



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MS-5020

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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

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development</b>	20	10
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality</b></p> <p><b>Comments on (A)(1)</b></p> <p>(a) The state has increased investments in Early Learning and Development programs over the past years through federal dollars (TANF, CCDF) for parents to use on child care. There is no state funded school-based preschool program. Only 56 school districts, out of 152, offer preschool funded through Title I. This is a limited investment in early learning programs by the state and school districts. (b) Most data for numbers of Children with High Needs in ELD programs was not available for 2011. Numbers from 2007 to 2010 showed an increase for all programs with the exception of CCDF funded programs which decreased for 2011. This is a proposal strength. (c) Existing policies include the creation of an Early Childhood Advisory Council, family subsidies for attendance in an ELD center and Early Learning Guidelines. (d) Standards for birth to three are housed in the state Head Start Collaboration Office and for children three to four housed in the Department of Education. This section gave no indication that the standards would be adopted statewide. The state has an existing TQRIS mandated in a 2006 law. All programs have health and safety requirements. Health promotion beyond basic safety is not part of the current QRIS. The QRIS has family engagement strategies as do Title I, CCDF and licensed programs. There are five levels of workforce credentials. Currently, an assistant teacher is not required to have a high school diploma or GED. A kindergarten assessment selection process has started with funds to school districts to select their own screening. The state has a longitudinal data system which will be used for collecting early childhood data. This is an appropriate system to address the requirements of the grant.</p>		
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	8

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)**

(a) The state's goal is to increase the number of Children with High Needs served in Early Learning and Development programs by 61%. The methods for reaching this goal are unclear, making it difficult to determine if the goal is achievable or ambitious. (b) The state plan describes activities such as needs assessments and plans to identify a Kindergarten assessment. Information on measurable goals, how goals are to be met and accountability is missing. It is difficult to track how this plan will lead to improved school readiness for children. (c) A weak rationale is provided for excluding Engaging and Supporting Families because Family Support is one quarter of the state's early childhood development system. The rationale for including D(1) and (2) are appropriate for the cited conditions in the state of low wages for early childhood workers and the importance of early education centers to the economy.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	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)**

(a)(1) The organizational chart focuses heavily on licensing and increasing the quality of child care. Articulation of how this links to school success is limited. The organization appears to build on existing structures within the department of human services. Licensing will be moved from the department of health to the department of human services (described in B3). The Unit of School Readiness was described but could not be located on the organizational chart. The Early Childhood Innovations Unit focuses on mental health and the effects of chronic poverty. The work of this was not clearly related to school readiness work. (2) The governance related roles and responsibilities will be determined through the development of an implementation plan to be developed early in the grant period. The table of governance roles simply stated where participating entities would serve, not their responsibilities. Undefined governance roles is a weakness of the proposal. (3) The methods and processes for making decisions and solving disputes were unclear. (4) The plan for involving representatives was a listing and description of early childhood organizations in the state. There was no information on how these organizations would coordinate with one another or be involved in the implementation of the plan. (b)(1) Memorandum of Understanding from all the participating state agencies were provided with the exception of Mississippi State University Extension which provided a letter of support. (2) All MOU's included scopes of work. The state department of education's scope of work was included in the appendix but not integrated into the description of the plan. The connection between the lead agency and the department of education seems to be weak. (3) Signatures were provided by all the state agency representative except Extension services. (c)(1)(2) Letters of support came from a broad range of stakeholders. Letters were very general with limited information on specific tasks or priorities toward the grant activities.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>

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)**

(a) Table for A (4)(a) shows who will use existing state funds tied to four general support areas. The application information on how the funds will be used was unclear. (b)(1) Budget appears adequate to support the proposed activities. (2) Costs include funds for moving the division of licensing and revising the licensing system. It is unclear how this focus on compliance is related to Children with High Needs accessing high quality programs. (3) The proposed budget allocation for the department of education is \$318,500, for the department of mental health is slightly over \$1 million and the department of human services is over \$48 million. The budget reflects an unbalanced focus on, for example, activities related to licensing and not school-based programs. A significant amount of funding (\$37 million) is devoted to local implementation. This is a strength of the proposal. (c) State department budgets for this plan will increase over the course of the grant in order to decrease dependence on grant funds. The sustainability plan includes requesting funds from the state legislature which is an unknown aspect of the state's ability to sustain the proposed activities.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

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

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)**

(a) (1-6) Tiered program standards for various programs in the state have only partial effective data practices. Currently, the state's Early Learning Guidelines for infants and toddlers are in the Office of Head Start and the Early Learning Guidelines for 3-5 year-olds are maintained by the Department of Education. It is not clear in this section how widely the guidelines have been implemented in the state. The TQRIS for licensed centers does not address a comprehensive assessment system or health promotion practices, and it addressed the learning environment - not learning and development standards. The In-Home provider QRIS standards do not address a comprehensive assessment system, learning and development standards or health promotion practices. The TQRIS for school-based programs includes the learning environment, but not learning and development standards. It does not include a comprehensive assessment system, health promotion standards or effective data practices. (b) State school based rating system - levels two through five all have the same criteria for professional qualifications. Other areas have meaningful differentiation. The In-Home and Child Care rating system levels are also appropriately differentiated. (c) The TQRIS is part of the state licensing system. Participation has been voluntary and will be required beginning in 2011 for licensed centers. School based pre-K programs are not currently linked to this system - they are included in the overall school's accreditation process. The plan is to require school-based programs to participate in the state system beginning in 2013 which is a long delay for programs that are part of the state.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>

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)**

(a) (1-5) Currently only 80% of Head Start Programs are licensed. The proposal indicates an agreement was formed with the Head Start Association that all Head Start programs will participate in the rating system but documentation of this agreement is unclear. The state has no state funded preschools. School-based preschools (Title I) will be required to participate in the system by 2013. The state's Child Care Development Fund programs will be required to participate with a goal of including 90% by 2015. Current participation in the system appears low, but achievable plans are in place to require participation. The proposal indicates that a request will be made to the state board of education to require all school-based preschool programs to participate in the tiered rating system leaving the status of their participation unknown. (b) Plans are outlined to change the enrollment policy from 6 to 12 months for families who qualify for CCDF funding in order to decrease transitions to new centers for children. This is a meaningful plan for family stability as long as the child care center is of high quality. No information is provided on subsidy reimbursement rates or the affordability of co-payments. Financial incentives for centers interested in increasing their ratings are in place. Is it unclear how many centers the incentives would impact statewide. The reward structure has been in place for four years and there was no evidence provided that the incentives worked. However, this structure will be employed in the same way the first year of the grant. This is a weakness of the proposal. (c) The proposal demonstrates strong planning in relation to involving in-home providers in the rating system. It was difficult to discern if the goal for reaching in-home providers was ambitious or achievable because the information about staff increases and other infrastructure to support this goal was vague.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	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)**

Two organizations monitor programs - one for centers and one for in-home providers. (a) Information on the validity of the tool was unclear. Raters are retrained every 18 months and evaluators must re-establish inter-rater reliability on every sixth scheduled evaluation. An inter-rater reliability level of 85% or higher must be maintained or the rater will be removed from the classroom evaluations until they reach the 85% reliability. Monitoring visits are every six months for centers with a rating of 2 or higher. Overall the plan for rating centers seems thorough, but it is unclear how the intensity of the rating schedule will be achieved. (b) Plan is in place to provide a short summary report that will be available to parents. The content for the reports will be developed in the first year of the grant. No clear plan for the content of these reports is a weakness because it ties directly to the data that will need to be collected which will be relevant to parents.

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

20

6

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)**

(a) The state has existing financial incentives for centers to improve their ratings. The state did not adequately describe how their incentive system has been or will be effective. The applicant raised issues about the strength and consistency of the financial incentives that would require policy changes. However, the incentive program will remain in place for the first year of the grant. (b) The applicant focused on support for low-income families through a program for children's college savings accounts. There was not strong tie to how enrollment in the plan would increase the quality of ELD program - parents would only have to enroll their children in centers participating in the rating system. (c) The state has designated tiers 3-5 as top tiers. The goals for increasing the number of programs in the highest tiers include moving from 5 programs (baseline) in the highest tier to 35 programs in the highest tier. This is not an ambitious goal because it leaves 4,761 programs in the lowest tier. The goals for increasing the number of Children with High Needs in top tier programs are to have 35% enrolled by 2015. This goal is not ambitious because it means the majority of Children with High Needs are enrolled in programs that meet the basic licensing requirements or are one tier higher.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	15	6

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)**

(a)NAEYC will conduct a structural audit in conjunction with state department of HHS. This demonstrates a good use of national experts. The plan also includes tracking child outcomes such as attendance. The goal of tracking attendance is to determine how attendance patterns impact child outcomes. The application does not address evaluation of the system for the accuracy of the tier levels in relation to program quality. The lack of a plan to validate the tiers in the TQRIS is a weakness of the proposal. (b)Plans for assessing the relationship between quality ratings and children's school readiness are not clearly defined. One evaluation question is provided that states "Is attendance at a higher-quality preschool program associated with Kindergarten readiness?" No further details are provided on how this will be evaluated and is a weakness of the proposal.

**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
<b>(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</li> <li>(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;</li> <li>(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and</li> <li>(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.</li> </ul>		
<p>Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b></p>		
<b>Comments on (C)(1)</b>		
<p>(a) A review of the Early Learning Guidelines was done but the results of the review are unclear. The birth to three years standards include language, social-emotional, physical development, practice and mastery of basic concepts in math, science and self-help. Exploration and experimentation may address the Essential Domain of School Readiness - approaches to learning. Only part of the guidelines are provided in the appendix. The early learning guidelines for 3 and 4 year-olds include language, math, science, social-emotional development, and physical development. Approaches to learning are the Essential Domains of School Readiness that are not included. Symposia are planned to address achievement of African American, Latino and Native American children for years 2 and 3. This appears to be part of the plan for the state to create standards that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. The lack of evidence that the standards are developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate is a weakness of the proposal. (b)ELG and K-3 standards alignment are being reviewed. Recommendations for adoption are under review but not yet adopted by the board of education. (c) The curricula accompanying the ELGs for 3 and 4 year olds will be reviewed during the grant for cultural and linguistic appropriateness (see (a)). ELG for infants and toddlers will be reviewed in year one and then possibly incorporated into the Tiered Rating System (this is not clear). (d)Training on the standards is provided through two organizations. Descriptions of these trainings do not include information about standards. The standards do not appear currently to be implemented statewide. The application did not provide a strong plan for statewide implementation of the standards.</p>		
	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>

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)**

(a) A Request for Proposals went out in 2008 for providing a Kindergarten Assessment. Last year, less than half of the districts used the Children's Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA). This year districts were given money for any part of this assessment that the district decides is important to them. In 2013-14 one assessment will be chosen for statewide use. The process for choosing an instrument seems extended and will increase the time it takes for statewide implementation of an instrument. (b) Descriptions of training for college students and early childhood educators does not address training on a comprehensive assessment system. (c) The application did not provide information that addressed the sharing of assessment results to reduce duplication of assessments. (d) Information on the training of early childhood educators included no reference to using the assessment data to inform instruction or services.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	20	7

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety; ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur; and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;
- (b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;
- (c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and
- (d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--
  - (1) Are screened using Screening Measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (see section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and that, as appropriate, are consistent with the Child Find provisions in IDEA (see sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of IDEA);
  - (2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and
  - (3) Participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care, including the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(3)**

(a) The applicant included limited evidence of statewide health standards. The training description in this section related broadly to the standards and not specifically to health. (b) Very general strategies are offered for increasing health practitioner skills in early recognition of children with developmental concerns. No goals or specific outcomes are stated. (c) The plan is to provide training on general health, oral health and nutrition in collaboration with community health centers. This plan was not clearly defined or described and was a weakness of the proposal. (d)(1) The applicant proposes to build on existing services such as the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) program and well baby checks. A uniform referral process will be promoted. Screening guidelines included vision, hearing, oral health and developmental screening. Submitting screening data into the statewide data system will be explored. (2) Referral protocol will be finalized in the first year of the grant - currently there seems to be limited connections between the EPSDT screening done by medical providers



and the Early Learning and Development community, MAP teams (interdisciplinary) have been used since 2007. Anecdotal information on MAP team accomplishments appears promising, but no quantitative outcome data is provided. Information on Part C of IDEA provided no articulated connection to other screening/ support efforts or the broader early learning community. A training program for physicians on early brain development and typical/atypical child development will be funded. It will also include information for parents and caregivers. An evaluation plan for this project is included, (3)Ongoing health care was not addressed. Goals were ambitious for increasing numbers of children screened and those receiving ongoing health care. It was difficult to ascertain if the goals could be accomplished based on the information 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
<b>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</b>	20	8
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--</p> <p>(a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes;</p> <p>(b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b>		
<b>Comments on (D)(1)</b>		
<p>(a) A career ladder with compensation tied to credentials has been developed. An analysis of the current regulations showed that an assistant teachers to be employed without a high school diploma. The committee will seek a regulatory change to address this concern in year one. The Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework seems to be loosely joined initiatives that lack a coherent structure. (b) The TQRIS contains a progression of credentials and degrees that have meaningful differences between levels. (c) There is a plan for curriculum alignment between 2 and 4 year institutions. A letter of support is provided from the Mississippi State Institutes of Higher Learning which offers vague support not tied to curriculum alignment. The lack of clear commitment from the universities for this task is a weakness of the proposal. No goals are provided for how many educators will be supported in improving their skills and knowledge. The impact of the plan is unclear. There is also no articulation of how the workforce plan will impact children's outcomes.</p>		

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	20	9
<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>		

(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)**

(a) The proposal states that intensive technical assistance has been the most effective way for the state to improve outcomes for children. The plan to provide additional technical assistance teams is a strength because it addresses a broad spectrum of center needs by including a business advisor, parent educator and other TA staff with specialization in infant/toddler or preK. (b) The proposed scholarship program has a history of working in other states. No information is provided on how many teachers this program and the education-based salary supplement program will impact. No goals for increasing impact over time for these programs are provided. (c) Registry data on educators will be provided on the CCR&R website for parents to access. Currently, educator participation in the registry is voluntary so the information for parents is limited. (d)(1)(2) Goals are set for increasing the higher education and professional development alignment with the WKCF and the number of educators that are advancing. The goal for higher education is to increase the number of aligned institutions from 15 to 24 by 2015. This is an appropriate goal based on the number of institutions currently aligned. The goals for increasing educators who have higher credentials seemed unrealistic based on the time it takes each educator to complete a degree or training program.

**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
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	20	6
<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)**

(a) Currently school-based prek programs can choose from a list of assessments. This "decentralized" approach will delay the state's ability to implement a statewide assessment. A common assessment will be identified and used in 2013-14. This section did not address aligning the Kindergarten assessment with the ELD standards. (b) Districts were allowed to choose from a list of assessments. The proposal states that all the options were valid, reliable and appropriate for the population. The application lacks information on the specific assessments and the associated reliability and validity of the instruments. (c) A task force will be convened to identify a statewide Kindergarten assessment which will be used in 2013-14. This plan gives the state limited time to provide training on the assessment. No information was provided on how this assessment will inform instruction. (d) The statewide longitudinal data system will be used for reporting the Kindergarten assessment data. (e) The state allocated funding for assessments for this year and will continue to use state funding for this. Grant funds of \$320,000 will be added in the first year. The significance of the state's resources in comparison to the grant resources is unclear based on the information provided by the applicant.

