guide they have developed and implemented to support working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs. The resources are comprehensive and include among other things, medical, therapies, basic needs, safety, and educational and enrichment resources. Other activities that will support working families include moving the QRIS from voluntary to mandatory and changing the eligibility of programs that take voucher-eligible children to require program participation in the TQRIS, thereby increasing the number of high quality programs available to serve Children with High Needs. (c) The applicant acknowledges the need for improvement to the current system and identifies the changes that are planned if awarded RTT funding. The goals outlined in table (B)(4)(c)(1) and (B)(4)(c)(2) for 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 Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System are ambitious and will be a challenge to meet. However, the applicant places strong emphasis on moving the current voluntary TQRIS to a mandatory system and changing the eligibility of programs that take voucher-eligible children to require participation in the TQRIS and meet the standards of the highest tier, thus increasing the number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. If these changes occur, then meeting the goals will be achievable. The applicant is awarded 16 points for having a partially-implemented plan.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	15

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

The applicant has clearly detailed a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs. (a) The applicant gave detailed information on recent evaluations conducted by the Arkansas Research Center to validate whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality. Citing evaluations conducted in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, the applicant was able to demonstrate higher learning outcomes of children served by state-funded Early Learning and Development Programs that participated in the TQRIS. The improved High-Quality plan includes a statewide evaluation examining adequate numbers of

programs at each TQRIS level using rigorous methods and considering program type. (b) The evaluation will also examine Kindergarten readiness indicators of child development across all levels of the TQRIS in order to demonstrate the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness. Potential assessment tools include the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 3rd Edition in English and Spanish. Subscales of the Woodcock-Johnson Tests for Achievement, which are available in English and Spanish, will also be used. The applicant identified a high-quality plan to link all programs to the longitudinal data system in order to use data effectively and include more children.

Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	30	24
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--</p> <p>(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;</p> <p>(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;</p> <p>(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and</p> <p>(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(2)

The applicant clearly and strongly demonstrates a High-Quality plan that supports effective implementation of a developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment System. The applicant currently uses the Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) and the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) and has identified specific areas for improvement with RTT funds: (a) The applicant adequately discusses working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes- clarifying acceptable screening tools , supporting the implementation of the tools, clarifying acceptable tools for formative assessment and identifying a clear schedule for assessment for all programs in order to provide consistency statewide. The applicant clearly documents its commitment to selecting a tool that includes all of the essential domains of school readiness and has a high reliability and validity. (b) The applicant adequately discusses working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems - providing a 4 year timeline for selection, training, and implementation of the assessments. Training will occur to ensure proper use of the instruments, a clear understanding of how the results will be used to support the child's learning in areas where issues are indicated, and how to use the information to impact decisions around instruction and curriculum. (c) The applicant clearly details an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs. An upgrade to the current data system will allow tracking individual children and sharing information across programs. (d) The applicant provides great detail on implementing the training of Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services. The applicant proposes to offer trainings

and technical assistance at the level of the Director and teaching staff. Also proposed with RTT funding is to move the ASQ to a requirement in AR-BB and offer training and materials to many more programs. Details are also given regarding linking assessment tool results with the longitudinal data system in order to track individual children and impact teacher classroom quality. Along with the assessment trainings, the applicant proposes to provide instruction around understanding how to use the results at the level of the individual child to support the child's learning. The applicant presented a partially-implemented plan.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	30	24

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--

(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;

(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; and

(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.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(4)

The applicant clearly presents 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. (a) The applicant clearly identifies a partially-implemented plan for 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. The State has devoted past funding to implementing family engagement activities such as the Family Map Inventory - to document family needs and resources and increase parent-teacher communication; TIPS for Great Kids - an approach to parent education delivered by educators in parent-teacher informal and formal exchanges; the use of the Strengthening Families Program Directors Seminar; and Family Connection - a collection of materials to connect families with their early education program and community supports. (b) The applicant presents a comprehensive plan for 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, by using RTT-ELC funds to develop and implement levels 4-6 on the TQIRIS. Each level includes intensive staff and administrator training on partnering with families and specific required assessment scores for each level in the family partnership assessment subscales. Implementing the Strengthening Families program is a good base for leveraging further supportive programming. The current TQIRS includes the use of Strengthening Families but the training is not there to allow for full implementation. The applicant proposes use of the RTT funds to further efforts in this area. The plan presented is strong and appears to have buy-in from partner agencies, including implementing stringent requirements in levels 4-6 of the TQIRS and awarding bonus funds to programs that implement and support these efforts. (c) The applicant proposes to promote family support and engagement statewide by using RTT funds to increase training to educators, build professional development opportunities to support providers who work with high risk families, increase availability and accessibility of family resources to more families, and supplement other funding resources to assist families who are transitioning from home-based care to preschool and kindergarten. Other activities that promote family support include the development (pilot) of the Community Cafe - a program that involves the Strengthening Families Framework, parent leadership, and parent partnership with child care centers, giving parents a "voice" to impact policies, communities, and programs that promote protective factors for children and families; and a home visitation transition program, providing program training and support for families as children move from home-based programs to preschool and kindergarten. The applicant presented a partially-implemented high-quality plan for meeting the needs of the State's special populations of Children with High Needs.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	24

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--

(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;

(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;

(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

(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

(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.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

The applicant 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. The applicant identifies several different systems running independent of each other and not tracked sufficiently to demonstrate any level of consistency statewide. The applicant proposes a strong detailed plan addressing each component of the PD system and the plan to improve services and link services to each other in order to develop a strong statewide system enhancing opportunities for providers, staff, and trainers and ultimately benefitting children and families. (a) The applicant gives clear details on providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. Recognizing that the current system does not provide consistent levels of quality and content and does not prepare early childhood educators to determine their own course for professional development, the applicant proposes to link the current system with Arkansas' Key Content Areas and Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals to provide a more defined pathway for Professional Development by linking the content and competencies to trainings. (b) The applicant gives clear details on implementing policies and incentives 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. Several components that the applicant is committed to improving include incentives and scholarships to obtain higher education; revamp the educator professional development system to allow tracking by the state and individual educators of progress; increase the requirements for professional development to assure high quality; and clarifying the professional development that is critical for quality. (c) The applicant documents that the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) will publicly report aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention. The professional development data will be linked to childcare program data and to the longitudinal data system. (d) The applicant does not address component (d) in the narrative or in the charts. The data is blank in the charts for: 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 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. Because the applicant did not address Component (d), and the plan is only partially-implemented with high-quality responses to (a), (b) and (c), the applicant will receive 24 points for this criterion.

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	40	24

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

- (a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- (c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;
- (d) 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; and
- (e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)

The applicant strongly demonstrates a plan to implement a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades. The applicant clearly demonstrates that they are part of a consortium of states working together to develop assessments that meet the ADE Kindergarten Readiness Indicator's Checklist. (a) The applicant identifies the Kindergarten Entry Assessment currently used as the Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI). The QELI is not an adequate tool because it is not aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and does not cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness; The QELI does not cover Physical Well Being and Motor Development. The applicant acknowledges the need for a more comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Assessment and presents a High-Quality plan for acquiring and implementing the new tool. (b) The applicant presents a plan for implementing a tool that is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, but does not mention ensuring an appropriate tool for English learners and children with disabilities; (c) The applicant clearly presents the goal of identifying a comprehensive tool by the end of 2012, plan for implementation in 2013 and implementing statewide in a phased process by 2014 to children entering a public school kindergarten. (d) The applicant identifies that the QELI is currently included in the longitudinal data system, however it is not effectively or efficiently used. Therefore, the applicant proposes the use of RTT funds to create reporting processes using the existing longitudinal data system to link early childhood assessments for use by K-12 educators; create reporting processes using the longitudinal data system to link Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for use by Pre-K programs; and create joint training for teachers and administrators in both Pre-K and K-3 on effective data practices, including the individualization of instruction based on assessment results. (e) The applicant states that previous funding has supported the longitudinal data system and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment, but does not state where those funds came from (Federal, State, or Local). The applicant provided a medium-quality response showing partial-implementation for this criterion.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	216

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	6

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

- (a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and
- (b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (P)(2)