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	6

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (E)(2)**

(a)(b) A list and description of programs that provide data to the statewide system is provided. A plan is outlined to build a unified early childhood data collection system. (c) The system's ability to facilitate the exchange of data was unclear. The plan is to create a data warehouse to house all the data from all the early childhood data bases. Then a unified system will be created which will have a single point of entry for all early childhood data bases. (d) The design for the reports from the system will be done in the first year. This section did not address if the reports would be timely or how accessible they would be for the various audiences. (e) The system's compliance with oversight requirements and privacy laws was addressed in the description of the longitudinal data system that will be used to collect early childhood data.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	280	115

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	10	3

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 (F)(2)**

(a) Licensing and inspection for all programs was not addressed. In-home providers and out of school providers will be encouraged to participate in the TQRIS but not required. (b) TQRIS will be used with school-based preschool programs only if this receives state school board approval. This leaves the participation of school based programs unknown.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry</b>	<b>0 or 10</b>	<b>No</b>
<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>		
<b>Comments on (P)(3)</b>		
<p>The state has not implemented a common Kindergarten assessment. Districts are currently choosing from a list of assessments.</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
<b>Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.</b>	<b>No</b>
<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>	
<b>Comments on Absolute Priority</b>	
<p>The alignment of goals across state agencies was not well substantiated. For example, the Tiered Quality Rating System is planned for use with child care centers overseen by the state department of human services, while use of the TQRIS with school-district preschool programs requires future approval by the state board of education. This leaves the level of participation of school-based programs unknown. The plans for building a strong workforce are vague and lack coherence. The plan for measuring outcomes and progress did not address how providers or teachers would use the collected data to inform instruction or make center level improvements that would help prepare High Needs Children for school success.</p>	



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # MS-5020

Peer Reviewer:   
Lead Monitor:   
Support Monitor:   
Application Status: **Reviewed**  
Date/Time: **11/15/2011 - 2:39 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

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>
<p>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--</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices, and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

#### Comments on (A)(1)

--It is clear that this applicant is deeply committed to meeting the needs of young children, especially those with high needs, as evidenced by their track record of investment - financially, in the development of a quality rating system, and in strategic partnerships. --The state has doubled their financial investment in an early learning development system over the past 5 years, with the greatest increase to early learning and development programs in TANF and CCDF (27.2). This seems appropriate as the application provides strong evidence that their greatest population of children with high needs is children from low-income families, proven by the Current Population Survey and the American Community Survey (both 2010) results that state that 44% of all children ages birth to kindergarten age are from low-income families. Similarly, this state provides evidence that there has been an increase of 26.9% of children served through state programs from 2007-2010. However, it is of concern that there are no state funds to support preschool and that there has been a significant decrease in funds to support IDEA and the TQRIS. --The data provided by this applicant with regard to the percentage of children with disabilities or delays illustrates that this is not a priority population (.76%). However, these data were defined by those children with an IFSP or an IEP only. It seems that there could be a large percentage of young children being missed by this narrow definition, including those who are in need of a screening and assessment to identify and treat specific needs. --With regard to this applicant's existing early learning and development legislation, policies, and practices, "The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007" is most notable. This act paved the way for this state to develop and maintain intradepartmental partnerships whose charge was specific to providing access for all children to high quality early learning programs, enabled the creation of the SECAC, implemented family subsidies for early learning programs, and provided the gateway for the development of the state's Early Learning Guidelines. The SECAC is made up of appointees from an impressive multidisciplinary team, including appropriate state agencies, institutes of higher learning, local agencies and providers. While there is a strong representation from a variety of stakeholders and it can be assumed that several are parents/guardians themselves, it is not clear whether there is anyone on the team in the "parent" or "guardian" role. Also, a provider is not listed on the roster. --Just prior to this Act, the state also made great strides in the field of quality early learning and development by the creation of their own tiered quality rating improvement system. During this same time, the

state created a statewide system of child care resource and referral. This is another example of the statewide partnerships that this applicant has developed to yield practical, working results. This applicant has also provided evidence of their ability to create partnerships with influential foundations and other states, all for the benefit of young children in their state. --This applicant also has a proven track record of implementing practices at the provider-level and to prioritize families, as evidenced by an increase of 198 licensed centers and an increase of more than 23 Family Resource Centers since 1998, respectively. --This applicant has done some quality work in forming the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, as outlined in the RTT-ELC NIA. They currently have adopted and implemented Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs) for infants and toddlers, as well as three- and four-year olds. All essential domains of school readiness are addressed for all aforementioned age groups. Last, both ELGs are either currently being revised or a revision is planned for the near future. --This applicant provides solid evidence that there is currently a comprehensive infrastructure to support the use of several reliable and valid assessment tools: the ITERS-R, ECERS-R, and CLASS. Additionally, this applicant explains in detail throughout the application their development and use of the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS), a state system in and of itself. However, it is a concern that more complimentary assessments are not being utilized in partnership with these tools. --This applicant discusses their use of EPSDT as a model for how young children are entered into the health care system. This seems an appropriate model given their large specified population of children with high needs. The applicant also provides information related to their system of health promotion on MAP teams (focused on community-specific resources) and Project PREPARE (focused on children with high risk factors related to disabilities, chronic health impairments, and special needs). However, according to the applicant, MAP is primarily a program for school-aged children, and their focus is not completely clear. Question arise as to what kind of services MAP provides, whether they work directly with early learning programs, and families, and whether these services are health-related; and at what level MAP teams provide their technical assistance (i.e., community or region). Similar questions arise with Project PREPARE (PP). For example, it is not stated whether the services of PP are provided across the state, and how many and what kind of centers they serve. Also, there doesn't appear to be any health-related criterion in the applicant's MCCQSS. --This state's family engagement practices seem to be strong as evidenced by three strategies: the inclusion of family practices in every level of the state's MCCQSS, the presence of family-related requirements in the state licensing regulation, and the multitude of family engagement practices in state systems, for example IDEA Part C and B, EHS and HS, and CCDF. Again, it is a concern that there is no family representation on the SECAC. --This applicant currently partners with two impressive programs: Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) and Child Care WAGES (WAGES) to provide incentives for workforce development. This partnership is appropriate as TEACH's scholarship program has proven results that include increased staff compensation and educational levels, and decreased turnover, all of which are current challenges with the early education workforce. These were viewed as progressive and necessary for the early education workforce, a population who historically is not fairly compensated. This applicant also provides evidence for a strong infrastructure of how they are working statewide to develop common knowledge and competencies for the early education workforce. A variety of credentials covering an appropriate range of levels for credentialing are currently offered in the state. --This applicant acknowledges use of a kindergarten assessment with a variety of stakeholder participation and provides evidence of a plan to increase usage over the four-year grant period. Also, it is already being implemented on a voluntary basis in all school districts. However, it does not cover all of the essential domains of school readiness. --With regard to effective data practices, this applicant provides evidence that they have an existing foundation for using a multitude of data systems, covering all essential data elements, while focusing on a large variety of priorities related to early learning and development (i.e., oral health, vaccines, home visiting).

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	11

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)**

--This applicant proposes to increase the number of children with high needs being served by high quality programs by 61% over the course of the RTT-ELC grant, with progress charted each year. This appears to be ambitious, yet a realistic goal for a relatively short timeline given the complexity of this type of work. This applicant proposes to spend the majority of the grant period gathering and analyzing data for the purposes of systems development. Analysis and assessments are crucial to having the ability to move forward and make real change. However, it is of great concern that the majority of key staff are not yet in place. It is a timely process to hire these staff members, which includes 7 key leaders. This could have a significant impact on the progress of the proposed work. --This applicant proposes to provide incentives to early learning programs whose ratings increase within the MCCQSS. Because it is often time consuming and costly for a program to participate in a quality rating

system, this is a reasonable and appropriate plan. Additionally, it is an advantage that this applicant proposes to use an external evaluator to determine the result of how centers are being supported. This is evidence of sophistication and willingness on the applicant's part to learn the facts about whether their program is leading to the intended outcomes. However, it is of concern that the applicant plans to wait until 2013 to include school-based programs in the MCCQSS. This raises a question as to how active the Department of Education is in this aspect of the state plan. --This applicant's proposed plan for one of the four major categories, Family and Child Supports, (with the goal of engaging families in early learning development throughout the state), is unclear. The proposed activities do not appear to match with the specified goal, but rather focus on the revision of the applicant's ELGs, the inclusion of health-related activities, and increasing workforce training. There is no mention of how families will be engaged in these activities. --This applicant provides vague justification as to why the specific Focused Investment Area of family engagement and support is not chosen. Specifically, this applicant states that a specific section on family engagement is not presented because the concept is woven throughout the application. However, this rationale is weak for a state that places a high importance on this component of an early childhood system.

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

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)**

--This applicant proposes to model other states in their organizational and governance structure. While this is appreciated and recognized as time and resource efficient, no evidence is provided as to the success of the states being modeled. However, the fact that this applicant proposes to first assess their working relationships and provide a focus to every county in the state (82 counties) is to be commended. Again, analysis and assessments are crucial to having the ability to move forward and make real change, and this proposal is evidence that the state's priority is making change as efficiently and effectively as possible. --The majority of the organizational structure made sense in that work is completed under specified units. However, there is concern that this does not entirely match up with the narrative for this section. For example, The Quality Initiatives Unit and the School Readiness Unit are not present in the structure and the regulatory unit is expansive. Also, the applicant states that reorganization will take place to create this structure, but coupled with the fact that staff will have to be hired, it is of concern when the work will actually begin. Additionally, a unit restructure is a timely and complex undertaking, and it is not clear that this could be done in a short amount of time. Last, no evidence is available in the application regarding how decisions will be made and how disputes will be resolved. --This applicant demonstrates impressive partnerships and working relationships with a variety of organizations and state agencies. It is clear that most of those listed have been working toward a collective goal for some time. However, only 19 Letters of Support are provided while many more were listed as providing these letters. While it is the belief of this reviewer that those agencies are supportive of this applicant's application, there is no evidence available.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>

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)**

--Overall, the proposed budget appears reasonable and adequate to support the applicant's proposed plan. The alignment of program supports makes sense; however, there is some confusion about how these programs fit into the proposed Units (i.e., Quality Initiatives, Early Childhood Innovation, etc.). Also, the pie chart in section A4B does not appear to align with the previous tables that explain how each program aligns with the RTT State Plan. In contrast, the first three budget tables appear to align with this pie chart. -All of the numbers in the budget tables calculate accurately and the narratives appropriately explain what the line items will fund, which seems to match and justify activities in the proposed plan. However, it is a concern that the majority of monies will be used by the Department of Human Services to go towards licensing. Additionally, the table provided that outlines the four areas of support is lacking in detail. --This applicant also provides evidence of current financial relationships with external entities (e.g., the Kellogg Foundation), which strengthens their ability to sustain and build upon their proposed activities after this grant period is over.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

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



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)**

--This applicant has an impressive history with regard to the existence of a TQRIS, the MCCQSS. They are currently implemented in a variety of settings, including in-home providers, pre-k programs, and centers. It is the proposal of this applicant that there will be a plan to implement this system into kith and kin care, but this plan is not specified. It would be helpful to know the proposed process for how this will be addressed. --It is apparent that their implemented TQRIS either currently address the majority of the required elements or they have a plan in place to revise the system to do so. The 5 Steps of the MCCQSS adequately addresses measurable strategies and appropriately increases with rigor to match the higher Steps. All of these Step-specific strategies are sensible to improving outcomes for children, for example as evidenced by the professional development requirements with each Step. However, this application does not provide evidence for how the MCCQSS will address health and safety indicators or children with special needs. Clarification is needed. --This applicant's TQRIS is not currently based on a comprehensive assessment system because if there are no clear assessments in place. At present, schools are responsible picking the assessment they would like to use from a list, but the list of tools from which one can be chosen is not provided. --One significant strength of this section is the applicant's transparent acknowledgement of the challenges associated with moving from a voluntary to a requirement for early learning programs. This represents the applicant's willingness to try to overcome challenges and realize that their proposed plan may not be full proof. However, it is not clear what their plan is for answering and addressing these questions. --The structure of the applicant's TQRIS is clearly presented as evidenced by their presentation of criteria for licensed centers, in-home providers, and pre-k providers within schools (three separate scales). Requirements that correspond with each level and each of the five components (Administration, Policy, Professional Development, Learning Environments, Parent Involvement, and Evaluation) are appropriately tiered between the five steps of their system. These requirements are also easy to measure because they are either something a center has or not (i.e., a staff handbook) or based on percentages (i.e., 15% of full time teaching staff have current CDA or higher). --This applicant presents clear evidence that their TQRIS is linked to the state licensing system as evidenced by the fact that the required first step for any program is licensing, accreditation, or registration. However, which set of accreditation standards their accreditation is based on is unknown.

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

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)**

--This applicant states that they do not currently independently fund state preschool programs, but they do propose a plan to include them in this process. Otherwise, they have a plan to include other programs (e.g., Head Start, programs funded under Part C of IDEA) in their MCCQSS as these centers are licensed, thus they fall under the category of "all licensed centers" for the purposes of this application. With regard to including state-funded preschool programs, programs funded under IDEA Part B and Title I of ESEA, this applicant provides a plan to approach the State Board of Education to require licensing. It is unclear whether there is any support from the State Board of Education related to this request. The plan is based solely on this request being approved. It would be helpful to know if the creation of partnerships and/or outreach methods are being conducted now to meet this goal. --There is some confusion about when licensed child care centers will be required to enroll in the MCCQSS. The application states two dates for this, 2012 (Year 1) and 2013 (Year 2). Clarification is needed to determine the quality of this specific part of the plan. There is also some concern about the applicant's plan to give Centers who don't enroll on their own an automatic Entry Level 1 in the system. It is uncertain whether this will be an incentive and promote a partnership or will create a "top down" view of the state system. --However, the pre-k programs administered through school districts are currently being phased into the MCCQSS, which provides evidence that this applicant has the commitment and ability to implement a complex system. --This applicant presents strong information on how providers and families will receive incentives to participate in the MCCQSS. Most notable for both target populations is the plan to provide financial rewards, subsidies, and MCCQSS "seed funds" to programs and a postsecondary savings plans for families. This applicant provides strong research to support the decision to implement these strategies, and should be commended for having the forethought to think about the long-term outcomes for young children in their State. An advantage of this section of the applicant is the applicant's plan to make changes to their state system that will provide families with more stability in their child's early learning program. This is evidenced by their plan to increase enrollment to every 12 months with the provision of a 5 year receipt. However, there is no guarantee that the enrollment will be in high quality programs. --Similarly, the fact that this applicant proposes to evaluate the effectiveness of these incentive programs annually provides strength to their plan. This illustrates the fact that the collaborating partners are committed to implementing a program that works and results in the intended outcomes. Additionally, their plan to provide salary bonuses to exceptional teachers (specifically defined in the application) is an effective strategy. However, it is the concern of this reviewer how this can be sustained after the end of the grant period. --One proposal this applicant makes to increase the quality of early learning programs is to train providers based on a specific curriculum. It does not appear that this curriculum is included in this application. Therefore, the quality and relevance of the course offerings is unknown. --This applicant's targets for numbers and percentages of programs that will participate in the MCCQSS appear realistic, if not a low estimate of growth (1-2% within each category of programs). However, this applicant proposes to serve close to half the population of children ages 0-5 in the state over the grant period. Also, it is a strength of this application that there is a proposal to reach out to unregulated early learning programs (i.e., nith and kin care) by offering free opportunities to attend professional development offerings. Although, reaching out to these programs to become licensed and thus, enrolled in the MCCQSS is not discussed.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>
<p>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--</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(3)**

--This applicant proposes to use several current valuable resources to review their regulations and enforcement capabilities, including the National Association of Regulatory Administration's (NARA) national review of licensing regulations, Head Start Performance Standards and the Caring for Our Children National Standards. This is evidence that this applicant is aware of the available resources that constitutes quality. Plus, this builds a strong foundation for their Early Learning and Development Guidelines. Their willingness and proposal to use a variety of highly regarded standards add strength to their overall plan. Also, their use of ITERS-R and ECERS-R is exceptional as these are regarded as the best tools to use in the field to determine quality. However, as stated earlier, it is a concern that these tools are standing alone and not part of a more comprehensive package of assessment tools to inform quality. --Additionally, the fact that this applicant highly regards the importance of inter-rater reliability in the MCCQSS process is to be commended. It appears that staff members are highly trained, not only initially, but also have to prove their reliability of the tools periodically. This gives more strength to their system, in that it is being used appropriately to meet the intended result. --While family engagement and outreach is included in the applicant's existing MCCQSS tiers, it was not specifically discussed how quality rating and licensing information to parents/guardians with children enrolled in early learning programs will learn this information. It is a concern that this is not presented in the plan; thus it is not clear family needs will be met.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>

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)**

--This applicant presents strong information on how providers and families will receive incentives to participate in the MCCQSS. Most notable for both target populations is the plan to provide financial rewards, subsidies, and MCCQSS "seed funds" to programs and a postsecondary savings plans for families. This applicant provides strong research to support the decision to implement these strategies, and should be commended for having the forethought to think about the long-term outcomes for young children in their State. Moreover, this applicant proposes to create a task force to review incentive levels and make necessary adjustments in subsequent years. This illustrates the state's capacity and interest in creating a foundation and oversight for this proposed practice. --An advantage of this section of the applicant is the applicant's plan to make changes to their state system that will provide families with more stability in their child's early learning program. This is evidenced by their plan to increase enrollment to every 12 months with the provision of a 5 year receipt. --However, there are some misunderstandings and inconsistencies about their performance measures with regard to how many centers will be in the top tiers of the MCCQSS. First, the total number of centers that will be enrolled in the applicant's rating system is unclear. For example, one piece of information states that a total of 5043 programs will be served (Performance Measures for B2c) and another states that a total of 5883 will be enrolled (Performance Measures for B4c1). Additionally, the totals provided in the Performance Measure B4c1 table are incorrect. More accurately, this applicant proposes to start with a baseline of 974 centers enrolled in the MCCQSS and end with a total of 5883 centers by the end of the grant period. This increase in enrolled centers is actually impressive and illustrates an enormous goal, one that by the belief of this reviewer, the applicant can achieve with their system should certain clarifications be in place. --Second, this applicant defines "high quality" programs as Step 3 and above. This does not appear to be a very rigorous rating system if the majority of programs will be considered "high quality." Also, this applicant proposes to have only 6.5% of all of their programs enrolled in the MCCQSS with a rating of Steps 3-5. This is of concern because the majority of centers would still have a rating of 1 or 2 by the end of the grant period. While this applicant has great vision and what appears to be an established system in place, it is surprising that their estimates for high, high quality are so low by the end of the grant period. However, when looking at the progression of number of programs moving up in the top two tiers by the end of the grant period (Step 4, by 500% and Step 5 by 700%), it is clear that the applicant is realistic in their plan. --Similarly, this applicant appears to have realistic and ambitious goals for how many children with high needs will be served by quality programs, as evidenced by the proposed 7-35% increase over the course of the grant period. However, again, being that this applicant defines "high quality" as Steps 3-5 of the MCCQSS, it is not clear how many of this 35% will be in high quality programs.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	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)

--This applicant places great emphasis on the importance of evaluation throughout their application. The plan to hire an external evaluator to complete data collection and the creation of an evaluation committee to review these data illustrates their commitment to implementing a solid, results-driven plan. Additionally, their proposal to partner with the NAEYC to complete an overall audit of the MCCQSS illustrates their willingness to gain technical assistance and guidance from well established national organizations. However, there is no documentation in the applicant to support this proposed partnership. Last, the research questions provided in Table B5-1 are appropriate and thoughtful; it is expected that these will guide the applicant to the information they seek. --There are some concerns with the effectiveness of their second step in the validation process. For example, while the applicant's proposal to provide every child enrolled in an early care and education program in the state is ambitious, it does not appear to be realistic because there are child care settings that the state does not currently monitor and regulate. It is questionable whether this will occur only in centers, or in centers and home-based programs. While it is stated that providers will be trained on how to enter data in the state system (nSPARC), there is a concern about whether the applicant has accounted for the resources needed to accomplish this task. Also, it is unclear what the applicant's oversight of programs to enter these data will be. Furthermore, it is proposed by the applicant that an attendance system will be implemented to track children's attendance in their program. It is unclear what the purpose of this is and how the information will be used to measure progress.

### **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
<b>(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.</b>	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;

(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and

(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(1)**

--This applicant's Early Learning Guidelines appear to be developmentally appropriate for the ages groups that are served - infants, toddlers, and 3-4 year olds). However, minimal information is provided to support the fact that the Guidelines are culturally and linguistically appropriate. One advantage to the applicant's plan is that there is a proposal to partner with several entities to revise the Guidelines to address diversity. The fact that this plan is spread across the entire grant period is a realistic activity. However, there is concern that because these Guidelines are currently voluntary, there is a likelihood that they won't be referenced and they will not be a basis for curriculum development and implementation. --Because the applicant is currently involved in the process of aligning the Guidelines with the State's K-3 academic standards, it is difficult to assess how well this is being done. However, it is an advantage for this application that the applicant is already involved in activities to do so, which illustrates a commitment to the alignment. Furthermore, as noted above, the applicant plans to partner with the NAEYC to conduct a review/audit of the MCQSS, but this letter of support is not present in the application. Therefore, there is no tangible evidence that the NAEYC has agreed to this partnership. --One piece of evidence that the applicant is or plans to incorporate the Guidelines into other systems and frameworks is the fact that they link a higher rating in the MCCQSS with program staff having received training on the Guidelines. In addition, the fact that early childhood teacher preparation curricula includes the Guidelines adds strength to the evidence that this applicant places great emphasis on incorporating this information. --This applicant currently has supports in place to promote the understanding of their early learning and development standards as evidenced by training that is provided to educators through two projects: project impact and via the applicant's CCR&R network. However, it is not clear how often these trainings are held and whether they reach a statewide audience.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>

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)**

--This applicant provides evidence that they are currently working with programs to implement the use of kindergarten entry assessments. However, as stated above, it is a concern that a specific tool has not yet been chosen and that currently schools are able to pick and choose a tool from a list. It is also a concern that this list of tools is not included in the application; thus it is not clear whether these tools are reliable and valid. As part of this current implementation, the applicant proposes to conduct an evaluation of assessments used by those who chose to participate to determine teacher satisfaction and usability. While it is presented that the screening tool is designed in such a way that children with special needs will not be penalized, it is not clear how this will be done. Clarification is necessary to determine whether this is accurate. --With regard to the proposed plan for the immediate school year, the applicant states that the top 2-4 districts will be chosen to implement the assessment. While this number of districts is a reasonable and manageable number, it is not clear how the applicant defines "top" and what the rationale is behind this selection. However, the applicant's overall plan to implement the kindergarten entry assessment is reasonable in their planning process, evaluation and assessment. --With regard to how the applicant proposes to work with early learning programs to strengthen educators' understanding of the comprehensive assessment system: specific goals and activities are not articulated in the application. The applicant proposes a plan for how to streamline and based curriculum on nationally recognized workforce competencies, but there is no evidence provided to the emphasis that will be placed on a comprehensive assessment system. --The applicant provides strong evidence that their Early Learning Guidelines will align with their state's kindergarten standards for two subjects. Their plan to further revise and align their Guidelines provides further evidence to implement the plan. Additionally, their plan to train educators from across the spectrum of early care and education settings and assessment alignment with the Guidelines further supports the

quality of their plan. The timelines and proposed implementation over the course of the grant period appears to be a comprehensive, realistic, and thoughtful approach. Furthermore, this applicant's plan to partner with Zero to Three and Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) to review content added to the MCQSS with regard to social and emotional health and development provides evidence of their knowledge of the high quality resources and agencies on this issue. Again, this applicant's ability and willingness to collaborate and partner with external agencies adds significant strength to their overall proposed plan. However, these are no letters of support or Memorandums of Understanding from either of these organizations included in the application.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety; ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur; and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;

(b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;

(c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and

(d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--

(1) Are screened using Screening Measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (see section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and that, as appropriate, are consistent with the Child Find provisions in IDEA (see sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of IDEA);

(2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and

(3) Participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care, including the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(3)**

--This applicant paints a comprehensive picture of the number and percentage of children from low-income families (children with high needs) in their state by providing current data from reliable sources. The fact that this state ranks as 50th in the nation (among the highest) on percentage of children living with one parent who is not employed and 50th in the number of births to a teen mother as evidenced by the provided KIDSCOUNT data is significant; thus this applicant is focusing their efforts in the right place. --However, the majority of the plan discussed here doesn't necessarily focus on the specific needs of this population. One example is that Strategy 2 proposes to educate providers on addressing the needs of children with disabilities; however this population and their specific needs are not discussed in detail throughout the application. More information is needed to understand the specific needs of this population, and how educators could be trained to meet these needs. --It is a strength of this application that the applicant proposes to support two home visiting programs throughout the state. The evidence behind this strategy is significant and the fact that the State is again keeping long-term outcomes in mind is a plus. The evidence linking early childhood approaches to outcomes later in life (adolescence to adulthood) is strong, and this further supports this applicant's knowledge of and commitment to the well-being of children and families. --While the Early Learning Guidelines address health and safety components, they are done so minimally. Further, while it is proposed that the Guidelines-based curricula will promote healthy eating habits, improved nutrition, and an expansion of physical activity, it is not clear to what extent. --It is a strength of this application that the need for a medical home is proposed and acknowledged as a best practice. Further, the applicant's current use of Federally Qualified Health Centers, EPSDT, and CHIP across the state illustrates their commitment to addressing and improving the physical well-being of their young children. --Additionally, the rural communities of this State are not referred to when discussing the implementation of these proposed strategies. Health practices should be developed based on community- and region-specific descriptions and demographics.

**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
<b>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</b>	20	20

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--

(a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes;

(b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and

(c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

#### Comments on (D)(1)

--This applicant provides evidence of the strides they are taking to create an infrastructure for common statewide workforce competencies by first discussing an ongoing pilot project conducted in two counties. Data are still being analyzed to inform future decisions and program plans. This speaks to the applicant's thoughtful planning and infrastructure building as evidenced in other sections of his application. This applicant appears to have a strong infrastructure across their community colleges for building common competencies. This increases the likelihood for success in their proposed plans to continue working with these entities. --This applicant should be commended for proposing to seek regulatory change to the current regulation that allows an individual without a high school degree to be employed as an assistant teacher. This is an appropriate and ambitious goal that are likely to result in the improvement of the quality of the early education workforce. --Overall, the applicant proposes a comprehensive plan for addressing developing a workforce knowledge and competency framework and a progression of credentials by addressing a variety of strategies, including data analysis to gauge impacts and how their activities are resulting in system changes. Another supporting plan proposal is again their proposed partnership with the NAEYC to align their workforce competencies with current course curricula. This is evidence of this applicant's prioritization to use and implement existing evidence-based strategies.

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	20	12

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)

--This applicant proposes an appropriate means of providing professional development opportunities for early education staff, that is by the provision of online courses. However, the applicant did not explain how they would ensure that all staff will have access to both a computer and the Internet. It is not discussed whether this is an issue, and if so, how this plan will overcome this type of challenge. --The fact that this applicant's state CCR&R is currently active in all of the State's counties is evidence that they have the capacity to propose meeting the needs of programs statewide. In relation, this applicant's plan to increase technical assistance teams to meet the needs of the proposed requirement to enroll in the MCCQSS is an appropriate activity and a great way to build on their current capacity. Similarly, it is a strength of this portion of the plan that each team will include a parent educator.

This speaks to emphasis that is being placed on family engagement. --As noted earlier in the application, this applicant proposes a quality incentives programs for the early education workforce with the implementation of the TEACH and WAGES programs throughout the state. It is a strength of this application that this applicant plans to partner with the Kellogg Foundation to match the financial rewards given to educators. --It is clear that this applicant already has a system in place to publicly report data on workforce development, advancement and retention. However, the reporting of these data are currently voluntary, so it's likely that the applicant is missing out on a large amount of significant data and the ability to paint a full picture of what the state is doing in this regard. This systematic plan could provide the state with data that can inform future policies and goals. --This applicant's goals appear to be realistic by setting goals that are a series of "small steps." There is a reasonable spread of proposed numbers across the variety of early education credentials, as are numbers/percentages for proposed partners of postsecondary institutions. However, the fact that the applicant proposes to have all higher education programs receive either NAEYC accreditation and/or NCATE accreditation within the grant period is unrealistic. This is a time-intensive process and it is not clear whether these institutions are working towards the same goal. For this reason and because state agencies are not able to control this choice and the process to become accredited, it is unclear whether this goal can be attained.