The applicant gives a comprehensive plan for increasing the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. (a) The applicant does not adequately meet this criterion because the state currently licenses or regulates centers and/or family child care homes with 6 or more unrelated children. The applicant documents that the state has no plans to reduce that number, however they are studying a change in the law to address this and link AR-BB to licensing requirements. (b) The applicant clearly details the goal of having all licensed programs participating in the TQIRS by 2015, by discussing the current system and changes that are occurring currently and within the next two years. The applicant states that they are currently trying to move the requirements for licensing to the first level of the TQRIS. In addition, the applicant states that they are currently contracting with an external evaluator to better understand barriers for groups of providers not participating and discuss ways to encourage participation. The applicant has presented a high-quality response on a non-implemented plan.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

Comments on (P)(3)

The applicant has chosen to address (b) and has received 60% of the points available for that criterion on implementing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes

To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

Comments on Absolute Priority

The applicant addresses children with high needs throughout every component of this proposal. The proposal highlights system building across state agencies and stakeholders, includes a TQIRS, focuses on professional development and the importance of kindergarten readiness assessments. The applicant does a good job of relating each criterion to the next to show the importance of building a comprehensive system.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # AR-5002

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 2:03 PM

CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

A. Successful State Systems

Table with 3 columns: Core Area, Available, Score. Row 1: (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development, 20, 16

The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--

- (a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;
(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;
(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and
(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

Arkansas has notable achievements in their investment in and commitment to publicly available early learning programs. They have established a state funded prekindergarten system that serves nearly 50% of eligible (meeting poverty eligibility criteria) 3 and 4 year old children in their state and have a statewide Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System. While the proposal indicates a substantial growth in financial investment from the 1990's to \$111 million in 2011, growth in the investment of funding since 2007 has been modest with peak total funding in 2009 of 137,460,406 and current funding of 136,737,717 (Table (A)(1-4)). The participation of Children with High Needs within Early Learning and Development Programs has also remained relatively stable since 2007, with increases tied more to federally funded programs (i.e., Head Start, Early Head Start, and IDEA programs) than state supported programs (Table(A)(1)-5). As the number of children living in poverty has grown substantially between the 2000 Census count of 47,930 children age 3-Kindergarten entry under the 200% Federal Poverty Line to 68,746 in the 2010 Census, enrollment in programs has seen only marginal growth since 2007. Arkansas has provided evidence of many current policies and practices that are linked to improving access for high quality early learning and development programs. These policies and practices include: the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire by some programs for early screening; the annual dissemination of a directory (Family Connections) with data regarding availability of licensed and quality child care; and the universal use of an assessment of children upon entry to Kindergarten (QELI, Qualls Early Learning Inventory). While Arkansas has made gains in their development of a statewide system, there are multiple areas that are in need of improvement. The state has established Early Learning and Development Standards, but those standards are not aligned to the state's Kindergarten entry assessment. A pilot study was conducted to demonstrate the feasibility of using a developmental screening tool (ASQ), but there was no evidence in the proposal that screening was occurring throughout the state in all programs. Formative child assessments are being used to inform instruction and monitor child outcomes, but the applicant expresses concerns that the tools selected do not link well to all of the school readiness domains. An important area for improvement that was noted in the application was the Arkansas Better Beginnings (AR-BB) quality rating system. The tiered system is linked to the use of an environmental rating scale and does not include independent measures of teacher-child interactions or the use of child assessment to

inform instruction. Arkansas provides a description of a broad array of programs and efforts related to family engagement, but the efforts described seem to focus on promoting parent participation and involvement and less on family support, ongoing family communication, outreach to other family members, or parent leadership development. In addition there are important needs in the development of early educators. While Arkansas provides free and low cost professional development courses and workshops, the state lacks a system to track the status of workforce knowledge and credentials. In addition, the proposal provided no information on the number of early educators receiving post-secondary preparation in early childhood education and the alignment of those programs to the Arkansas Early Learning Framework. The lack of information and detail on the credentialing system and progression of early educators in the system raises concerns about the extent to which personnel preparation are engaged in the state plan. Finally, although Arkansas has instituted a mandatory statewide school readiness screening for all Kindergarten children (QELI) the state has concerns about the adequacy of the assessment to provide information on some of the key school readiness domains (i.e., physical development, social emotional) and the lack of alignment of the assessment to Early Learning and Development Standards. An overall concern with the evidence provided by the state on their commitment to high quality and accessible Early Learning and Development Programs was the documentation of their efforts to provide services to Children with High Needs. The application lists multiple efforts to support children in poverty; there was minimal discussion in this section about the support of children who have disabilities or developmental delays or in foster care. This gap might be due to the lack of awareness by the state about who these children are as very little data seem to be available on the counts of these children within the state (Table (A)(1)-2). The score for the response to the A-1 criteria is 16 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	15

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

The reform agenda for Arkansas is directly tied to the State's progress to date and the needed improvements that have been identified by the state in this application. Their goal is focused on increasing the number of early learning and development programs that meet revised standards of quality. The plan is appropriately ambitious as it includes the following elements: a) mandatory participation in the Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System (TQRIS) (although this is contingent on changing state law); b) increase in the minimum licensing standards to match the requirements of the first tier within the TQRIS; b) linking pre-kindergarten child data to the K-12 longitudinal data system; and c) improvements in the TQRIS that include screening and use of valid and reliable child assessments. The rationale provided in the proposal for the reform agenda is based on data that suggest when children with poverty attend higher quality programs (such as the public preschool program); they perform better on the Kindergarten readiness measure than children in poverty who have not attended those programs. The reform agenda identifies major projects that will improve components of programs (comprehensive assessment system, family engagement, revamping the inservice professional develop system and tracking of education attainment, and making improvements to kindergarten assessment and use of data). The rationales for the focus areas are linked to gaps or weaknesses in the system or to the desire to strengthen particular components (e.g., family engagement). However, there is little content in this section on the rationale for how those focus areas link specifically to improving school readiness outcomes for Children with High Needs. Thus, the score for this section is 15 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	6

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--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(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--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(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 providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

The lead agency, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, will house all project funded personnel, with projects being completed by subcontractors who will be identified through an RFP process. Of note, is the use of the existing Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, to provide input and guidance to the project. The use of this commission will continue to support a foundation of inter-agency collaboration that has already been established in the state and could promote sustainability. The use of an existing commission with a history in the state is a strong element as it has an established structure, visibility, and history of collaboration. However, the use of the existing committee means that representation from the agencies that support children disabilities have to be added as ad hoc. This might be problematic as it could establish a second tier of participation and affect how well the concerns related to children with disabilities will be addressed. The proposal does not provide information on how decisions will be made or disputes will be resolved. The applicant has provided letters and MOU from all key agencies. However it is not clear from the application how the collaboration will occur other than representative seats on the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission. While there is one seat on the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission for a parent, other mechanisms for the involvement of representatives from participating programs, parents and families, and families of Children with High Needs was not addressed. The applicant includes a Memorandum of Understanding from each of the key collaborating agencies, but does not provide scope of work descriptions for each of these agencies that describes their efforts in the implementation of the state plan. The state has provided a plan to establish strong participation and commitment in the state plan by Participating State Agencies and other learning and development stakeholders and parts of the plan are currently being implemented. The applicant failed to provide some necessary details for the response to this section's criteria. The score for the response to the criteria is 6 points.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	14

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

- (1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;
- (2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and
- (3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

The applicant has presented substantial evidence for how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from the grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan. The proposal provides information about how current funding sources support efforts that are linked to the state plan. Existing funds for providing quality early learning and development programs are substantial. For example, the state spends 6.2 million annually to meet the match requirements of the CCDF Block Grant and has an annual budget of 111,000,000 to serve low income children in quality programs. However, a noticeable omission for the dedication of existing resources is IDEA funding related to the support of children at risk of or with disabilities. This omission raises questions about the investment that will be made by participating state agencies and partners who provide supports and services to Children with High Needs who are eligible for special education programs. The proposal lists each major activity involved in the plan and details the resources that will be needed to implement those activities. Issues related to sustainability of effort after the end of the project have been addressed by ensuring that grant-funded activities are designed to build capacity and implement reforms and infrastructure that the state funding will be able to maintain. This response received 14 points.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	8