### 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
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>
<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**

<b>Comments on (E)(1)</b>		
<p>--Previous portions of this application provide evidence that this State is currently working on aligning or has a plan in place to align their Early Learning Guidelines, which have been proven to cover all of the essential domains of school readiness, with the kindergarten entry assessment. --This applicant provides a list of assessment tools that were given to districts; however it is not clear which tools can appropriately assess English learners and children with disabilities, and how they do so. Also, as stated previously, it is not clear what these tools are and whether or not they are valid and reliable. --The applicant proposes a plan to administer a common, statewide assessment prior to the 2014-2015 school year by convening a task force. However, there are no details on how this task force will be formed, who will serve on it, and the process by which an assessment tool will be chosen. --With regard to implementing a statewide data system, this state currently utilizes the National Strategic Planning &amp; Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) system. This system seems adequate to meet the data needs of this plan and grant. However, as stated earlier in the application, it does not currently house a significant amount of data for children ages 0-5. It is unclear how the system will be revised to do so. --This applicant has proven that they have the capacity to leverage funds outside of this grant to support their kindergarten entry assessment.</p>		

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>



The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (E)(2)**

--This applicant's proposal to use the nSPARC system has many advantages, including its apparent ability to synthesize data from a wide variety of databases, the ability to create reports that are focused on different stakeholder groups (e.g., parents/guardians, policymakers, etc.), and a single point of entry for the data. Over the use of approximately two dozen data systems, all essential data elements are covered as evidenced by the information provided in table (A)(1)-13. --Also, it appears that it will collect and generate data that is current and relevant to early learning programs and educators as evidenced by the type of data that are collected and the data time period. Moreover, these data will allow the applicant information that can inform system and program improvement and decision making because of the multitude of data that will be collected (i.e., from assessments, vital records, screenings, and follow-up activities). However, the illustration of the system does not appear to support communication and data access between programs. Additionally, it is stated by the applicant that the system is currently cumbersome, but there is no proposed plan to overcome this challenge. --While it is stated that there are security systems in place, it is not clear whether these measures comply with the requirements of the Federal, State and local privacy laws.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>180</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>

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)**

--This applicant provides solid evidence that they have a comprehensive infrastructure in place to regulate the quality of early learning programs. The MCCQSS is already substantially implemented and the applicant's plans to further develop the system are realistic and of high quality. However, it is unclear how this system will reach to early learning programs that will not be required to be licensed (for example, kith and kin care), and hence will not be regulated by the MCCQSS. --This applicant has also provided a thoughtful way to address anticipated challenges and assessment questions regarding the implementation of their proposed plan. This is the first step in being ready to modify or revise a program throughout its implementation.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry</b>	<b>0 or 10</b>	<b>No</b>
<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>		
<b>Comments on (P)(3)</b>		
<p>--As stated earlier, this applicant provides evidence that a Kindergarten Entry Assessment is not established due to the fact that it is up to the schools to choose a tool from a list, a list that is not included in this application. Because of this, it is unknown whether any of these implemented tools are reliable and valid. --Further, this applicant has addressed selection criterion E1, albeit with a score of 55% from this reviewer.</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
<b>Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<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>	
<b>Comments on Absolute Priority</b>	
<p>--This state has kept in mind their high need population (in this case, children from low-income families) throughout the application. This applicant proposes a comprehensive system, aligning resources across state agencies and from external sources both within the state and at the national level. Their TQRIS is already embedded in their early childhood work, and they have a bona fide plan to improve it over the course of the grant period. This applicant adequately addresses how the work will be improved, implementing alignment with he MCCQSS and then a common competency framework, while implementing an incentives program. There is also solid evidence that this applicant has the capacity to collect and disseminate the appropriate data to match with the intended outcomes and progress of their proposed plan.</p>	



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

## Technical Review Form Page



Application # MS-5020

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: **Reviewed**  
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 7:59 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

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development</b>	20	10
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

#### Comments on (A)(1)

--The applicant demonstrates a past commitment to supporting early learning and development by the establishment of The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007. This demonstrates that the applicant can motivate many independent departments to collaborate so all children have access to quality early childhood education and development services. --The applicant states that there has been an increased financial investment in Early Learning and Development Programs from 12 million in 2007 to nearly \$25 million in 2010. It is not possible to know where the funds are from since there is no breakdown as to what percentage of that investment was specifically provided for Mississippi's population of Children with High Needs (91,886 which is 44% of the total children birth through Kindergarten). --The applicant uses a data system, The National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (nSPARC), with the goal to align the efforts of universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, and early childhood education. Alignment will include academic standards and career expectations. Because it is currently functioning and gathering data successfully it can be used effectively to align systems across the state. --The State has demonstrated a significant past commitment to and investment in high-quality accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for children with high needs by passing early learning and development legislation and policies. Legislation that verifies these investments include Senate Bill No. 2667, in 2007, enabled the creation of The State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC); provided certificates for families to subsidize attendance at an Early Learning Center, created Early Learning Guidelines. The State mandated the creation of a Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System as a result of Senate Bill #2602, House Bill #419 authorizes the State Board of Education to issue a standard license to teach in public prekindergarten through kindergarten to persons holding a Bachelor of Science degree with Child Development emphasis. The child development emphasis will lead to a better educated workforce with a greater understanding of the birth to five year old development and capabilities. --In 2006, Senate Bill #2602 "Mississippi Education Reform Act of 2006"; established the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System by requiring the Office for Children and Youth of the Department of Human Services, to develop and implement a pilot voluntary Quality Rating System (QRS). This is a significant step that will provide the groundwork for expanding a system to improve the quality of all licensed early care and education. --The applicant provides evidence, Mississippi

Department of Education Pre-kindergarten Data, of increasing access to Early Learning and Development Programs for children with high needs. --The applicant states that they have key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system. The state's Early Learning Standards were officially adopted but there is no mention of how the Guidelines are being implemented or which centers are receiving training. There is no evidence that all Early Learning and Development Programs have received training on implementing the Guidelines, if the Guidelines are accessible to their staff and if their staff understand how to use it. --The applicant does plan to begin training all staff on the early learning standards during years 1 and 2 of the RTT grant implementation but gives no indication as to how this will be completed and if Early Learning and Development Programs serving a higher percent of Children with High Needs will be given priority. --The applicant's Comprehensive Assessment Systems are not effectively described. There is no indication of which screenings and assessments are or will be used routinely and appropriately to improve instruction for children's learning and positive developmental outcomes. --The applicant relies on The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), Family Child Care Environment Rating are the assessment/screening tools. Research has confirmed that the ITERS and ECERS are as comprehensive as any scale available for the assessment of child care but if used with additional assessments and screening will provide a better picture of individual children's progress making it easier to focus observations and to consider the whole child. Research has confirmed that it is not "best practice" to rely on only one tool to determine how to improve instruction for an individual child's learning and positive developmental outcomes. Other assessments and screening tools are needed so strategies to support the development of the child within the context of the classroom as well as his family, culture, and environment were measurable. Research concludes that assessments should include both a formal; using of published developmental tests, checklists, or structured observational procedures and an informal process. --The applicant has included appropriate health screenings (including vision and hearing exams), preventive health care such as immunizations, inpatient and outpatient hospital care, doctor's or clinic visits for well-child check-ups and sick-child care, lab services, prescription medications, eyeglasses and hearing aids, dental care, and mental health services in the proposal. --The applicant has an elaborate process for developing, choosing and implementing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that will be available at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	8

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 demonstrates 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. The Summary of State plan demonstrates a vague plan by building an infrastructure, Center Supports, Family and Child Supports and Professional supports. The applicant has secured participation from lead agency departments, participating State agency local and private funders, organization and community organizations throughout the state to adequately meet their goals. --Mississippi selected Focus Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E) embedding (C) (4) throughout the application. The applicant's plan does not show convincing rationale for linking early childhood, health, mental health and nutrition, special needs and early intervention and family support to achieve their goal to by increasing the number of children with high needs served by high quality early education providers by 61% in year 4 of the grant. A concern is that the applicant will be creating new silos. --The seven key staff referred to in this section are not in place yet. It will be difficult to implement the staff in a timely manner. --The reform agenda is not fully formed, there is a lack of detail in the specific data. It is not clear how this will be collected and used. --The State plan lacks specific measurable goals and accountability. --The State is not clear on how too include families.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	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)

--Participating State Agencies and other partners have recognized the need for a governance structure for working together. This will facilitate inter-agency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability. --The ambitious first step is to expand and build on the current Division of Early Childhood Care into the Mississippi Division of Early Childhood Care and Development. There are many challenges in shifting from "compliance to supportive." --The proposal has adequate support from leaders, as shown in Memorandum Of Understandings (MOUs) etc., but staff are often resistant to change and should be provided with additional, significant support and education to make a smooth transition. --The applicant states that this goal will be implemented by the State building relationships with early educators across the State. There will be a significant amount of time needed if the State does not already have the respect and positive relationships with these educators. --The organizational structure is comprehensive with responsibilities allocated to the two offices: The Office of Early Learning and the Office of Family Support. The Division Director is the head of the RTT-ELC grant activities. This is not appropriate and adequate given the extent and scope of the work. The organizational structure of the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development appropriately aligns services for children and families by relocating child care licensing under this new structure. --An important part of the system design is the 10 Liaisons that will serve with supporting collaboration between existing programs and to develop inter-agency information and tasks. This is challenging but realistic since the applicant plans to provide considerable time for these Liaisons to communicate other Liaisons from various agencies on outcomes and barriers. But, the applicant does not indicate if there will be an equitable representation from the participating agencies. --The State Early Childhood Advisory Council of Mississippi (SECAC-MS), formed under Governor Haley Barbour in 2008, established a strong foundation for this application. SECAC-MS will be the governing body for the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development. A list of the members of the Council is provided in

Appendix A and illustrates the strong commitment of State and local leaders. There is a lack of information in regard to what process will be used for decision making related to policy. --The applicant provides an impressive, lengthy list of early learning representatives, constituents and stakeholders from throughout the state and includes their independent responsibilities but it is unclear how these key stakeholders will be involved in the planning and implementation. --State agencies will contribute a total of \$50,000,000 from 2013-2015. This total is not broken down so it is not clear where these funds are coming from and how they will be allocated to the project. --Head Start will contribute \$2,132,011 in 2012 to support the State plan but it is not clear as to which agency is contributing and how the funds were designated. This is a serious commitment from agencies that have been operating under significant budget cuts. --There are extensive Memorandum Of Understandings (MOU's), from authorized representatives, with solid commitments from State departments, early learning councils, higher education institutions, private funders, family and community organizations, children's community programs, early childhood educators and school boards. This indicates a strong support for the RTT-ELC project. --Letters of support are lacking persuasive language and support for the RTT-ELC plan.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>

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 provides a list of participating agencies but does not clearly demonstrate how the State will use or blend existing funds from these agencies. The proposal does not adequately break down or explain how existing funds, that support early learning and development, will be used to support RTT-ELC services and outcomes. --It is not clear how specific funds from 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) will be used. It is difficult to know if these funds will be used for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State plan. --The applicant did not include a detailed explanation or the amount of funds budgeted for other participating programs and/or partners. It is difficult to determine what specific activities they will be responsible to complete and if the amount of funds are adequate to support the activities in the state plan. --The applicant in both the budget tables demonstrates how the funding from RTT-ELC will achieve the outcomes in the State Plan. The State has included items and costs in Budget Table 1-1 but there are no narratives to explain each line item. --The budget shows that the new structure formed in the State plan will effectively reduce costs by eliminating duplication of services. The new structure will be effective in providing services to families by reducing confusion and increasing a family's ability to access all supports available to them. The applicant has not yet determined how much of the funds are needed to provide incentives for providers to participate in the MCCQUS. There is no funding earmarked for educating the public on the need and merit of the MCCQUS system. The pie chart does not align with previous tables. --It is unclear why the applicant is requesting 100% of the cost for DHS licensing. --The applicant effectively demonstrates that sustainability after the grant period is probable. The new agency will be in full implementation, staff will be trained and the shift from compliance to supportive will be established. The new streamlined structure will be able serve more families and children and provide more services since duplication and confusion will be eliminated. The funding in the budget appropriately peaks at year 2 and decreases appropriately in year 3 and 4 to begin a transition for the state to maintain services past the grant period. It is not clear how the breakdown (\$318,000 DOE, \$1 million Mental Health and \$48 million for DHS) was determined.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<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"> <li>(1) Early Learning and Development Standards;</li> <li>(2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;</li> <li>(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;</li> <li>(4) Family engagement strategies;</li> <li>(5) Health promotion practices; and</li> <li>(6) Effective data practices;</li> </ul> <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>		
<p>Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b></p>		

Comments on (B)(1)		
<p>--The state has effectively planned to focus on those providers serving children with high needs by using Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI), a statewide, nonprofit organization of parents, providers, and community leaders working together. The program will increase the number of centers that participate in the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS) program by using incentives to motivate participation. Participating centers will receive a higher reimbursement rate by providing higher quality care. --Mississippi's Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System (TQRIS), known as the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System, provides a clearly defined five step structure for early childhood professionals and providers to plan their training and education. The field of early care has recognized that the education of child care providers directly impacts children's ability to grow and develop to their fullest potential so building and expanding this system has positive implications. --The applicant has Early Learning Guidelines for infants and toddlers, maintained by the Office of Head Start in the Governor's office and aligned with K-12 standards. Early Learning Guidelines for ages of 3 and 5 years old, maintained by the Mississippi Department of Education, are aligned with K-12 standards. --The applicant did not provide complete Comprehensive Assessment System; it is unclear as to how the assessments will be chosen and/or adopted. The applicant gives the impression that they are using Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLAS) to help them to decide on the assessment and screening tools to be used but there are no samples of the "on-going Child Assessments" that the applicant projects to use for Step 4 and 5 of the MCCQSS system. It is not clear what assessments or developmental check lists the applicant intends to use. --Early Childhood Educator qualifications increase adequately as you move from Step 1 to Step 5 on the MCCQSS system beginning with adding hours of staff development to an increase in the number of staff with CDA or higher. This will motivate providers to increase their education leading to a more knowledgeable workforce. Parent involvement and education is weak. The applicant did not include enough incentives (dinner, child care and awards) for parents to participate in activities and education. --The state's family engagement strategies are promising but there is a lack of program option for parents. One area of concern is that the applicant did not have a strategy to involve fathers in their child's early education. There has been considerable research around motivating fathers to participate in their child's activities beginning at birth. When father's are absent from their child's life, children are more likely to drop out of school, use drugs, be involved in the criminal justice system, and become young parents themselves. --One of the purposes of the MCCQSS is to increase the quality of early childhood care and education around high standards for healthier children but none of the steps in the MCCQSS address this issue directly. --The applicant includes the Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines for three year old children and Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for four year old children in the MCCQSS system. --The data portion is generally strong though it is not clear why the applicant is not using a more comprehensive assessment/screening process to get data results that would be more. --The MCCQSS Step 1 is linked to the State licensing system. All participating providers must be State licensed and all State licensed providers will be part of the MCCQSS system. The MCCQSS does not include any accreditation level to denote a higher levels of quality (lower ratio of child to adult, smaller class sizes etc.).</p>		

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>

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 has a simple and effective plan with milestones imbedded for each year of the grant to maximize program participation in the State's MCCQSS by providing a factor/component for each of the major categories of providers. Beginning in 2012 all licensed all childcare centers will be required to participate. --There is a plan for Early Head Start and Head Start centers to participate in the MCCQSS by closely collaborating with the State Head Start Association. The applicant plans to get the 20% of unlicensed Head Start centers licensed through this collaboration but there is no MOU to evidence this action. The applicant has the cooperation and commitment from State departments to ensure full participation from Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA; Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program. --Mississippi proposes an incentive structure to encourage parents and providers to participate in the QRIS system. The funding per child could be up to \$350 per child but it is not clear how this amount will be determined and how the Division of Early Care and Development will make sure that amount fair and equitable for all centers across the state. --The applicant has planned for additional supports to motivate participation and shows a solid starting place for a successful structure. The State plan includes incentives for centers to increase their quality but does not provide a plan to get children with high needs in high quality center.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	15	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 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)**



--An effective change for Mississippi is the moving of the licensing division to the Department of Human Services, Division of Early Childhood Care and Development. This move will bring all programs specific to early care and education of children 0-4 years of age into one Division in one agency and ensure a better coordinated planning and implementation of the MCCQSS system. --The Mississippi Department of Human Services contracts with two experienced organizations, Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University to conduct the MCCQSS rating and monitoring services for learning and development programs and the Extension Service housed at Mississippi State University to rate and monitor early care in-home providers. --The applicant is providing training on the ITERS-R and ECERS-R showing a commitment to create a well trained team to monitor the Early Learning and Development programs effectively but does not address how or who will provide this training and how it can be accomplished financially. The applicant lacks providing additional assessment/screening tools for data collection. The process lacks the necessary informative to improve planning activities for young children. The applicant does not provide evidence of a Comprehensive Assessment System Indicators. It does not site a range of assessment tools; including, early childhood educator anecdotal notes/observations, annual developmental screening, child assessment tool, communication with parents, to inform instruction and make appropriate referrals for children with special needs. --Research has confirmed that teachers should use a combination of observation and formal assessments, including multiple sources of evidence, especially reports from parents and teachers, to evaluate their own teaching and make improvements to better meet the needs of children. --The applicant has developed a good plan for pre-assessment, a six month review and a 12 month review for the MCCQSS process to ensure that the provider's star rating is maintained. It is not clear how this will be financially feasible and staffed adequately. --The applicant refers to an In-home Inspection Checklist but does not provide a sample or description of the tool. There is not enough evidence presented in this application that the tool is appropriate and effective. --The applicant refers to a report card but this item is not available for review. There is not enough evidence that the tool is appropriate or effective. --The applicant did not establish a solid reporting method to be used with parents and community. --There is a well-designed data system that will create reports for policy makers to help them better understand child outcomes and provider improvements. This will benefit the agency staff, county based staff, providers and parents, in each agency, in every county and with all providers. --Reports will be shared across the system, in a particular agency, in the county and with the provider assisting them when strategic decisions are necessary.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	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)**

--Since the applicant is in the planning stage of creating and implementing a quality rating system all the incentives have not yet been established. The applicant plans to use grant resources to ensure that the MCCQSS provides appropriate incentives and supports. --The applicant has financing incentives for providers that will be linked to progress on the quality step system; incentives will be awarded to parents for sending their children to centers with higher star ratings. The incentives are thoughtful and appropriate to motivate providers and parents to participate in the MCCQSS. There is a plan to provide awards to help improve their center to purchase materials and supplies. These plans are ambitious and achievable given the time and staff allocated to the grant. --The applicant provides adequate evidence with baseline and annual targets for the number of centers and children with high needs, participating in programs, currently in the top tier of their Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (in the 3 charts). The applicant demonstrates a significant increase by almost doubling the number of centers and children with high needs for each target year. There is an inconsistency in the performance measures. It is not clear how the applicant considers Steps 3,4,5 as quality. There are 35 centers on the top tier and over 4000 not at quality. It is questionable that the goals are feasible. --Mississippi proposes an incentive structure to encourage parents and providers to participate in the QRIS system. The funding per child could be up to \$350 per child.

	Available	Score
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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)**

--Early childhood educator qualifications increase adequately as you move from Step 1 to Step 5 on the MCCQSS system beginning with adding hours of staff development to an increase in the number of staff with Child Development Associate credential (CDA) or higher. The CDA and other measures described are research based and will motivate providers to increase their education leading to a more knowledgeable workforce. The CDA credential is an strong credential to use since it is awarded in the United States to those who have completed a list of requirements, including 120 hours of training, set forth by the Council for Professional Recognition, and who have successfully passed the verification visit to work with Infants/Toddlers or Preschoolers. There are several settings toward which a CDA can be awarded: Center-based Infant/Toddler, Center-based Preschool, Family Child Care, Bi-lingual, and Home Visitor. Since it has many focus areas it can be used as a successful measure of education/training for all providers. --One of the purposes of the MCCQSS is to increase the quality of early childhood care and education around high standards for healthier children but none of the steps in the MCCQSS address this issue directly. --The MCCQSS does not include a measure for increasing the quality at Step 5 for centers or homes. The lack of an accreditation measure, to denote a higher level of quality (lower ratio of child to adult, smaller class sizes etc.) was a weakness in this application. For example, NAEYC accreditation would be a valid, research-based means to denote high quality. --The MCCQSS Step 1 is linked to the State licensing system. All participating providers must be State licensed and all State licensed providers will be part of the MCCQSS system. This is a valid Step 1 in the system.

**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
<b>(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.</b>	20	10

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;

(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program

Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and

(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(1)**

--The applicant states that The Early Learning Standards were officially adopted by the State but at this time the Guidelines are voluntary. The applicant has included competencies and objectives, suggested teaching strategies and developmental check-lists in the Guidelines. The applicant states that the Early Learning and Development Standards are in the process of being aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards. The applicant did not address how they would address Approaches to Learning in the Standards. --The applicant has formed a committee of stakeholders (early care and education teachers, directors, teachers with expertise in special needs and representation from coordinating agencies). The draft of the Early Learning Guidelines/Standards was sent for review to an "advisory panel" of readers who have expertise in early childhood. --The Early Learning Guidelines were approved by the Mississippi Board of Education and aligned with Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework: Promoting Positive Outcomes in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children 3-5 Years Old (Section C Appendix). This provided evidence that the applicant met the criterion but there are concerns. A weakness of the Early Learning Guidelines is the lack of including a review of the Standards by nationally recognized organizations and leaders in the field. It is unclear as to whether the applicant used all aspects of school readiness as identified by the National Education Goal Panel (NEGP). --Although the applicant states that professional development will be part of the state-wide implementation of Early Learning Guidelines/Standards they did not include on-going support for front-line staff such as mentoring, conferences, workshops, and pre-service and in-service training to ensure that the Standards would be understood and linked to assessment and curriculum. --The applicant does include two supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the early learning guidelines across early learning and development programs. Project IMPACT and the CCR&R network training activities designed to develop professional skills of caregivers and to improve parent's knowledge of early childhood development. And, Project PREPARE provides evaluation based training and technical assistance to child care centers on the best practices to serve children with high risk factors related to disabilities, chronic health impairments and special needs.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	20	10

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 applicant had a process in place to select a kindergarten assessment and during the 2011-2012 school year, all school districts were given funding for self selection of the "screener" to be used for kindergarten entry but no one common kindergarten readiness tool was selected. --A weakness of this application is that a state-wide kindergarten assessment will not be available during the first two years of the grant. If there are any proposed changes to the tool there could be further postponement to its use. It is not clear how the applicant will use the information from the Kindergarten Assessment to develop a scoring rubric to assess current screening instruments and during 2013-2014. --The applicant has a plan to establish a unique identifier for every child to make gathering data collection more efficient. The applicant will be able to follow each child even if the child moves to another part of Mississippi. --The applicant has plans to verify that course syllabi will provide students with exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity and improving educator awareness of the impact of poverty on child development and family engagement but does not tie this to a Comprehensive Assessment System. --The applicant failed to thoroughly explain and provide example's of a Comprehensive Assessment Systems since there are no samples of child assessments. It is not clear which screenings and assessments will be used routinely and appropriately to improve instruction for children's learning and positive developmental outcomes. --The Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network is used for training of early care and education providers on the ELGs as part of the training required to successfully move up the quality step ladder. The content of the training will be revised contingent upon the review and revision of the ELGs and the MCCQSS criteria. It is

not clear how or what the technical assistance "Quick Peeks" or other resources will do to support the early care and education providers professional growth. --The applicant plans to use the NAEYC Workforce Competency Blueprint as a rubric and have representatives from community colleges and universities review current course syllabi to determine if the elements listed in the blueprint are covered in their courses. A special emphasis will be placed on increasing student exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity and improving educator awareness of the impact of poverty on child development and family engagement. By year 4 of the grant, course syllabi will reflect the inclusion of the workforce competency elements. --Training sessions provided by the MSCCR&R will be reviewed in years 3 and 4 of the grant to determine the elements listed in the blueprint that are covered in the training. A special emphasis will be placed on increasing student exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity and improving educator awareness of the impact of poverty on child development and family engagement. By year 4 of the grant, course training modules will reflect inclusion of the workforce competency elements. --The applicant relies on The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), Family Child Care Environment Rating are the assessment/screening tools. Research indicates that the ITERS and ECERS are comprehensive tools. But, additional assessments and screenings will provide a more comprehensive picture of a child's progress and help determine how to improve instruction with better learning and positive developmental outcomes.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	20	9

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety; ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur; and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;

(b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;

(c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and

(d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--

(1) Are screened using Screening Measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (see section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and that, as appropriate, are consistent with the Child Find provisions in IDEA (see sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of IDEA).

(2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and

(3) Participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care, including the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(3)**

--The Mississippi plan includes 4 comprehensive areas including a new division and better collaboration between state and local structures, opportunities to increase collaboration between programs, establishing a system for including and assisting providers and families, and establishing a feedback loop to determine effectiveness. These focus areas provide a foundation that the state can build on to better serve high needs children and families. --The applicant provided clear, up-to-date data and risk factors describing the target population. There is weak evidence of statewide health standards. --The MCCQSS system is based on the Mississippi Department of Education's Mississippi Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines for Three Year Old Children, as well as the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers and Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Three and Four Year Old Children. These guidelines are a foundation but the applicant has not adopted an assessment/screening tool that will assist providers when planning to meet the needs of individual children. --MCCQSS system incorporates a progressive, incremental strategy to address parental involvement and communication, including curricula topics being currently addressed. Implementation of the curricula will promote healthy eating habits, improved nutrition, and expand physical activity in children but the applicant needs to provide additional strategies to reach and educate parents on the importance of healthy eating habits, improved nutrition, and how to expand their child's physical activity. The applicant did provide strategies for parents to join their child for lunch and demonstrate healthy lunch dishes. --The applicant includes evidence that they will use reputable partners to the develop professional skills of providers and parents. For example; the applicant is using Project IMPACT, operated by Jackson State University to improve the knowledge of early childhood development. Project PREPARE, operated by the University of Southern Mississippi, provides evaluation-based training and technical assistance to child care centers on the best practices to serve children with high risk factors related to disabilities, chronic health impairments and special needs. --Research tells us that parents/families are more comfortable and trusting of organizations and individuals from their community so the applicant's plan to work with local communities to identify and recruit families is well intended. The applicant also provides a good progressive plan beginning with the identified 4 counties, added two more counties and then proceeding to all 82 counties statewide. This will enable the applicant to build and adjust the plan before going statewide. --The applicant discusses many additional training opportunities that will be available to providers and parents but does not

indicate if these trainings will be state approved (or if there is a state approval method) or nationally recognized training such as the CDA trainings they mentioned. --Mississippi plans to develop a high-quality screening and referral system by building on the current Mississippi Child Care and Resource and Referral Network. The referral process will begin with screenings, medical as well as developmental areas, which can provide immediate data for services needed. This is advantageous since it is already an established successful state-wide system and based in communities where providers and parents reside. The applicant shows evidence that by expanding this network they can increase the number of appropriate referrals made based on a child's needs and facilitate families to access services. --The applicant will use Race to the Top funds to coordinate these services in order to provide a system of comprehensive care for every child in Mississippi. This demonstrates great promise for equitable services in rural communities. They will have the ability to increase training for educators and providers promoting a more knowledgeable workforce. --The Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) includes a physical exam, hearing and vision screenings, immunization/shots, blood/urine tests, blood lead levels, developmental screen, nutrition evaluation, oral health screening, and medical referral or referral to another health provider if needed. This will appropriately serve as the model for screening. RTT-ELC funds will be dedicated to an assessment of current IDEA fund allocation and show the ability to reform the overall early learning and development system in Mississippi. --The applicant plans to implement a uniform referral process to increase the number of appropriate referrals made based on a child's needs and facilitate access to services. This will promote collaboration and insure that supports and services get to the child promptly and at a reasonable cost. --It is expected that the referral protocol will be finalized during the first year. The referral process will begin with screenings. The screens will cover medical as well as developmental areas. --A unique collaboration with a community pediatrician, working with the Mississippi Chapter AAP and the MS Early Childhood Institute, will allow the applicant to develop a protocol to train residents as well as practicing physicians on the need for early identification of typical and atypical development. This a logical first step in motivating the community to find information and learn more about healthy development for children. The MS Early Childhood Institute will serve as content developers and trainers. The applicant has well thought-out ambitious targets but does not address how they will be implemented.

#### 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
<b>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>
The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--		
(a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes;		
(b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and		
(c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)
--The applicant shows evidence that there is a plan in place to improve the workforce knowledge and competency by engaging experienced partners to develop professional skills of providers and parents. For example the applicant is using Jackson State University and Project IMPACT to improve the knowledge of early childhood development. Project PREPARE, operated by the University of Southern Mississippi, provides evaluation-based training and technical assistance to child care centers on the best practices to serve children with high risk factors related to disabilities, chronic health impairments and special needs. The applicant did not provide evidence of any MOUs from universities or community colleges. --The applicant states that 12 community colleges with AA degrees in early childhood technology courses are taught using the Early Learning Guidelines but the applicant does not provide information about where these colleges are located statewide or if there are additional colleges and universities that will be motivated to use the guidelines in the future. --The applicant plans to verify that course syllabi will provide students with exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity and improving educator awareness of the impact of poverty on child development and family engagement but does not indicate how they will strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of different assessments included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems. --Early Childhood Educator qualifications increase appropriately as you move from Step 1 to Step 5 on the MCCQSS system beginning with adding hours of staff development to an increase in the number of staff with Child Development Associate (CDA) or higher and/or other research based trainings. The applicant did not include strategies to support CDA adult learners. This is an appropriate strategy to motivate providers to increase their education leading to a more knowledgeable workforce. Each step of the 5-level system, has additional professional development and educational requirements for the director and staff to

motivate staff to increase their knowledge and education. --The applicant has a current progression of educational opportunities with plans to expand it to create a better educated and competent workforce. The applicant is working with National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), an organization that set a nationally accepted standard of excellence for early childhood programs benefiting the early childhood professionals, young children, families, and communities. Appendix D provides evidence that the applicant will participate in a self-guided state analysis and in integrating a professional development system during the years of the RTT-ELC grant. The NAEYC State Policy Blueprint Guide will help the State move to a shared vision of a competent and stable early childhood workforce and gives the state an opportunity for state stakeholders to move forward rather than focusing on the negativity of what is not working. --Home visitation strategies are not included in the applicant's plan. --There is no rationale for different expectations for school-based and non-school-based programs.

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>
<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 applicant will use the NAEYC Workforce Competency Blueprint as a rubric and training sessions provided by the MSCCR&amp;R will be reviewed in years 3 and 4 of the grant to determine the elements listed in the blueprint that are not covered in the training. It is not clear how the MSCCR&amp;R will have the capacity and education to complete this goal. This allows the applicant a reliable tool for building on strengths and adjusting for weaknesses. Research confirms that intensive, sequenced, multi-session training is linked with quality. --The applicant provides evidence that they will provide and expand access to effective professional development opportunities such as T.E.A.C.H. and WAGES initiatives that will create an incentive for providers to participate in professional development and training in order to improve their quality rating. It is not clear how this strategy will be available to in-home providers. --T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project, gives scholarships to child care workers to complete course work in early childhood education and to increase their compensation. It is a well respected program used to address the issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover within the early childhood workforce. --The Child Care WAGES Project addresses high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education. Both programs are derived from a response to research-based evidence that shows that the quality of care children receive is lowered by high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education. The selection of these programs demonstrates the commitment Mississippi has to improve child outcomes for children with high needs. --MCCQSS system is considering rewarding centers that employ higher educated directors and teachers. Research found that higher quality early childhood programs were associated with teachers/caregivers with bachelor's degrees. --The applicant shows evidence that they are aligning professional development with the state's workforce and competence framework by collaborating with post secondary institutions and professional development providers. Evidence includes aligning community colleges with the course offerings in 4 year degree programs that are implementing a birth – five certificate, using the NAEYC Workforce Competency Blueprint. The applicant did not provide evidence that the collaboration with the universities will produce accreditation. --The applicant will review current requirements for those who provide professional development. This is an important step since research has found that the three factors that impact effectiveness: quality of trainers, supervision of trainers, and agency supports for trainers. Research and many national projects have found that education or training should be accompanied by on-site approaches aimed at helping early childhood teachers/caregivers implement positive practices. --The performance measures for increasing the number and percentage of early childhood educators is evidenced in the applicant's ability to show progression beginning with less than HS through Master's degree.</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
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	20	9
<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 applicant provides evidence that the State's Early Learning and Development Standards is aligned to the Essential Domains of School Readiness by providing a short crosswalk of the two items. --Districts were allotted funding for the 2011-12 school year to implement an assessment they could choose from a list. This list included options that were 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 but no evidence or samples of the assessments were included in the proposal. --The state plans to convene a task force that will identify a statewide assessment that is aligned with the upcoming common core standards. The common, statewide assessment will be used in the 2013-14 school year. The applicant did not provide information on how assessment tools would be focused on curriculum planning, activities, parental involvement, program accountability and evaluation, and program improvement. --The applicant does not mention how English learners will be assessed. It is not clear if the child will be assessed in the home language as well as English to ensure valid outcomes. --The applicant provides evidence of their robust longitudinal database called nSPARC which will collect the Kindergarten Entry assessment data. --The State has allocated funding on a per pupil basis to implement a Kindergarten Entry assessment. There is no indication on how significant this amount will be to the full implementation.</p>		