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--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(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 standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

The proposal provides evidence that Arkansas has a statewide tiered quality rating and improvement system (Arkansas Better Beginnings, AR-BB) that includes opportunities for participation from all licensed and registered programs that serve children birth to five. The system is linked to early learning and development standards, but is not currently linked to licensing standards, does not currently require the use of child screening, and does not have a component to address the use of effective data practices. In the current system, the environment rating scale is used to assess the implementation of practice for family engagement and adult-child interactions which might be an insufficient measure for these critical areas. The need to improve the state TQRIS is addressed in the state plan. There is evidence of a state plan to improve the TQRIS by mandating a common screening measure for programs at AR-BB tier levels above a 3, adding the use of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System to measure adult-child interaction at higher tier levels, requiring college education for higher tier levels, increasing requirements for family engagement, including routine annual developmental and health screening, and the addition of higher levels of tiers to the current three tier systems to align the TQRIS with nationally recognized program standards (e.g., NAEYC). Because the state has only a few of the elements regarded as essential to a TQRIS currently implemented, the response to the criteria received 8 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	12

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

The applicant provides a plan that maximizes program participation in the TQRIS with a goal of having 100% of the programs participating in the system by the end of the grant. Given the current participation rates in TQRIS, these are achievable and ambitious targets for the majority of programs in Arkansas. However, a concern related to the participation by all programs is the lack of a current baseline for IDEA and Title I programs displayed in Table (B)(2)(c). While the applicant has a strategy that will ultimately ensure 100% participation in the TQRIS of all programs, the lack of baseline raises questions about the state's level of knowledge of those programs, their investment in the state plan, and the state's ability to develop policies to reach the participation goal. The plan to achieve 100% participation includes changing licensing standards to align with the system so that tier 1 standards are required for licensure. This will provide an incentive to programs to participate and ensure a minimal quality level for all programs. In addition, the plan includes providing incentives to programs for each level of certification in the form of incentive grants that can be used flexibly by the program. Arkansas also promotes the value of quality care to families through marketing efforts, provides a tax credit for families whose children participate in a quality-certified program, and provides vouchers for families with low income to use for their child's attendance in the state-funded pre-kindergarten program. The project proposal also includes the intention to tie receipt of state or federal funds to programs that meet the AR-BB quality level of 3 or greater and will require that all programs that receive vouchers for foster care meet Level 3 quality or above. The state has provided evidence that it has a plan to maximize participation in the TQRIS and has many of those elements substantially in place. The response to the criteria for B(2) received a score of 12 points.

	Available	Score
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(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs

15

12

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)

Arkansas has a well-developed system for rating and monitoring the quality of programs. The state contracts with Arkansas State University to provide trained monitors who have credentials in early childhood education and who have been trained in using the Environmental Rating scale with reliability. Inter-rater reliability is checked on an ongoing basis. Quality ratings of programs and other data (included health and safety information) is publicly available through the DCCECE website. The importance of high quality programs has been disseminated through a marketing campaign implemented by DCCECE. In addition to these elements that have been implemented, there are plans to improve the system by conducting an independent evaluation of quality levels and to add a new measure for teacher-child interactions (i.e., the CLASS). While the plan to develop and implement a system for rating and monitoring program quality is generally addressed, there are no distinctive elements described that address the unique needs of Children with High Needs. Thus, the response to the criteria for (B)(3) received 12 points.

(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs

Available

Score

20

12

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) 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 Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

The proposal describes the provision of free training and technical assistance to support the continuous improvement of quality programs. The state is currently implementing an incentive grant program to encourage programs to participate in the TQRIS, and with the funding will add a bonus program to support and incentivize movement of programs into higher quality tiers. The project will use funds to establish local Child Care Collaboratives to link home-based and center-based early educators with kindergarten educators, to identify resources, and to engage with parents. However, it was not clear in the proposal on how these newly formed collaboratives would result in continuous improvement, supporting families of Children with High Needs, increase the number of programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS, or increase the number of Children with High Needs enrolled in top tier programs. The failure to provide these details are troubling as the state plan is designed in a manner that relies on success by the local collaboratives to implement the reform agenda. The state intends to expand their Special Quest efforts to promote inclusive service and expand Project Play that provides early childhood mental health consultation to programs serving foster children. These supports should lead to greater access to programs for Children with High Needs although the proposal lacked specificity of the supports that would enable families to access these programs. An area that the applicant identified as challenging was the participation of

specialized, segregated programs that provided supports to children with disabilities within the TQRIS. The state plan for improvement was to provide technical assistance to programs to assist with structure of the environment and to support movement into higher tiers. The response to this section received 12 points.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	8

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

The proposal describes, in a very general manner, the intention to conduct a statewide evaluation to validate the quality system and measure child outcomes using randomized selection, a research design that will yield sufficient numbers of children within different types of programs to offer an analysis of program type, and the inclusion of measures to examine the kindergarten readiness domains of language, literacy, and early mathematics. The outside evaluation will be conducted by a subcontractor who will be selected in response to a Request for Proposals. No other details on the evaluation plan were offered by the applicant. The state will also be able to evaluate the relationship between participation in the TQRIS and child outcomes through the state longitudinal data system. Finally, there is the intention to examine if the use of bonuses and incentives has a relationship to quality. No details on the evaluation design for that analysis were provided. Thus, the response to this section received 8 points.

Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E)

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	30	15

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;

(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;

(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as

appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(2)

The state plan includes a commitment to use the ASQ screening program and the requirement for use for programs at tier 4 in the TQRIS and higher. The state is also in the process of determining state mandated choices for a formative assessment tool. This section of the proposal did not discuss the selection of these tools and how populations of Children with High Needs will be considered in their selection. The applicant offers data to support that training materials have been developed to support the use of the ASQ with participants indicating they felt the training was helpful. Detailed information on how training would be delivered (for example, who will provide, what training activities, implementation supports) so that practitioners would have the skills and understanding to administer and interpret both the screening tool (ASQ) and formative assessment that will be selected was not included. The state has a longitudinal data system and with the support of these funds, the system will be improved to allow for the tracking of individual children and the sharing of information across programs. Because elements of the plan to support the effective implementation of a Comprehensive Assessment System are partially implemented and some of the criteria are not addressed in the plan, the response received 15 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	30	15

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--

(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;

(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; and

(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.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(4)

The applicant describe many elements of their current family engagement strategies and note that current modes of implementation have limited their impact. The strategies that will be used to increase family engagement involve expanding and leveraging current efforts in the use of the Family Map Inventory (a family needs assessment), TIPs for great kids (flexible parent education modules), expanding training opportunities in Strengthening Families and integrating requirements for completion in the TQRIS higher tiers, and encouraging the use of the Family Connections materials. The applicant shows evidence that there is a plan for a progression of standards that will be used in the TQRIS system for family engagement. These activities provide a rich menu of options for helping educators use family engagement strategies, however the description of their use does not highlight how they meet the requirement for culturally and linguistically appropriate information or how they support families of Children with High Needs in particular. Two new efforts, professional development to support providers in the needs and strategies to support children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and living with depressed caregivers might meet the unique needs of some populations of Children with High Needs. However, very little information was provided on how staff were to be trained in those efforts. Because the applicant is currently partially implementing a plan for family engagement and some criteria were not completely addressed, the response to this section was scored with 15 points.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
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(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

40

15

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--

(a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;

(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;

(c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

(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

(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.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

The applicant focuses improvement for supporting early educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities by improving access to professional development training, the improved alignment of training to core competencies, improving the professional development tracking system, and encouraging the use of professional development bonus awards for college preparation. Some critical deficiencies in the current system that were acknowledged by the applicant included: a) the lack of a link between existing trainings and the career lattice; b) very limited expectations for staff training for minimum licensing standards; c) no oversight of the current training content that is offered through the state system; d) the lack of data on teacher credentialing and advancement; and e) the lack of outcome evaluation linked to training. The state includes plans to improve each of these deficiencies including to publicly report on aggregated data on early childhood educator advancement and retention, but fails to set targets for increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that will be aligned to the workforce knowledge and competency framework. In addition, it does not offer baseline data on what level of credentials are currently held by early childhood educators or set targets for increasing the progression of early childhood educators in the career pathway. The response to criteria for (D)(2) received 15 points.

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	40	32
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--</p> <p>(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p>		

(d) 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; and

(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)

The applicant described a plan to adopt a statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that will inform instruction. The state currently uses a mandated Kindergarten Readiness checklist that is reported to be reliable and valid (including for children with disabilities and who are English Language Learners), is used with all children entering Kindergarten, and is entered into the longitudinal data system. A concern of the state is the alignment of the current assessment to the essential domains of school readiness. Thus, they have begun a process to identify a different assessment that might be used to replace the currently used Qualls Early Learning Inventory. The state plan is to identify a new tool that meets all desired criteria by the end of 2012 and begin to use the tool by 2014. An omission in the description of the assessment selection criteria for their new KEA was the capacity of the tool to be appropriate for English language learners and children with disabilities. While the applicant did not describe the funding sources for the Kindergarten Entry Assessment, it seems appropriate to assume that those costs would continue to be the State's responsibility. Because the state is substantially, but not fully, implementing the criteria for a common statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment (please note that the assessment currently used does not meet criteria of covering all essential domains of school readiness), the score for the plan was 32 points.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	180

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	4

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and

(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (P)(2)

The state offers a systematic plan to strengthen their Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and mandate the participation of all licensed Early Learning and Development Programs. However, the state does not offer plans for meeting the criteria for extending their licensing requirements to include covering all programs that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee. Currently, the state only licenses family child care providers that provide care for 5 or more unrelated children. Because the applicant will only address (b) of these criteria, this response received 4 points.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	Yes

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

Comments on (P)(3)

The state is implementing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment and acknowledges some concerns about the assessment that has been selected and it's match to the required elements. Prior to the RTT funding announcement, the state initiated activities to help them identify an assessment that would be more appropriate.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.</p>	
Comments on Absolute Priority	
<p>Arkansas has presented a plan for ensuring mandatory participation of all Early Learning and Development Programs in a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. The applicant has identified areas to improve in the TQRIS and identified the activities that will revise the system, raise the quality of all programs, support a great early childhood education workforce, increase access of Children with High Needs to those programs, and address the needs for improving the school readiness outcomes. The state application meets the minimum threshold for a comprehensive plan for building a system that will increase the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs.</p>	



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # AR-5002

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 6:50 PM

CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

A. Successful State Systems

Table with 3 columns: Core Area, Available, Score. Row 1: (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development, 20, 17. Includes detailed text description of the core area requirements.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

The applicant provides a thorough depiction of the state's commitment to early learning and development. The state funds Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) to serve children with high needs in child care for children birth to five. Funding has fluctuated with a drop in 2010 but increased to the seemingly second highest level in 2011 in several categories. The state invests \$103,500,000 in ABC with \$7.5 transferred from TANF funding to support early learning and development programs. CCDF match was met for the five fiscal years. The state's contribution to CCDF decreased over the same time period. Overall spending has fluctuated slightly but the evidence provided supports the state's financial commitment to young children which is considered to be a strength. There has been no funding directed for IDEA Part C for any of the years listed which is a weakness. --The evidence provided supports an increasing number of children who have access to services, 2007 - 2010 data show an increased service level. --The state has fully met the criteria demonstrating its past commitment and investment. The applicant provides evidence of the state's commitment to public policy supporting early learning referencing several legislative acts (Act 1132 of 1997, Act 49, Act 636, Act 825/2003 and Act 1132) and describes how these actions impacted practices to improve systems of care. The state has in place a Licensing and Quality Initiative (AR-BB) under the Arkansas Department of Human Services that provides a tiered QRIS; a program entitled Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) that provides services for children with high needs in center based settings or home-based through HIPPY. The program is a joint collaboration with the Department of Education. --Arkansas has adopted standards for early learning in two documents that cover infants and toddlers and preschool. Arkansas' professional development system aligns with the early learning standards in the frameworks. The state has a system of assessments to include screenings (Ages & Stages), formative assessment measures (The Ounce Scale), environmental quality and adult-child assessment (ERS and CLASS). The state is seeking a potential replacement to reflect all domains of school readiness. These are considered strengths. --Health promotion is addressed through the use of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) targeting a self-assessment system for child care programs. After the child care program has self-assessed, assistance is provided to consider changes in policy and practice with follow up training opportunities. --Family engagement is embedded into their ABC program that resembles the requirements for

Head Start with two parent-teacher conferences and parent involvement strategies. Family engagement is represented as one of the four goals through the Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative. Moreover, attention to families is reflected in the state's core competencies for ECE professionals which are a strength. --The state demonstrates their support for English Language Learners through their Welcome the Children project. This initiative provides a community team approach for reaching Latino families. Training is delivered through the professional development systems using Nuestra Familia materials. Home visiting is also delivered through HIPPIY and Parents as Teacher program models. These are strengths of the state. --Professional development is provided through free and low-cost courses. The Traveling Arkansas Professional Pathways (TAPP) provides practitioners with career guidance and the TAPP registry tracks the training received. Transcripts are available and practitioner levels are defined as: Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced and TAPP Trainers. Comprehensive workforce data is not yet available through their registry system which is a weakness. --Kindergarten students are assessed at entry using the Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI). Some domains are not assessed through this instrument; therefore, the state is exploring other options. Other assessments of child well-being are conducted (physical health, vision and hearing). --Arkansas states that they do not know the number of early childhood educators that received an early childhood credential nor whether the institutions align their programs with the state's current workforce knowledge and competency framework. This is considered a weakness. --The state has established the Arkansas Research Center (2009) to serve as the state's longitudinal state system and has met the essential elements required. Innovative approaches of data collection are evidenced via smartphone applications and linking preschool data for children into the system. Initial data are being used to evaluate children funded in early learning programs with comparative analysis for those children who did not have access to programs. The state is building data systems to support evaluation strategies both formatively and summative which is considered a strength. Overall, the state provides evidence of progress in key areas that demonstrates their commitment to high quality early learning and development systems.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	20

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

- (a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;
- (b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and
- (c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

Arkansas has met the criteria for articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals. The applicant provides a fairly thorough reform agenda articulating five projects. Based on their own assessment of strengths and challenges and empirical research, they focus their investment as follows: comprehensive assessment systems (C2); engaging and supporting families (C4); supporting early childhood educators KSAs (D2); and understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry (E1). --The goals are ambitious for improving quality and improving outcomes for Children with High Needs and appear achievable. The first project is aimed at improving the levels of quality for all licensed providers and expanding the availability of quality programs which is a strength of the plan. Efforts include the realignment of their existing QRIS, their Arkansas Better Beginnings (AR-BB) program and changing their licensing standards to level 1, recognizing that this will require legislative action. The goal is to encourage greater participation and saturation in the system. --Improving quality for the most at risk children includes a requirement that state reimbursements will not be made for programs below Level 3 in AR-BB for those serving children in foster care, those receiving vouchers and those with disabilities. The intended strategy is designed to encourage providers to attain the higher Level to be eligible to serve at risk children. --Project 2 focuses on comprehensive assessment system and enhancing those elements of assessment in their current AR-BB system. Valid and reliable assessments will be integrated into their existing system with the results used to inform and improve planning and instruction. --Project 3 focuses on engaging families. The applicant provides a rationale with empirical research for this planned focus. The applicant acknowledges that child care programs are typically weaker in this dimension and strategies are planned to strengthen this dimension. --Project 4 proposes to increase the number of credentialed practitioners and revamping their system of continued education. Standardized training is planned to maximize the value and likelihood of change in classroom practices. Improvement of the career lattice is also planned and revision of existing professional development courses in an effort to standardize training. --Project 5 proposes to enhance their existing kindergarten assessment to address all domains of learning and development and incorporate more preschool children into their longitudinal data system. The development of a new data system will be capable of producing standardized reports for teachers and programs. --Collectively, these project goals should achieve the intended goals to help close the achievement gap and improve outcomes for children.