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	14
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State’s existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--</p> <p>(a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;</p> <p>(b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;</p> <p>(c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;</p> <p>(d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development</p>		

Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and

(e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(2)
<p>--Mississippi's goal is to build a high quality and effectively functioning system building on the strengths of its independent components including Head Start and Family First Resource Centers as well as several more recent components. Evidence of oversight is not clear. --The applicant proposes all essential data elements that will support this new system: Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs), A TQRIS system, a new division of early childhood services Division of Early Childhood Care and Development, liaison structure, incentives for providers and parents, support services for all classes of providers, expand support for screenings, referrals and services, expand support for coordinating services among state agencies. -- There is no evidence that the system will work effectively and efficiently with the data system. The applicant relies on nSPARC to ensure that the Mississippi system is highly effective since it will provide uniform data collection and easy dissemination. The data system appears to be well-designed, comprehensive and efficient. nSPARC will be effective in creating reports that will be used by policy makers, agency staff, county based staff, providers and parents. It will effectively help them understand what is happening across the system, in a particular agency, in the county and with the provider. This is a solid system that allows for strategic decisions. The applicant provides charts to evidence all data sources and other types of collections the system will gather, transfer and use. --The National Strategic Planning &amp; Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) seeks to align university, industry, and government expertise and resources to maintain and increase economic competitiveness. This provides a solid foundation for a standard data structure since it presently manages the state's education longitudinal data system which includes all of the state's essential data elements.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>147</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>

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)
<p>An effective change for Mississippi is the moving of the licensing division to the Department of Human Services, Division of Early Childhood Care and Development. This move will bring all programs specific to early care and education of children 0-4 years of age into one Division in one agency and ensure a better coordinated planning and implementation of the MCCQSS system. --The MCCQSS Step 1 is linked to the State licensing system. All participating providers must be State licensed and all State licensed providers will be part of the MCCQSS system. This is a valid Step 1 in for the States system. The assessment of whether a center meets these expectations is monitored by the Early Childhood Institute on a contract from the DHS. --The applicant provides the necessary evidence that during 2010-11, participation in the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS) for any type of provider was voluntary but beginning in 2011-12, participation in the system will be required for licensed centers. Beginning in 2013, pre-kindergarten programs offered through schools will also be required to participate. For licensed in-home providers receiving CCDF children, participation beginning in 2012 will also be required. Any facilities that are newly licensed after January 2013 will automatically be enrolled. --The applicant appropriately estimates that between 100,000 and 115,000 (45.5 percent of the zero to five population) children will be served by licensed centers each year. --Approximately Eighty percent of Head Start and Early Head Start Programs are currently licensed centers and therefore will participate in the MCCQSS system. The vast majority of remaining twenty percent of Head Start and Early Head Start Programs are housed in local school</p>



districts but are affiliated with non-public school head start grantees and with the incentives provided by the applicant it is feasible to expect these centers to attain licensing and participate in the MCCQSS system.

**Priorities**

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

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 had a process in place to select a kindergarten assessment. During the 2011-2012 school year, all school districts were given funding for self selection of the screener to be used for kindergarten entry but no one common kindergarten readiness tool was selected. The state plans to adopt a state-wide kindergarten assessment. --It is unclear as to how the applicant, in the time frame stated, will use the information from the Kindergarten Assessment to develop a scoring rubric to assess the current screening instrument.

**Absolute Priority**

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

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**

--In Mississippi, the TQRIS is called the Mississippi Child Care Quality Steps System (MCCQSS). --The State has planned MCCQSS five step system to improve the quality of care for children with high needs. The strength of the system is in the significant professional development and educational opportunities for early childhood professionals and providers. Research has confirmed that the education of child care providers directly impacts children's ability to grow and develop to their fullest potential. Therefore, building and expanding this system has positive implications for all children. --The applicant uses the MCCQSS as the State's broader quality improvement continuum. The MCCQSS includes incentives and has five components: Administrative Policy, Professional Development, Learning Environments, Parent Involvement and Evaluation. The criteria for the MCCQSS are effectively developed on a system of upward progression. --The MCCQSS will increase the number of centers that participate in the program by rewarding participating centers with a higher reimbursement rate when they provide higher quality care. --The applicant demonstrates a past commitment to supporting early learning and development by establishing The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007. This demonstrates that the applicant can motivate departments to collaborate and ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood education and development services. --The applicant demonstrates effectively that an increased financial investment in Early Learning and Development Programs from 12 million in 2007 to nearly \$25 million in 2010.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # MS-5020

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 10:51 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, 13. Includes detailed text about the state's commitment and investment in early learning programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

Mississippi's application provides evidence of a strong statewide commitment to the improvement of early childhood services, particularly increasing access for Children with High Needs. The state's funding increases, increases in numbers of children served, recent legislation designed to improve early childhood programs, and a statewide data system are key elements of this evidence.

have been given funding for a Kindergarten Entry Assessment, no data are provided about district implementation. The state's new data system, the National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (nSPARC), shows promise as a tool to coordinate decision-making across all levels of education in the state. In addition, the state has a variety of initiatives that demonstrate its ongoing efforts to improve conditions for young children. Given the extremely limited resources of the state, its previous efforts have been strong and have clearly made a difference.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	10
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)
<p>Mississippi's stated goal is to "to increase the number of Children with High Needs being served by high quality early education providers by year 4 of this grant by 61%." This is a substantial and ambitious goal, but other than providing a very specific percentage, this does not provide a clear reform agenda. It is, therefore, unclear whether the plan is achievable. In Focused Investment Area (C), the plan specifically addresses criteria (C)(1), (C)(2), and (C)(3), with aspects of (C)(4) embedded throughout. Within Focused Investment Area (D), the plan addresses criteria (D)(1) and (D)(2). Within Focused Investment Area (E), the plan addresses criteria (E)(1) and (E)(2). The explanation of goals is vague, as is the description of the path toward achieving the goals. The rationale justifying the choices of criteria is not particularly clear, and insufficient explanation is provided. For example, the application specifies "Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials" as an important criterion and cites the participation of many childcare workers in the state's support system due to low wages as a reason. However, it does not explain how selecting this criterion will help to alleviate this problem. No clear rationale is provided for excluding the family engagement criterion, except that it will be embedded throughout the proposal. Given the prominent role of family engagement in the state's model, embedding this criterion and not addressing it explicitly is insufficient. The use of an external evaluator is a strength of the application, but information about the criteria used for the selection of this evaluator is not provided. The inclusion of investments from private foundations (e.g., Kellogg) is another strength, but little information is provided about how these private dollars will be used to enhance the grant activities.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	10	6
<p>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--</p> <p>(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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and</p> <p>(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</p>		

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 application outlines very specific plans for coordinating existing services and creating a new, "integrated" infrastructure. The plan demonstrates how redundancies will be eliminated and efficiency increased, while building on existing capacity through ongoing programs. The organizational chart shows how agencies will interact under a more coordinated system. However, the creation of new offices has the potential to create new redundancies, and no plan for avoiding this is provided. Also, it is unclear how the Unit for School Readiness will fit into the organizational chart. The time allotted in the proposal for reorganization of the new infrastructure seems inadequate, especially given the scope of the proposed transition. Also, no clear plan is provided for decision-making or dispute resolution. Numerous letters of support provide evidence that a wide range of stakeholders has been involved in the planning of this project and stand ready to support its implementation, but some of the letters listed in the table were not provided in the Appendix. Also, several of the letters did not provide sufficient detail to ensure that they are committed to providing all the resources outlined in the proposal. MOUs are provided to demonstrate commitment from a number of participating state agencies, including the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Mental Health, the Early Childhood Advisory Council, and the Division of Medicaid. Each MOU includes a Scope of Work and a signature from an authorized representative. However, there is no MOU with Mississippi State University. Without an MOU, it is unclear how committed Mississippi State University is to the extensive role in training and monitoring described in the proposal.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	15	6
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 application describes the process through which heads of existing agencies met and agreed to rethink their way of doing business. The state's information about how existing funds will be used to support the plan is unclear. Funds from Head Start and each state agency collective are listed, but although the amounts are listed in the table, their uses are not explained in the narrative. The sustainability of the plan, as described, is somewhat unclear. The following statement leaves too much room for interpretation: "each agency budget reflects any increases in their budget the agency received as a result of their participation in the Race to the Top proposal during 2012." The intent appears to have the various agencies begin embedding the services and resources provided through this grant into their existing budgets, but a plan for how this is to be accomplished is not clearly articulated. Little information is provided about the specific allocations of funds within agencies for expenditures of the lump sums provided. Again, the heavy emphasis on DHS, with little involvement from other state agencies is a weakness of the proposal. No rationale is provided for moving licensing to DHS, although this move will require considerable funds. Support from private sources is a strength of the proposal, but little information is provided about how the private funds will be used. Finally, some discrepancies in total RTT-ELC dollars exist among budget pages.

**B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs**

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	10	7

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)**

Mississippi has a tiered quality rating system in place. The Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS) is a method to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in licensed early child care and education settings across the state. The steps of MCCQSS are clear, appropriate, and reasonable, and it provides a strong framework for improving program quality. However, because few details are provided in the application, it is unclear how school-based programs will be included in the system. This lack of clarity may be related to the minimal involvement of the state's Department of Education in the proposed grant activities. The tiered Program Standards include all the expected elements, with Effective Data Practices partially implemented. The program standards are, for the most part, measurable and based on appropriate early learning standards. Mississippi was among the first states to develop and adopt early learning standards. The program standards also provide a basis for meaningful differentiation of program quality. The application articulates plans from transitioning this system from voluntary to mandatory and to include preschool providers as well as licensed centers. However, given that the early learning guidelines for different ages are "housed" in separate agencies, it remains unclear how widely they are implemented across the state.

	Available	Score
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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)**

Mississippi will use licensure as the method by which centers will be encouraged to participate in the TQRIS, which is an appropriate tactic. The process for moving from voluntary to mandatory participation has already begun and will be complete during the grant period. Within 2 years of the grant award, all licensed centers will be required as part of their license renewal to enroll. The application provides clear goals for moving from voluntary to mandatory participation, but the plans for achieving these goals are less clear. That is, for licensed programs, the process is well defined. For programs that are exempt from licensing, the process depends on approval from the Mississippi Board of Education, and no evidence is provided that approval is forthcoming. Also, the targets of participation by 100% of programs in various type categories are ambitious but may not be realistic, especially for those programs that are exempt from licensing. The state also provides plans for helping more families access high quality child care. Moving from 6-month to 12-month child eligibility renewal is a strength. Support in the form of incentives per child, provider training, teacher bonuses, and postsecondary savings accounts are planned, but the plan for sustainability of these incentives beyond the grant period is vague. Many of these incentives will depend on public/private partnerships, but there is little evidence provided to indicate the long-term sustainability of these partnerships. Finally, the state's targets for improving ratings are vague, so determining whether they are achievable is difficult.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	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 Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) are well-established tools, but on their own, they are insufficient to provide the data needed to monitor program quality. Inclusion of Caring for Our Children to monitor health promotion is a particular strength of the proposal, as this is a widely recognized and appropriate tool for this purpose. There is little information provided in the application regarding the validity and reliability of the other tools to be used. The lack of emphasis on child outcomes as a critical indicator of program quality is a weakness of the application. The state contracts with two entities at Mississippi State University to rate and monitor early learning and development programs using the ERS. The application articulates clear steps that a provider undertakes in preparation for their monitoring visits, as well as the process for establishing and maintaining inter-rater reliability. The application also articulates an effective plan for improving the monitoring system during the grant period. The plan as described calls for frequent visits to evaluate program quality. This is commendable, but no explanation is provided about how the state will manage the considerable human resources necessary for such frequent monitoring. Finally, no clear plan is presented for making program quality data available to families to assist with their decision-making process. Registry data, provided via a web site, is cited several times as the mechanism for helping families make decisions about child care choices. However, alternative methods of data sharing for families without internet access (i.e., many families of Children with High Needs) are not presented.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	20	12
<p>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--</p> <p>(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);</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing--</p> <p>(1) The number of Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)
<p>The state's plan to increase enrollment of Children with High Needs in high quality early learning programs is three-pronged. The state uses two main provider incentives. The first is a fund to subsidize the cost of services for Children with High Needs. The second is a reward system for improved quality ratings. The state also has a parent incentive to encourage enrollment in high quality early learning programs in the form of the Mississippi Affordable College Savings program, a 529 college savings account that is seeded with an initial deposit and then parent contributions are matched up to an annual cap. These incentives seem effective and appropriate for addressing the intended goal. It seems inappropriate, though, to have a teacher attendance incentive that appears to promote working while sick. However, the proposal's emphasis seems to be on increasing the number of programs that have basic licensing rather than on increasing the quality of programs. In particular, there seems to be little information provided about how the state intends to increase the number of high quality programs. The strategies listed focus on incentives rather than on supports, such as technical assistance. Also, given the requirements of each step, it seems inappropriate to consider programs that have reached Step 3 to be of "high" quality. Step 1 is automatic with licensing, and Step 2 is still low quality. Although the criteria for reaching Steps 4 and 5 are stringent enough for those steps to be considered high quality, the requirements for Step 3 could not be reasonably considered to provide a comparable level of stringency. The state currently serves a very small percentage (7%) of Children with High Needs in programs that are in the top tiers of the TORIS. The plan's target is to increase this number to 35%. While reasonably ambitious, there is insufficient detail provided in the plan to allow determination of whether this target is achievable.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	15	6
<p>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--</p> <p>(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</p>		

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 evaluation plan begins with a "structural" audit of the state's TQRIS by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). As the primary professional organization and accrediting agency for early childhood providers, the involvement of NAEYC is a strength of the proposal. The bulk of the evaluation plan focuses on results of the system, including child outcomes. The state will contract with an independent evaluator to conduct a validation study of the MCCQSS to determine whether its tiers accurately reflect differential levels of program quality. The evaluator will analyze data from the nSPARC system to determine overall effectiveness. No criteria for selecting the external evaluator are provided. The state provides a plan of specific questions to be addressed by the evaluator, but the questions do not seem to address all the areas necessary to determine the quality of the system and they seem to emphasize factors that do not necessarily reflect program quality (e.g., attendance patterns). Finally, the process for conducting the evaluation is not adequately described, so it is unclear whether data from the evaluation will be able to determine the extent to which changes in quality ratings are related to progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness.