	Available	Score
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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--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(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--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(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 providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

The applicant has partially implemented this criterion and presents a plan for aligning and coordinating early learning across the state. The applicant provided basic information on the governance structure in the state. An organizational chart was included in the appendix. --The Arkansas DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education would be the lead agency for RTT-ELC. Other state agencies identified are the Department of DHS Child Care Unit; Foster Care; Public Pre-K Unit; Arkansas Department of Education; DHS HIPPIY Program; DHS Developmental Disabilities Unit; Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, Early Learning Council and the Head Start State Collaboration Office; and MOUs are in place indicating their willingness to perform duties related to the grant. Other stakeholders are identified and letters of support are included in the application. The Early Childhood Commission / State Advisory Council will be responsible for approving activities in the plan. Overall, there appears to be appropriate collaborations across systems established. --It was less explicit regarding the method and process for how decisions would be made and how disputes would be resolved. This dimension does not appear to be addressed. The role of parents and families in the overall governance structure was not apparent. There did not appear to be significant variation in the types of support letters. There were no letters from community leaders and policy makers though there were letters from associations and councils as well as child care resource and referral agencies. These are considered weaknesses.

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

- (1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;
- (2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and
- (3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

The state provides a reasonable budget to support the work outlined in the plan to develop a high quality Early Learning and Development system across agencies. The applicant provides a evidence of existing efforts targeting early learning. The budget appears to contain the necessary funding to support the projects outlined in the proposal. A majority of the funding is contracted out and administration appears to be reasonable. The state has an approved indirect cost rate that will be applied to the project. The state provided evidence of the overall ECE program through other funding sources in Arkansas. --Arkansas stated that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by the programs would be maintained with existing funds through the Department of Education which is considered a strength. --The applicant states that the efforts funded by RTT-ELC were designed to build strong systems and avoid activities that require long term funds, but states that new programs requiring supports after the project ends would be funded through state resources. The applicant also provides a table outlining the other existing Federal, State and private/local funds to be used to achieve the outcomes of the state plan but they do not provide adequate detail on how the existing funds would be used to enhance the RTT-ELC goals, which is a weakness. The overall funding supports will likely enable the state to achieve its outcomes targeted in RTT-ELC.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	6

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--

(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--

- (1) Early Learning and Development Standards;
- (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;
- (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;
- (4) Family engagement strategies;
- (5) Health promotion practices; and
- (6) Effective data practices;

(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 standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

The state has partially implemented these criteria of developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS). The applicant had a QRIS system called Arkansas Better Beginnings (AR-BB) in place since 2010. The current system has three levels and the applicant acknowledges there are deficiencies in the existing model that are addressed in the plan. Overall, the TQRIS plan represents a high quality accountable program. Family child care homes, child care centers, Early Head Start/Head Start and private/public preschools are included in the TQRIS, which is a strength of the plan. --The proposed plan incorporates five levels and a Centers of Excellence designation as its sixth or highest level. The early learning and development standards are embedded into the design. The early childhood educator qualifications are increased as the levels are higher and address the qualifications of the administrator, teachers and cooks. Including the cook in the levels is a strength and acknowledges the role of this position in promoting healthy practices through good nutrition. Current environmental assessments reflect a score of 4 on the ERS for Level 3. Plans to add the additional levels will also increase expectations on the ERS scores to 5, 5.5 and 6. The learning environment expectations also increase with the proposed levels and include adult-child ratios that are lower as the levels increase. --The applicant provided the description of the Better Beginnings Incentive and Professional Development Grants outlining the incentive and PD awards by year based on levels. This appendix describes their current system and it is not clear how the awards and incentives would be distributed for levels 4, 5 and Centers of Excellence, though there is mention that there would be bonus awards for Levels 4 and 5 in the narrative. --The standards are measurable and differentiate between program quality levels. A strength of the plan is that empirical research findings were considered in its structure. The applicant plans to seek statutory changes to basic licensing requirements to align Level 1 on the AR-BB with minimum licensing standards. Each of the components address required element to include family engagement, professional development / qualifications of staff, learning environment which aligns with the frameworks, and child health and development. --The data system to maintain staff data is the TAPP which will be expanded to include applicable information on staff, current credentials, progress towards professional development goals and demographic information. The applicant also addressed the longitudinal data system that will be used to track child progress and collect assessment data. It was not clear how the TQRIS data needs would be managed, such as the investments in specific programs, levels and progression through levels, etc. and whether this aspect of the overall system would be managed via child care licensing data systems or another outside system and the linkages between these systems which is a weakness.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	10

The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;
- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
- (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

The state has partially implemented these criteria and presents a high quality plan for promoting participation in the state's TQRIS. The plan calls for the change in minimum licensing standards to align with Level 1 and moving the system from voluntary to mandatory as a goal. Programs participating in ABC (state funded preschool) will be encouraged to participate through reciprocity agreements which are considered a strength. Public school facilities will provide documentation that staff qualifications and professional development requirements are met for the appropriate levels. The most recent ERS scores will be used to calculate levels along with other supporting documentation. Incentive grants provided are expected to attract a higher number of participants into the system. --Head Start and Early Head Start programs will be encouraged to participate and can ask for reciprocity as well, recognizing the level of review and monitoring of these programs by federal reviewers. Policies and procedures for reciprocity are outlined. The process is designed to reduce the redundancies and complexities in maintaining standards from various oversight agencies and is a strength. Strategies outlined in the application will enable more families to afford quality child care with the increased supply and availability of resources to meet their needs. --Programs that serve children receiving services under Part B or Part C of IDEA will be encouraged to participate via targeted mentorship, training and support. Children in foster care will be required to be served in a Level 3 program or higher towards the end of the grant period. The expanded capacity is expected to be sufficient to meet this requirement. The plan calls for targets to increase participation in AR-BB which will also increase the availability of care for CCDF funded children via vouchers. The applicant provides ambitious goals for participation in TQRIS by the end of the grant period at 100% in all categories.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	15

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

- (a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and
- (b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)

The state has substantially implemented the criteria for rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs. The state has a rating and monitoring system in place in the existing AR-BB initiative. The Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS-R, ITERS-R, FCCERS-R) and the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and Business Administration Scale (BAS) instruments are used to measure both environments and program / business administration practices. These are valid and reliable tools for monitoring and assessing programs which is considered a strength. --Programs at Level 1 self-assess using the tools. Once programs request assessment for Level 2 consideration, contracted trained assessors are engaged. Plans include an independent evaluation of quality levels using the existing instruments and the CLASS and Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale. Programs are certified for 36 months before being reassessed. The plan states that programs may be assessed with the ERS for the initial year and follow-up assessment via the CLASS or other instruments measuring teacher interactions. --Parents can access information on child care program licensing online through the state's website. Information regarding a center's rating as well as citation information is available. The state ran a media campaign using various media to create more demand from the public for high quality programs. AR-BB programs receive media kits and banners that they can display to identify the center as AR-BB. R&R agencies also communicate information to parents on the center's status. These strategies are considered to be strengths of the Arkansas system.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	14

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

- (a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);
- (b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs, transportation, meals, family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) 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 Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

The state has partially implemented these criteria. The state plans to promote access to high quality programs for Children with High Needs and improve quality through TQRIS. A system of training and free technical assistance will be available and trainers will be required to become a member of the PD registry (TAPP). Policies include offering bonuses to higher quality programs in Level 4,5 and 6. These are all strengths of the system. --The state plans to expand its resource and referral services to enable access for families, provide training for key staff and help in preparing for assessments using the prescribed instruments. Community child care collaborative partnerships will be engaged to coordinate resources and outreach. The Arkansas Special Quest initiative providing training on inclusion will be expanded and linked to local child care collaborative partnerships which is a strength. An early childhood mental health consultation model will be expanded to target services for foster care children. A pilot program will be launched to target areas of high need where there are few high quality programs available. Such supports may include scholarships for education for key staff, materials and mentorship. Children in Title I ESEA and IDEA Part B will be required to attend licensed programs to receive funding and moving the licensing program into Level 1 of AR-BB is expected to improve the availability of access. The state plans to increase the number of programs in the top tiers. However, there are no targets for moving programs into Level 5 reflected on the chart assuming levels and tiers are synonymous for this example which is a weakness. The state has set ambitious goals for participation in the statewide TQRIS anticipating that 100% of the programs will be participating. The number and percentage of children participating in the system is also 100% by the target end of calendar year 2015. While these are lofty goals, these may be achievable if the statutory changes can be made.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	5

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

Arkansas does not provide a quality plan for validating the effectiveness of the state TQRIS. Arkansas states that they plan to conduct a statewide evaluation of the quality system category at each level to determine child development impact. The programs will be linked to the longitudinal data system for ongoing analysis. The bonus and incentive structure will also be analyzed and evaluated to determine its appropriateness and ability to impact change in quality. --The evaluation will examine the kindergarten readiness indicators of child development across AR-BB levels. The study is intended to examine adequate numbers of programs at each level using rigorous methods (e.g. random selection). A weakness is that they did not provide an overall comprehensive evaluation design to examine the system elements to include the anticipated research questions, timelines, instruments, sampling frame, etc.

Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60.

The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	30	18
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--</p> <p>(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;</p> <p>(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;</p> <p>(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and</p> <p>(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(2)
<p>The state has partially implemented the criteria for supporting effective uses of comprehensive assessment systems. The state presents a plan that incorporates the effective use of comprehensive assessment systems. The programs will use a screening tool, Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) for child screening and will expand the ASQ to target all voucher programs. It will be made available to all programs wishing to use it. ASQ will be required for programs at AR-BB Levels 4 and higher which is a strength. Since the ASQ is not required for children served in Levels 1-3, children served by these programs would not have the benefit of the screening unless the program voluntarily decided to use it which is considered a weakness. --A formative assessment instrument has not been selected but plans are to select one instrument that incorporates all domains of school readiness recognizing current instruments have deficiencies. Environmental assessments will be achieved through the use of the ERS (ECERS-R, ITERS-R, and FCCERS-R). The CLASS and Arnett will be used to measure adult-child interactions. Using common and consistent assessment tools will facilitate data aggregation into the longitudinal data system and is viewed as a strength. These instruments are appropriate to measure environments for Children with High Needs. --Adoption of common assessment instruments will aid the state in developing common elements linked to the longitudinal data system though the details were scant which could be viewed as a weakness. --The state did not provide specific plans for articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results. This is viewed as a weakness. --The state outlines a strategy to provide training on the assessment tools which will be expanded for all directors and teaching staff. The training will incorporate instruction on how these assessments can be used to inform practice and improve program quality will be included and is a strength. The state is not specific as it relates to training early childhood educators to administer and interpret the scoring, particularly for children with disabilities which is considered a weakness.</p>

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	30	20
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(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; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(4)

The state has partially implemented the criteria for engaging and supporting families. They outline a high quality plan to engage and support families. This element is reflected as a requirement in the AR-BB in Levels 4, 5, and 6 which would impact all staff which is considered a strength. --The standards reflect an increasing number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an ongoing basis. For example, 100% of staff will be required to complete the Strengthening Families webinar and minimum scores must be obtained on the PAS Family Partnerships sub scale for the TQRIS which is considered a strength. --The state has an online wizard tool to help families to determine eligibility for early childhood services such as ABC, KidCare and nutrition. A geo mapping feature is planned with links to the child care collaborative partnerships. Community Cafes have been piloted in an effort to facilitate parent voices to impact policies. Through the Maternal Infant and EC Home Visiting funding, program training and support for families will be provided as children move from home to preschool and kindergarten which is considered a strength. --The state also has a refundable tax credit available for families whose children are cared for in AR-BB Level 2 or higher. This provides a financial incentive for families to participate in the program and is considered a strength. --Though the overall plan appears to be comprehensive, it is not clear how the efforts provide a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards across all levels to expand the capacity of families to support their children nor how families who have children with disabilities will be more engaged, which is considered a weakness.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	24
<p>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 Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

The state has partially implemented the criteria for supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills and abilities. The state plans to engage in several strategies to improve the overall status of the ECE workforce. --Currently, trainers in the TAPP are advertising their training opportunities but they do not necessarily align with the core competencies or build on prior knowledge. The state will address this issue by revising the data system that collects the information on the available training to align with the core competencies. Trainers will be required to revise their training to fit a standardized protocol to improve the course content and delivery which is considered a strength. --The state provides professional development grants to improve child care staff qualifications. RTT-ELC funds will be used to pilot and evaluate differential reimbursement rates tied to AR-BB ratings for infants and toddlers and children in foster care. Bonuses will be awarded for moving and maintaining higher levels. These are considered strengths. --Professional development awards are not currently tracked within their AR-BB system to determine how they are being used. Plans are to track those to determine their use between in-service training opportunities and college classes. Analysis of the types of training that

practitioners engage will be monitored to ensure that the training aligns with the educator's position to improve practices. The SPECTRUM (career lattice) will be revised to ensure the core competencies are aligned with specific coursework that has been registry-approved. --While revisions to the data system are expected to improve the ability of the state to collect data on retention, advancement, etc., there was no mention of ensuring that the TAPP Registry aligns its policies and practices with those recommended by The National Registry Alliance to ensure consistent data structure, verification and reporting which is a weakness. --Goals were not addressed with regard to formal education via post-secondary institutions and how those institutions are aligned with the core competency frameworks established for ECE. Data was not available to establish a baseline or to develop targets for future measurement in this dimension which is considered a weakness.

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E) which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	40	28
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--</p> <p>(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p> <p>(d) 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; and</p> <p>(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)
<p>The state has partially implemented the criteria for understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry. The state understands the importance of valid assessment and how these assessments are used to improve instruction and track progress towards improved school readiness for children. Since 2004, the Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI) has been utilized. The data have been included in the longitudinal data system since 2007 which is considered a strength. --The state adopted the national common core standards in 2010. The instruments currently used to assess kindergarten readiness do not cover all of the essential domains of school readiness. However, plans are underway to adopt a new instrument but the specific tool has not yet been determined. --Validity and reliability are principles of the Consortium, Developmentally appropriate tools are also a principle though there was no reference to English learners or children with disabilities and how these children would be treated, which is considered a weakness. --Arkansas plans to select a new comprehensive assessment tool by 2012, plan for implementation in 2013 (including training and revision to the DOE data system) and implement in a phased process by 2014. --The data from the kindergarten assessments will be stored in the longitudinal data system (ARC). Funding from RTT-ELC is designed to supplement existing efforts and will be used to transition to the new tool and train teachers and administrators in Pre-K and K-3 on effective data practices and how assessments are used to inform instruction, which is considered a strength. --The PARCC consortium is working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments. It was not clear what other funding is used to support the kindergarten screening which is a weakness.</p>

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	193

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	5
<p>Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--</p> <p>(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and</p> <p>(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		
Comments on (P)(2)		
<p>The state has minimally met the criteria for including all early learning and development programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. The state currently requires licensure in programs where 6 or more unrelated children are in care. Family child care homes must be registered by the state if 5 unrelated children are in care. The applicant states that there are no plans to require licensure or to reduce the number of children where licensing is required for two or more unrelated children, which is considered a weakness. A TQRIS is planned that would change the licensure requirements to be aligned with Level 1 on the AR-BB; thereby enabling all licensed providers entry into the AR-BB, which is considered a strength.</p>		

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p>		
Comments on (P)(3)		
<p>The state currently has a kindergarten entry assessment. The state does address selection criterion (E)(1) and has earned a score of at least 70 percent.</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting</p>	

Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

Comments on Absolute Priority

Arkansas presented a good overall comprehensive plan that addresses the systemic needs across state agencies and departments for early learning development and expands capacity for the state's most vulnerable children. The plan is ambitious yet achievable if the statutory changes sought for licensure can be obtained so that the TQRIS Level 1 is consistent with minimum licensing standards. The improvements planned for the kindergarten screening will aid in providing data to support and inform instruction. The planned strategies for the ECE workforce are important and acknowledges the teacher as the most important determinant of quality in ECE classrooms. Improving the knowledge, skills and practices of teachers is a plausible strategy to realize the overall goal of improved program quality resulting in better outcomes for children, enhancing school readiness, and narrowing the achievement gap.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # AR-5002

Peer Reviewer:
Lead Monitor:
Support Monitor:
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 10:36 AM

CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

States must address in their application all of the selection criteria in the Core Areas.

A. Successful State Systems

Table with 3 columns: Core Area, Available, Score. Row 1: (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development, 20, 8. Includes detailed description of the state's early learning and development programs and investment.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

The response was scored at 8 out of 20 points; a medium to low quality response. Reasons for this rating include: a) The application does not contain adequate information to evaluate financial investments. In the narrative, the applicant lists a number of impressive investments in Early Learning and Development (ELD), but the material does not provide a coherent picture of the system. The data in Table (A)(1-4) is difficult to relate to the narrative. The table shows a fluctuating pattern of investments and no funds are reported for Part C, which seems unlikely as states cannot participate in Part C without state funds. No explanation is provided regarding the fluctuation in funds; b) The narrative and applicable tables regarding serving high need populations are confusing and incomplete. In the narrative the applicant asserts a considerable increase in children with high needs served from the '90's to present. Neither the narrative nor the tables give the total population of children birth to kindergarten age. This denominator is critical to understanding the full picture. For example, in the special population Table A(1)-2, the applicant reports most categories as unknown except for children in foster care. Children in foster care (1705) are reported to be 41.9% of children (B-K) in the state who are high needs. However for the disability categories, 3222 children represent 3% of the 0-3 population and for children 3-5 years 7722 represents 6% of the population. In Table (A)(1)-5 which provides the historical data on participation of children with high needs in ELD the 2008 and 2009 figures are lower than the 2007 figure; c) The narrative contains a brief paragraph referencing four state laws. There is no overall picture provided as to how legislation policy and practices relate to one another; d) The current status of each of the essential building blocks is described in the narrative. Arkansas has had a framework and standards since the 1990's and frequent updatings are described. The comprehensive assessment system addresses: Screening (ASQ); Formative Assessment (The Ounce, which has limitations in essential domains of school readiness); Environmental quality (tool use in transition) and Adult Child Interactions (CLASS). Table (A)(1)-7 shows inconsistencies across programs in application of the system. Family engagement strategies are described briefly in the narrative with examples of some activities. (A)(1)-9 details separate activities by program. An overall vision in this area is not provided. The applicant has not adequately addressed the building block of development of Early Childhood Educators. Development of EC educators is acknowledged as having "serious gaps." The question in (A)(1)-10 regarding alignment of credentials and knowledge and competency

framework is filled in as not available except for the P-4 credential which is aligned. Information requested in Table (A)(1)-11 regarding IHE and credentials or degrees are listed as unknown. The applicant's response regarding the building block of development of early childhood educators is poor and unlikely to succeed without higher education involvement. In regards to data practices, Arkansas has a longitudinal data system which includes essential data elements and efforts are well underway to integrate data systems across agencies. The applicant's description of the status of the data system is a strength, in that it has all elements and steps have already been undertaken to integrate data systems.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	4

The extent to which the State clearly articulates a comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable, builds on the State's progress to date (as demonstrated in selection criterion (A)(1)), is most likely to result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs, and includes--

(a) Ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality, improving outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and closing the readiness gap between Children with High Needs and their peers;

(b) An overall summary of the State Plan that clearly articulates how the High-Quality Plans proposed under each selection criterion, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving these goals; and

(c) A specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E), including why these selected criteria will best achieve these goals.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

The response was scored at 4 of 20 points; a low quality response because the narrative does not articulate a comprehensive and coherent ELD reform agenda. The applicant has proposed five projects. Project 1, which is framed as the overarching goal, is to increase the quality and quantity of programs in Arkansas. The goal statements are not measurable and therefore not judged to be ambitious yet achievable. The goal statements do not clearly speak to the competition requirements of improving outcomes for children with high needs and closing the readiness gap with measurable plans. The applicant does provide rationale to the three focus areas selected, but, those rationale do not combine into a comprehensive plan.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	4

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--

(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--

(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;

(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;

(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

(b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--

(1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;

(2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and

(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(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--

(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and

(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 providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

The response was scored at 4 of 10 points; a medium to low quality partially implemented response. There are three key entities central to the structure of the application; the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) lead agency, Department of Human Services, and the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission/State Advisory Council which will approve activities funded by RTT-ELC. The administrative relationship among these entities is not clear. The applicant has only minimally addressed the criteria regarding the organizational structure, the roles and responsibilities of each entity, methods of decision making and dispute resolution as requested in (A)(3)(a). The plan in response to these elements is judged to be of medium quality. Duties for each entity are described, and organizational charts are provided for the Division and the Department of Human Services, but it is not clear to whom DCCECE and the ECC/SAC report to. The required letters from stakeholder groups are a strength of the application. However, the MOU's while adequate, are not sufficiently detailed in level of commitment. Institutions of Higher Education are not represented in the council or letters and this lack is judged as reflecting non inclusion of a key resource, a significant weakness in the plan.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	4

The extent to which the State Plan--

(a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;

(b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--

(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;

(2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and

(3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

(c) Demonstrates that it can be sustained after the grant period ends to ensure that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served by Early Learning and Development Programs in the State will be maintained or expanded.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

The response was scored at 4 of 15 points; a medium to low quality response. The proposal contains brief descriptions of the major initiatives of current use of federal and state dollars. It was not clear where some of the required federal programs fit in these descriptions, specifically Home Visiting, IDEA and Literacy Programs were not identified in the text and budgets. The RTT-ELC funds go to two state agencies, Human Services and Education. The description provided regarding the use of these funds is minimal. The guidance asks for detailed description of personnel. The budget calls for \$275,415 per year at Human Services for personnel. Six new positions will be hired at a total of \$200,771 per year. Apparently there are existing personnel who will be funded by RTT-ELC funds. This is appropriate, however no information is provided as to who these people are or the nature of their qualifications. The bulk of the RTT-ELC funds go into contracts (95%) that presumably the staff at DHS will be administering. The narrative breaks out RFP's by activity which is appropriate. However there is no detail provided beyond that. While time and space constraints preclude detail for every project, an example of the scope of an RFP is necessary to judge feasibility and quality. Overall the budget narrative is inadequate in detail and does not provide evidence of sustainability as required.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	6
<p>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--</p> <p>(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Early Learning and Development Standards; (2) A Comprehensive Assessment System; (3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications; (4) Family engagement strategies; (5) Health promotion practices; and (6) Effective data practices; <p>(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 standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and</p> <p>(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		
Comments on (B)(1)		
<p>The response was scored at 6 of 10 points; as a partially implemented medium quality response. Arkansas began implementation of a three tier TQRIS in 2010, these three tiers are higher than and separate from licensing regulations. This system includes ratings for five of the six expected program standards. Effective data practices are not addressed, but plans are included in response to E1. Arkansas acknowledges that "current levels in the TQRIS do not meet critical quality levels." Data from Head Start programs provides some evidence for the validity of the ratings which is a strength. Plans under RTT-ELC call for broadening participation in the system and expanding the system to include increasing to quality tiers 4, 5 and 6. The presentation of the existing standards (levels 1-3) was confusing and acknowledged by the applicant to be inadequate. Tiers 4, 5 and 6 are not yet developed, consequently it is not possible to judge whether they are measurable, and able to meaningfully differentiate quality levels nor reflect high expectations. The applicants plan to request legislative action to link State licensing and ELD programs is appropriate and necessary.</p>		

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15	9
<p>The extent to which the State has maximized, or has a High-Quality Plan to maximize, program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--</p> <p>(a) Implementing effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs participate in such a system, including programs in each of the following categories--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) State-funded preschool programs; (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs; 		

(3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA,

(4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and

(5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;

(b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

The response was scored at 9 of 15 points; as a medium quality partially implemented plan in response to the element of promoting participation in the state's TQRIS. The proposal details practices such as incentives tied to TQRIS participation, and tax credits for enrollment in higher quality care which have implemented to increase participation in the rating system and to make doing so affordable. Some detail is provided about what has been done, but there is little detail about the number of programs and number of children impacted with each strategy. In Performance Measure (B)(2)(C) there is no baseline data for IDEA Part C, Part B, or ESEA Title I, yet there is a target of 100% by the end of 2015. Based on the information provided, it is not possible to judge the feasibility of this goal. The applicant proposes some interesting ideas, i.e. pilot and evaluate differential reimbursement rates tied to ratings for children in foster care. However, a rationale was not provided for targeting 25% of children in foster care and 25% of infants and toddlers. While the applicant has proposed some interesting ideas, not enough detail is provided as to how these plans would be implemented, so it is not possible to develop a judgment as to how likely these efforts are to help more families afford high quality child care.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	9