**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
<b>(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--</p> <p>(a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;</p> <p>(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and</p> <p>(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b>		
<b>Comments on (C)(1)</b>		



The state has a set of early learning guidelines (ELGs) in place. Although plans for review of these standards for cultural appropriateness were outlined, no evidence was provided to support the developmental or linguistic appropriateness of the standards. The application proposes symposia by historically black postsecondary institutions, but no clear connection is made about how these symposia might relate to the standards. There is also limited information provided about how the standards were developed (e.g., based on what criteria? qualifications of reviewers?) and how the revision will be accomplished. The domain of "Approaches to Learning" was not specifically addressed in the standards, and the Infant and Toddler guidelines are actually activities rather than standards. Appropriate plans to align standards with K-3 standards were provided. Efforts to coordinate the ELGs with the state's TQRIS are also appropriate. However, the application provides very little information regarding the incorporation of the standards in the state's Comprehensive Assessment System or Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. Although it appears Mississippi has a strong program in place for training providers on risk factors related to disabilities (i.e., Project PREPARE), overall, insufficient evidence of training efforts related to the ELGs is provided. The descriptions of training that were provided did not include any connections to the standards.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	20	5

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's progress to date in the development of a Comprehensive Assessment System has been limited, and the plan presented does not provide sufficient information to ensure that it is of high quality. There is no coherent explanation provided of the selection of assessment instruments, professional development for educators on understanding and administering assessment, and coordination of services. The plan to use nSPARC as the unified data collection system is appropriate and will likely contribute to improvements in data usage, such as sharing assessment results. Much of this section focused on curricula, with very little explanation of assessment instruments beyond the classroom level measures (e.g., ECERS, CLASS). The classroom-level measures are valid and appropriate choices for their intended use. The state issued a call for proposals in 2008 for assessment development for K-3, but there is no real explanation about how this applies to the RTT-ELC proposal. There is no evidence provided about how duplication of assessments will be avoided. The plan also does not address training for educators in administering assessments. Some information is provided about training educators to use assessment data using vignettes, which is an appropriate method, but the description of this process is vague.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	20	10

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety, ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur, and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;

(b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;

(c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and

(d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--

(1) Are screened using Screening Measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (see section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services

available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and that, as appropriate, are consistent with the Child Find provisions in IDEA (see sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of IDEA);

(2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and

(3) Participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care, including the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(3)**

The health needs of Mississippi's children are well documented. The application outlines a variety of strategies to address these needs. Most of the strategies are appropriate, of high quality, and clearly needed, but the approach taken seems fractured and uncoordinated. For example, the state is planning home-based health services, pediatrician outreach, and center-based health screening, but there is no evidence that there is coordination or prevention of duplication or overlap among these services. It is, therefore, unlikely to result in changes anywhere near the scale needed in the state. The explanation about the establishment of a progression of standards is vague, and no evidence of statewide early childhood health standards (outside the TQRIS steps and the ERS) is provided. The only strategy mentioned for training providers is additional community college coursework. This strategy is insufficient, because it does not address the health promotion training needs of already credentialed providers. Plans for promoting healthy habits through parent education are stronger. These include the Healthy Homes Mississippi (HHM) and Healthy Families America (HFA) programs. The state's plan for increasing the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care include use of the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) model and Multidisciplinary Assessment and Planning (MAP) teams. Plans for screening appears comprehensive (vision, hearing, dental, nutrition, etc.), but little evidence is provided about how these things will be accomplished. Outreach to pediatricians and the use of the EPSDT model are strengths.

**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
<b>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</b>	20	12

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--

(a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes;

(b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and

(c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (D)(1)**

The plan for development/re-evaluation of the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework is clear and based on current best practices so it is, therefore, likely to lead to improved child outcomes. The application also outlines a reasonable plan for career progression opportunities that will allow providers to reach higher levels of competence through steps of training and licensure via the career advancement pathway, but this is still in the planning stages. The state plans to develop a partnership with T.E.A.C.H. and WAGES to offer programs in the state. Funded by other grants (e.g., Kellogg), the programs will provide scholarships and salary supplements for early childhood educators who might not otherwise be able to afford to complete educational coursework. Funding also comes from the 4% quality funds from CCDF. The plan for progression of credentials is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. However, the plan relies heavily on providing online instruction, but no information is provided about how online learners will be supported. Inadequate support for online learners is a common problem for web-based programs designed for individual with limited educational backgrounds. Also, there is little evidence of the commitment of postsecondary institutions to participation in this process.

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

20

14

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 application outlines sound plans for expanding professional development opportunities and implementing incentive options. The T.E.A.C.H. and WAGES programs, along with quality funding from CCDF, will provide financial support (e.g., scholarships and salary supplements) to promote professional improvement and career advancement. Little information is provided in these plans regarding training for in-home providers, despite the fact that this is a very large proportion of the early learning workforce in Mississippi. A plan is also provided for (a) increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and providers with programs aligned to the competency framework and (b) increasing the number and percentage of educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentialing. The state's plan for increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials relies on the first two years of the grant period being devoted to collecting baseline data. Given the data presented in table of performance measures for (D)(2)(d)(2), it is unclear why baseline data collection will take two years. The application states as a goal having all early childhood educator preparation programs accredited by NAEYC and/or NCATE by 2015, even though only one is currently accredited. No plan for accomplishing this substantial goal is provided. Although this target is ambitious, it is not likely to be achievable. A reasonable plan is provided for making data public through the Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network website.

**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
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	20	8
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)**

Although the application outlines a plan for identifying and implementing a statewide assessment for kindergarten entry, the plan is extremely vague. The application states that a task force will be convened to identify an assessment and the assessment will be implemented the following year. However, no information is provided about the qualifications of those serving on the task force, the criteria they will use to select an instrument, or how the implementation will be rolled out. No list of valid and reliable instruments is provided. The plan does not address the assessment needs of ELLs or children with disabilities. The use of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, nSPARC, to manage and enhance availability of data is a strength. Although the application explains that state funds were allocated to districts to fund assessment implementation, the amount of funding is not provided. It is, therefore, difficult to determine whether significant funding sources other than those available under this grant are used. The application states that \$320,000 of grant funds will be used as supplemental funding for this purpose.

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	14

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (E)(2)**

According to the application, Mississippi has been working on the coordination of data sharing among multiple state agencies for some time. Two systems have been developed (nSPARC and SLDS) that provide this level of coordination. The application outlines plans for the expansion of nSPARC's data system to allow for the expectations of RTT-ELC to be met, and nSPARC seems well equipped to provide data security and oversight. Although the application states that nSPARC "manages the state's education longitudinal data system which includes all of the state's essential data elements," supporting evidence of the Essential Data Elements is not provided. The plan appears to hold much promise for meeting the state's needs, but the explanation lacks detail. For example, various agencies will have access to input data, but how will one agency access data from another agency? It is also unclear how providers will be able to use the data for continuous improvement and decision making. The use of a unique 10-digit identifier will allow for uniform data collection and data entry by participating programs. The nSPARC data system provides substantial security assurances to meet the data system oversight requirements and to comply with privacy laws.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	280	152

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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

10

7

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 has a substantially implemented TQRIS and has outlined a clear plan for implementing a refined system and ensuring participation of all licensed providers. The licensing system covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State. Steps are clearly defined and well established based on the state's ELGs, and participation will be a requirement of licensure. The TQRIS steps provide a reasonable progression through which programs can improve quality. At licensure, programs enter the system at Step 1. Incentives are in place to encourage providers to move up the steps. However, it is unclear whether programs that are exempt from licensing will be included.

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry</b>	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)**

Although plans are presented for implementing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment, the state has not already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment and did not earn a score of at least 70% on this criterion.

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
<b>Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.</b>	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 the absolute priority by addressing 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. This system takes the form of a TQRIS, a comprehensive data system, and a plan for providing training to providers. The TQRIS incorporates key elements and is based on established early learning standards. The plans for a unified early childhood data system holds much promise for reducing redundancies and increasing efficiencies in early learning programs. A reasonable plan for developing a kindergarten entry assessment is also provided. Together, these elements are likely to lead to improved outcomes for Mississippi's children.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

Technical Review Form Page



Application # MS-5020

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 12:25 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, 8. Includes detailed text description of the core area requirements.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

A1 (a)The applicant describes a significant increase in State investment in Early Learning and Development that has occurred since 2007. The State has increased funding primarily in subsidy funding through CCDF and TANF. The applicant notes that State increased spending has been used for child care expenses. Within the tables provided it is of note that while this represents an overall increase since 2007 other areas significant to Quality have decreased. For example State funds have significantly decreased in support for TQRIS going from \$417,315 to \$18169. Similarly the State contribution to IDEA Part C and related services to children with disabilities has decreased significantly from \$3,314,909. to \$1,486,866 An analysis of this trend indicates that while increased money has been used to provide child care, there has been a decrease in State support for the quality of care. The applicant describes a 7% Special Populations and a 44% children living in poverty however it is unclear why this decrease in spending occurred. This is not addressed in the narrative. (b) The applicant provides tabled information that indicates they have increased services to their high need children. It is noted that increases have occurred in programs receiving funds from the State's Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) program and Title 1 (high need poverty), State funded preschools, Early Head Start and Head Start, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and Part B and their Child Care Certificate program. Services to high need preschoolers has increased over the past four years as documented by the applicant. The applicant describes several initiatives, "pockets of innovation" in high need areas (regional). However, the applicant does not offer information regarding the specific outreach to increase early development and learning services to their at-risk population. The applicant cites 3 legislative initiatives in Mississippi that support early learning and development. 1) The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007 that enabled the creation of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) 2) Certificates for families to subsidize attendance at an Early Learning Center, and 3) The creation of Early Learning Guidelines, Senate Bill #2602 in 2006 (known as the "Mississippi Education Reform Act of 2006"), was the legislative catalyst to develop a Quality Rating System. In 2000 the State amended Mississippi code to authorize licensure to teach in public prekindergarten through kindergarten to persons holding a Bachelor of Science degree with a Child Development emphasis. The State has a data system in place that has been operation since 2000 and serves to collect some education related data called the National

Strategic Planning and Analysis Center (nSPARC). This Statewide system has an education component with potential to collect related data statewide. Though the state of Mississippi appears to be backing early childhood initiatives their financial support is noted as being at a standstill with no notable investments since 2007. The State of Mississippi has several key elements in place to support early learning and development. These include Early Learning Standards and Guides for Preschoolers and Infants and Toddlers. The applicant repeatedly states that that these are not "housed" by the same agency and it appears as if the Infant Toddler standards are more suggested activities and the entire set of standards was not provided. This approach does not support full acceptance or dissemination of these standards. The State has offered schools the opportunity to voluntarily assess students upon Kindergarten entry though at times this appears to be supporting screening rather than specific school readiness indicators. There was not enough detail provided about this initiative. Lack of this detail made it difficult to discern whether or not lessons learned could inform the project. Family engagement is currently supported by the 38 existing Families First Resource Centers. As noted earlier, Mississippi appears to have several pilot isolated projects supported throughout the State SPARK - supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids -a Kellogg foundation project, Building Blocks, Excel by 5, Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative and Mississippi Center for Education Innovation and Learning Labs. The existence of these innovative birth to five programs could offer solid foundations for the State. However no data is provided to demonstrate the effectiveness of these projects or how they could be scaled up. No evidence is offered to make a case for scale up. nSPARC, the statewide data network, appears to hold promise though it is unclear as described in the narrative how effective this system is currently or the degree to which it is currently functioning. Mississippi describes their use of the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) as their guide for ensuring healthy preschoolers. They also describe their Statewide use of Multidisciplinary Assessment and Planning teams (MAP) to holistically review child needs and referrals. Though MAP teams work primarily with school aged children, the applicant describes a rationale for extending this to preschool age children. Additional current infrastructure is described by their Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) now known as Tiered QRIS (TQRIS). This system will be supported by partnerships with TEACH - Teacher Education and Compensation Helps Early Childhood and the WAGES programs. This offers promise as incentives to increase teacher knowledge in early childhood. While Mississippi offers many existing programs that hold promise it is unclear how successful they have been, which populations may be targeted and in general there is no rationale provided regarding how or why they should be scaled up or used as foundational components of RTT - ELC implementation.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	8

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)**

A2 The applicant states an overarching goal of increasing the number of children with high needs being served by high quality early education providers by 2015 by 61%. They then assume that this will positively impact the school readiness of children served, seeing improved outcomes and closing the achievement gap. This is an achievable goal, however the applicant does not provide evidence through data or their plan of what the readiness goals are, or how this will be noted. Though the applicant repeatedly states they will analyze data, there is a lack of detail regarding what specific data will be collected, how it will be analyzed and how this analysis will inform ongoing project implementation. For example their statement, "Use assessment data to evaluate whether or not High Quality programs are enabling school readiness (2013 - 2015) is too vague to discern what may or may not be done. Though they state that the Family Child Care (FCC) QRIS process will be used by an additional 300 providers over the course of the grant, no professional supports are offered. Some school entry readiness indicators are provided in Table (A) (1) -12 however the applicant does not describe how or why they are/were selected or how they may be used. Further it is not targeted for use until 2014, which limits its capacity to inform ongoing impact. At other points in the narrative the applicant indicates that school readiness measures will be identified for statewide use and that they will align with the National Academy of Sciences recommendations for early childhood assessments. The response to this section is too vague in general to demonstrate that the applicant has a thoughtful plan by which they will identify, use, and learn from their comprehensive assessment process. Given the scope of this particular grant further identification at this point would be expected. For example the applicant does not describe what measures were used by those who did voluntarily identify school readiness measures and what did they reveal. The applicant provides primarily inputs as their measure of success. For example the increase in number of children served and number of providers increasing TQRIS status. What is missing are the metrics that will be used to assess if the increased status as measured by the TQRIS step or the improved rating on environmental scales is pushing the needle towards closing the readiness gap that exists as high need children enter the school door. This is not addressed at any point in this application. Given the variety of



preschool initiatives Mississippi has implemented in limited scope it is a noted gap that no results or data from them is being used to inform this application. The lack of specific and explicit emphasis by the applicant on impact with regard to school readiness is troubling. The applicant appears to be going on a leap of faith that increasing quality as measured by their TORIS among their providers will lead to greater child outcomes and school readiness. While this may be so, given the high stakes and expectations of this reform initiative it would seem appropriate to more specifically and explicitly describe robustly and systemically how school readiness will be demonstrated. The applicant presents a plan to integrate their new early childhood system by creating a new state-level department dedicated to early learning and development. However, this department will be housed within an existing system Department of Human Services (DHS) as will the majority of their proposed liaisons. An unclear plan is described by which these liaisons will exist and it is stated that they will be directed collaboratively by the base agency - DHS, and the Director of the Office of School Readiness which appears to be under the DHS umbrella. The applicant provides a rationale for their focused investment areas (C)(1);(2);(3) stating they are consistent with the "4 Ovals" identified by the Early Childhood systems Working Group in 2006. Given the previous statements by the applicant of the "profound" process in which State stakeholders engaged to prepare their RTT - ELC application, more specific rationale as represented by the current work group would provide a fuller description for their selection. The applicant provides a rationale for focused investment in both D areas. They feel that developing their workforce is particularly significant as many early child care and education workers are participants in the state's system of support due to low wages and they feel that a better supported workforce would benefit the entire state. In the other D area of focused investment the applicant feels they have the capacity to use their existing data collection infrastructure nSPARC to effectively collect and report school readiness indicators (though not explicitly referenced) to state-level leaders and that this information has the potential to inform the process. The applicant's rationale is consistent with their proposal. The overall response to this criteria is scored medium low quality.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>