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Using a valid and reliable tool for monitoring such programs, having trained monitors whose ratings have an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability, and monitoring and rating the Early Learning and Development Programs with appropriate frequency; and

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs (e.g., displaying quality rating information at the program site) and making program quality rating data, information, and licensing history (including any health and safety violations) publicly available in formats that are easy to understand and use for decision making by families selecting Early Learning and Development Programs and families whose children are enrolled in such programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)

The response was scored at 9 of 15 points; as a partially implemented medium quality response. The narrative details the current monitoring practices for the current 3 tier system. Plans for improvement of the rating system are described as "the commissioning of an independent evaluation of quality levels and integration of an assessment tool regarding the quality of teacher child interactions." This approach is reasonable, but there is not enough detail regarding how this would work. The applicant stipulates that the improved process will include use of a valid and reliable tool, have trained monitors with acceptable levels of interrater reliability and monitor with appropriate frequency, but insufficient operational detail was. Parents and the public currently have access to licensing information. Arkansas plans to conduct a media campaign to draw attention to high quality care but no plans are described as to how strategies will be adapted to needs of parents from culturally and linguistic different groups. There is no information in this section regarding outreach to high needs population which is a weakness.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	8

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for improving the quality of the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

(a) Developing and implementing policies and practices that provide support and incentives for Early Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, higher subsidy reimbursement rates, compensation);

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--

(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and

(2) 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 Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

The response was scored at 8 of 20 points; the narrative contains a partially implemented medium quality response. The response is rated as partially implemented because currently they have only implemented the first three tiers of the TQRIS, which were acknowledged in an earlier section as not fully adequate with respect to standards. The strategies described include expansion of R-R, creating incentives for child care collaborative that would support better coordination between child care and schools. The proposal mentions that Special Quest (program for children with disabilities) exists in 5 communities, the plan is to expand Special Quest but specifics as to how this expansion would occur are not provided. Arkansas plans to use RTT-ELC funding to expand Project PLAY but specifics of how this will be done are not provided. In Performance Measure (B)(4)(c)2 baseline data is unavailable for Part C, Part B and Title I of ESEA. In general the proposal lacks specifics plans such as activities, timelines and responsible parties and therefore cannot be rated as ambitious and achievable. In regards to children with delays or disabilities, the proposal describes the current status of an essentially separate system. The proposal does not contain specifics as to how this system will be changed and coordinated with other programs.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	3

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--

(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and

(b) Assessing, using appropriate research designs and measures of progress (as identified in the State Plan), the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

The response was scored at 3 of 15 points; it is rated as a medium to low quality response because the narrative lacked any operational detail. The applicant did not describe a design as to how changes in quality ratings will be related to children's progress and school readiness. The applicant did identify potential assessment tools that are valid and reliable and were awarded points on this element.

Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E)

Each State must address in its application--

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C),
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D), and
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

The total available points that an applicant may receive for selection criteria (C)(1) through (C)(4) is 60. The 60 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points. If the applicant chooses to address two selection criteria, each criterion will be worth up to 30 points.

The applicant must address at least two of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C), which are as follows.

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	30	12
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--</p> <p>(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;</p> <p>(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;</p> <p>(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and</p> <p>(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		
Comments on (C)(2)		
<p>The response to supporting effective use of a Comprehensive Assessment System was awarded 12 points out of a possible 30 points. The response is rated as a partially implemented medium quality response. The response to this criterion addresses the required four critical points but only very briefly and without details such as goals, activities, timelines and responsible parties required in the criteria for a high quality plan. Some of the detail regarding tools to be used was provided in other sections of the proposal and in appendices that is acceptable. However to be rated high quality, it would have been helpful if the applicant included more operational detail. More operational detail regarding specific activities, responsible parties and timelines is needed. Lack of detail was especially an issue in regards to the criterion regarding an approach for aligning, interpreting and sharing assessment results. There is minimal to no attention given to differentiation by program type or special needs. More detail is needed regarding training plans for the workforce. The applicant simply states they will provide training but offer no details for it.</p>		

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	30	10
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(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; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		
Comments on (C)(4)		

The response to engaging and supporting families was awarded, 10 points out of a possible 30 points. This response is rated as a partially implemented medium quality response. Specific elements were not addressed and therefore the plan was rated as medium quality and partially implemented. The narrative presents a number of interesting ideas regarding strategies for engaging families; however none of the ideas were fully developed as a plan. Points were awarded on the merit of these concepts. The narrative does not explicitly address a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across levels of program standards. In regards to the element of increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators to be trained and supported, the applicant said they would train 100% of ECE's by the end of the grant. However specific numbers were never given. Specifics regarding leveraging of other resources were not provided.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

The total points that a State may earn for selection criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (D) which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	40	4
<p>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 Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and</p> <p>(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation		

Comments on (D)(2)
<p>The response was scored at 4 points out of a possible 40 points. This response is rated as low quality and partially implemented. There were a number of specific elements that were not addressed. A strength is the breadth of professional development opportunities that are aligned with the knowledge and competency framework. However the response does not provide any numbers regarding the numbers of individuals currently participating in these opportunities and the number to be addressed in the expansion. The applicant gives some examples of incentives they have in place or plan to develop. No numbers of participants were provided. No articulated career pathway is described. The criterion of plans for publically reported aggregated data on ECE development, advancement and retention were not addressed. The applicant did not set specific targets for increasing the number of post-secondary institutions and professional development providers aligned to the framework nor the progression of ECE credentials. The applicant did not complete the performance measures requested in this section.</p>

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The total points an applicant may earn for selection criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2) is 40. The 40 points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address both selection criteria under this Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 20 points. If the applicant chooses to address one selection criterion, the criterion will be worth up to 40 points.

The applicant must address at least one of the selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (E), which are as follows:

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	40	4

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--

- (a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- (c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;
- (d) 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; and
- (e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)

The response was scored at 4 points out of a possible 40 points. The response was judged as reflecting a low quality response that is partially implemented. The response to this criterion is very brief and only minimally responsive to criteria. a-e outlined in the guidance. a) They currently have a tool QELI but have spoken repeatedly about changing it because it is not comprehensive, however no criteria are given for changing it. What it does contain is aligned with the standards; b) The QELI meets some psychometric criteria but there is no discussion of its performance with special populations; c) It is not clear whether it is realistic that they can meet the 2014-2015 school year implementation target; d) Specifics of integration with the statewide longitudinal data system are not addressed; and e) How funding from other sources are used was not addressed.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	85

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	5

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

- (a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and
- (b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (P)(2)

The applicant was awarded five out of a possible 10 points. The applicant acknowledges that currently their system does not require licensing and inspection for all non-excluded programs. The system is voluntary unless programs wish to be eligible for vouchers. The response does not reflect plans to address this issue. The applicant was awarded 5 points based upon the intent to enroll all licensed or state regulated programs in the TQRIS.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p>		
Comments on (P)(3)		
<p>The applicant responded to selection criterion E(1). The E(1) response was rated as low quality with 4 out of a possible 40 points and therefore did not reach the 70 percent threshold to receive competitive priority points.</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	No
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.</p>	
Comments on Absolute Priority	
<p>The application is judged as not meeting the absolute priority for this competition. While the majority of criteria were addressed in the application the responses were of low to medium quality in each area. Specific examples of inadequacies include: the documentation of state systems was fragmented and financial investments were difficult to determine; the applicant's description of an early reform agenda was inadequate; the applicants goals and plans were not clearly articulated; the applicants proposed organizational structure was of low quality and governance roles and responsibilities were not adequately developed. The funds requested were almost all allocated to contracts with no detail regarding expenditures provided. Responses to criteria in B,C,D and E contained no operational details for the plans described. Plans did not contain specific activities, timelines or identification of responsible parties. Some Performance Measure tables were left blank.</p>	