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)**

A3 The applicant offers a description of organization for their proposed new Division of Early Learning and Development. They plan to split this newly created Division into two offices - one called the Office of Early Learning and the other, the Office of Family Support. It is unclear through the narrative provided the rationale for doing so. The applicant does not demonstrate how this will effectively engage key stakeholders rather than create a new silo. The Unit of School Readiness is charged with oversight of quality programs in public schools and transitions of preschool families into public schools. With the descriptions provided and the organizational chart the applicant appears to be creating perhaps a new silo as the Divisions seem disconnected across programs and purpose. Quality appears to be primarily focused on regulatory measures based on applicant narrative and organization chart. Existing Departments such as the Department of Health, Head Start Collaboration Office, and Department of Mental Health though supportive do not appear to have a place at the table with regard to this newly created Department. Though the applicant states that liaisons "may" be placed within some of these agencies they will be primarily housed within DHS. The applicant states that the creation of this Division within DHS will eliminate duplication of services though it is not made clear how this will be eliminated. References are made to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and other subsidy funding; however no direct link is made to the impact of this on improving the school readiness of high need children. The applicant does not effectively demonstrate how their plan will transform their pockets on innovation into a widely available statewide system of services to impact school readiness. It is stated that the interagency work of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) will continue as they will be the Governing Body for the Department. The applicant lists a series of 9 questions that the advisory board will grapple with as they meet to determine an implementation plan should they be awarded funding. Given the pilot projects within the State and the existence of this committee since 2006 the questions on the surface appear to be ones whose answers should have guided this proposal. For example, one question "What types of support are needed by providers as they move from one level to another?", would seem to be essential to explore in the development and implementation of the TQRIS. This lack of preliminary investigation based on existing programs weakens their approach. Specific details related to how decisions will be made and disputes resolved were not presented. Nor was there a clear description of when and how representatives from participating programs such as Head Start, Migrant and Tribal programs, Family Child Care and parents and families would inform the planning and implementation process. Loosely stated this may occur during SESAC meetings but a more specific process should be detailed to ensure this valuable input. Within the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) each partnering agency provides their scope of work in which they describe what they will do as part of the project. No letters of support are provided by parent councils, or community based venues serving families such as libraries or museums. The applicant's response is scored as medium quality and partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>

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)**

A4 The budget information provided is concerning. The pie chart reflects that a major portion of funding will be spent on infrastructure and center supports. A closer look at these allocations within their budgets show that much of this infrastructure and center supports revolves around the licensing process. As stated repeatedly the applicant intends to shift licensing to the DHS. Year 2 budget shows that all licensing efforts are being charged to RTT - ELC including youth camps and investigations of complaints. It is not clear why licensing needs to shift from the Department of Health nor is it clear why the money currently is used for licensing will no longer be used. Year 2 RTT-ELC budget detail indicates that 100% of all licensing positions will be charged to these funds. While this may be necessary the applicant does not provide information to explain the need for this shift. The applicant details many sources of supplemental funds that are providing early learning supports. Though they indicate that these will be a part of their plan and add significantly to it, the applicant does not provide information regarding how these efforts will be realigned in a cohesive manner to work towards achieving a greater degree of school readiness for all children in the State. This lack of detailed explanation creates a concern that the applicant does not see a need to connect these programs in ways that ensure more children have access to high quality programming. The State clearly has much innovation and support for early childhood. Foundations such as the Kellogg foundation and Children's Defense Fund have invested in major projects within the State. However, the applicant does not specifically describe the results of these efforts, nor documents any outcomes to build a case for their continued use and potential scale up. The applicant provides a plan which seems reasonable and achievable by which each partnering agency will progressively pick up costs of key staff housed within the Department of Early Learning and Development and in this way proposes sustainability for many of their implementation costs. The applicant's response to this criteria is scored as medium low quality.

## B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<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"> <li>(1) Early Learning and Development Standards;</li> <li>(2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;</li> <li>(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;</li> <li>(4) Family engagement strategies;</li> <li>(5) Health promotion practices; and</li> <li>(6) Effective data practices;</li> </ul> <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)

B 1 The State of Mississippi has had a statewide quality rating system since 2007. Providers could opt to enter the rating system during their licensing process. The Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS) includes all components including: early learning and development standards; a comprehensive assessment system; early childhood educator qualifications; family engagement strategies; health promotion practices; and effective data practices. The expectations at the tiered steps vary from program to program. With reference to how the system meaningfully differentiates program quality levels and reflects high expectations, the applicant did not explain their rationale for why ratings for licensed Center based programs and School based programs are very different on the same step -with school based programs having much higher expectations. There was also no indication that they would strive to align the quality of these programs to level the playing field and offer equal access to high quality care regardless of child care program context. Measurable outcomes exist within the current system via valid measures of environmental quality using the ECERS, ITERS, and FCCERS. The applicant notes they are considering use of the CLASS to measure the quality of interactions between the child and provider however they feel more information is needed on its validity with their population. Information on the validity and reliability of this instrument was not found in the application. However, further in the application plans are described to use the CLASS within programs in failing school districts and with one subset of their high need population. They also describe the use of Coaches for CLASS in these select programs. It is unclear why only a few programs will have access to this. The applicant did not provide information on why it would be selectively used. This selective use of CLASS is inconsistent with the applicant's stated concerns. Though previously a voluntary system in 2011 all Center based licensed programs will participate in the MCCQSS. In 2011 all in home providers receiving CCDF children will be required to participate, and in 2013 all school based preschool programs will be required to participate. No rationale was provided as to why school based programs would not be participating until 2013. Given the high needs served in these school based programs and the more solid infrastructure they offer

administratively, the choice to hold off on their participation seems ill advised. The applicant's response to this criteria is scored as medium quality and partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	15	6

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)**

B2 Beginning in 2011 participation in the TQRIS will be required of all Center based providers. In 2012 all in home providers receiving CCDF funds School based preschool programs including those serving part B and part C of IDEA and Title I will not be required to participate until 2013. The applicant did not provide their rationale for school based programming to be fully two years behind in implementation. Participation will be required as part of the licensing process. The applicant states that grant resources will be used to ensure that they are up to the challenges related to moving from a voluntary to a required participation system. (b) The applicant describes a few strategies that have the potential to serve more high needs children though their linkage to high quality is minimal. For example the applicant's plan increases children placed in low rated provider homes – tiers 1 and 2 who would then enter into an improvement plan. Their plan does not appear to provide high quality placements for their high need children though it does provide an incentive for providers to enter into quality improvement plans. The applicant sets a goal of reaching 80% of all in home providers by 2015, with an initial cohort of 300 providers that the applicant will target. They set as their goal a gradual increase so that at the end of the funding period (2015) 80% of their 2900 licensed providers will be participating. More information and detail related to Project NURTURE is needed to judge whether or not this is indeed achievable. Financial incentives and rewards will be implemented through the Department of Early Learning and Education to support the achievement of this goal. Though the applicant states that staffing with reliable assessors, qualified trainers, and availability of educational opportunities will make this goal feasible, given a lack of existing data on staffing to do this it is difficult to discern if this is truly achievable within the scope of this grant. The applicant plans to work closely with the Department of Education to engage school districts in the TQRIS. Initially 56 districts will be enrolled and they will target 15 - 20 new districts in years 2 and 4. The applicant does not describe why these programs serving very high needs children are slow to become participants though there is some indication that it may be linked to legislative action. There is no indication of a commitment of legislative intent or advocacy for increasing the participation of high quality programs to serve high needs children. A lack of an explicit plan to increase this weakens the applicant's response to this criterion. The applicant's response is scored as medium quality and partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	15	6

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)**

B3 Some inconsistency in rationale is reflected in the applicant's discussion of their selection of measurement tools to be used. While they have selected The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) ; Infant Toddler (ITERS), and Family Child Care (FCGERS) to measure the quality of the environment and develop improvement plans they inconsistently suggest they may or may not use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, Preschool Version (CLASS) as a measurement of teacher child interactions. At several points they suggest it may be inappropriate for their population though they admittedly have not researched its validity. However, when discussing how they will measure quality in classrooms for their most at risk population in failing schools CLASS will be required. This inconsistency is repeated several times in the proposal. The applicant is aware of the need for trained valid and reliable assessors who will conduct baseline and follow up assessments. However it is uncertain if there is an awareness of the magnitude of need the system will require and the time needed for training and assessment. This is not reflected in their budget. The applicant does not provide a clear analysis of their awareness of the resources this will take to be effectively implemented to the degree necessary to impact and appropriately measure quality and change. Though the process for monitoring and frequency is explained fully the applicant does not describe in sufficient detail the cost in terms of human capital to be anticipated by the project. More specificity and detail is needed. The applicant proposes the use of nSPARC their proposed statewide network for data collection as the processor of information related to quality ratings, and other related issues. Though they mention this information will be available in a condensed version no details are provided related to how and when this can be done or how a parent would know it was available. It is not specifically addressed how this will be made widely available to all stakeholders including parents. Further description of what would likely be - though they state this will be determined during the first year of the grants - available appears more closed in scope as the applicant states they expect to make available the following information: what providers exist in your community. What Mississippi Child Care Quality State Standards (MCCQSS) rating do they have? What additional services are available in your community? and How do you contact them? This approach minimally uses data capacity and does not describe in an effective manner how it would be used to inform parents and other key stakeholder of key quality indicators.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	20	6

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)**

B4 The applicant presents a set of proposed policies they will implement to incentivize and reward the continuous improvement of program quality. These include higher subsidy reimbursements, and bonus money for increased degree status. In addition they propose a matching strategy for parent savings that while innovative would not seem well aligned with the quality improvement specific to increasing school readiness for high needs children represented by this initiative. They propose using RTT-ELC funds to support a program whereby matching funds are provided parents that will go towards college education for their child if the parent places them in a high quality - as determined by the MCCQSS - early childhood setting. However, this approach does not address equity of access for a family who does not have geographic access to a high quality program. The applicant proposes paying additional rewards to teachers if they miss no more than one day per month due to illness. While this promotes consistency of care it would seem to be rewarding something that often is not controlled by the teacher. No rationale for this was offered. The applicant has set goals to increase the number of programs at the top tier of quality that grows over time. The applicant provides a graph to represent the increase and upward tiered

movement they expect. Graphs are provided for in home providers and licensed center providers. In each area they have established performance measures that reflect participation in the tiered system. However no descriptive verification of how or why these targets is provided. In this narrative section the applicant describes their college savings plan rather than their tier progression performance measures. These measures appear to be randomly chosen and attached to programs serving high need populations. Two questionable elements are noted in this section. First, the applicant refers to increasing the quality of Even Start classrooms over time. Even Start is no longer funded and programs are ending this year. Additionally, the applicant projects increased tier movement in the school based programs that they have previously stated will not even be brought into the system until 2013. They reflect a current number of 7 classrooms in the upper tier year one, 20 year two and 25 in year three when these programs will be entered into the system. This seems conflicting with prior information. Based on the applicant's response this criterion is scored as minimally implemented and medium quality.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	15	2

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)**

B5 In response to both B 5 (a) and (b) the applicant proposes a plan to validate their tiered rating system that poses more questions regarding their consideration of a thoughtful and research driven plan. Their plan includes the consultation of NAEYC and staff of the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development to conduct a structural audit and process evaluation. This will comprise phase one. During phase two, the state will be more focused on the results for "providers, parents, and children". To do this, they will contract with an external evaluator to identify tools and methods for evaluation. The applicant minimally notes how the system is linked to child outcomes and school readiness indicators. The focus of the evaluation as per the applicant appears to be on participation in the tiered rating system per se rather than the improved outcomes that one hopes would result. This is noted by reference to their key evaluation questions. Questions posed are: if parents understand how to access subsidy funds, attendance using biometrics, and a provision for training on use of nSPARC. These are all mentioned as key elements of their validation process. These are deemed weak and ineffective elements to be used to validate the effectiveness of the implementation of their TQRIS, its effectiveness in differentiating quality as per their defined tiers, nor does it address a link to tiers and specific child outcomes. No specific research design or proposed evaluator(s), their credentials, or measures/methodology to be used are identified nor is there any mention of the effects of preschool experiences on school readiness indicators. Based on the applicant's response this criterion is scored as low quality.

**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
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**(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.**

20

5

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

- (a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;
- (c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and
- (d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(1)**

C 1 (a) The applicant provided minimum evidence to justify the development of their standards. There is no description of any process for revisions or updates. Further examination of this document reveals no description of, or guidance towards use of strategies to support development of these standards. The applicant states that these are very general standards. The description provided in the narrative as evidence of their cultural, linguistic, and developmental appropriateness is limited and does not match what is provided in their appendices. Their narrative and evidence are inconsistent in this area. (b) The applicant provides some evidence that there is alignment between their Pre K standards and Kindergarten Common Core in the areas of Math and Language and Literacy. They do not address beyond kindergarten to align K – 3. This demonstrates their beginning steps towards some alignment. (c) The applicant explains their approach of the integration of program standards into their statewide system in a confusing manner. At times it appears to be in the process of integration via their MSCCQSS at the higher levels only – levels 4 and 5. Regarding curricula alignment and integration the applicant states that this will be done as curricula are developed and associated training will occur. The standards are integrated into the 12 community colleges identified that offer early childhood technology courses. The evidence provided to demonstrate that early learning standards are incorporated in standards, curricula, activities, comprehensive assessments systems, professional development activities and their workforce framework is minimal and only partially implemented. (d) While the applicant references they will have supports in place to support the understanding of their standards of the TQRIS, there is a lack of specificity and connectedness in their stated approach. For example, their largest targets for increased participation in their TQRIS are family child care providers however they do not describe how their training needs will be met so that they understand birth to five standards. It is unclear how the state will promote their standards or provide any training to assure the early childhood workforce understands them. This indicates a lack of commitment to the wide use of the state's early learning and development standards. In summary, as they exist, the early learning standards, guidelines, and teacher activities offer minimal and basic guidance. The applicant provides only minimal evidence of early learning programs' use of these standards. The applicant demonstrates their understanding of the need to update their standards. They also indicate an awareness that they need to promote wider use of the standards. The applicant is aware that they need to plan for some training for understanding by early childhood educators. However, within each criterion the lack of detailed specificity weakens their proposed approach resulting in a medium low approach partially implemented scoring.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	20	5

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)**

C 2 (a) In response to their plan for selecting assessments the applicant provides a description of the State's call for proposals (2008) for contractors to bid technical assistance and products to align with their need for a K - 3 assessment system to include screeners to provide and formative measures to be used throughout the year. Although the applicant proposed to build on this it the description was unclear. No information regarding standardization, norming, or validity are provided related to any current assessments used. Their plan includes a process whereby the applicant describes how schools will initially self-select a screener. This description does not provide enough detail regarding this strategy. The applicant states that their goal will be to identify a statewide assessment instrument that will be used across the state for kindergarten entry and continuous assessment throughout the year. (b) To address the understanding of the early childhood workforce regarding the use of assessments the applicant proposes a plan to integrate an understanding of the appropriate use of assessments into their state's institutes of higher learning and their state training networks. They will begin by auditing current training and propose filling gaps as their goals. They will use the NAEYC blueprint to provide guidance. The applicant does not provide rationale for not starting this work until years 3 and 4 of their project. Given the state's prior relationships with both the resource and referral networks and state colleges it is not clear why this would not begin immediately upon funding. (c) The applicant does not address the potential duplication of assessments or describe a plan for sharing results across programs. Though the applicant provides a narrative section to address this the information provided is focused primarily on how they will use a common checklist across programs and this information will be shared across the state. This limited approach and the narrow focus of the checklists provided as evidence (related to curriculum implementation and Head Start Program Performance Standards) is weak and does not address the larger scope of a more comprehensive assessment system. (d) The applicant responds that their approach to training teachers regarding use of assessments and their interpretation will occur by referencing a website where teachers can view best practice ideas and vignettes. This is currently a strategy used by their state resource and referral network. They note that this will be updated as curricula is developed and aligned with their standards. This approach will not be effective as it does not address how assessors will be trained to deliver this important assessment information related specifically to the administration and use of assessment. Similarly it does not address how teachers will be trained in using assessment to inform and improve instruction. This lack of information is not addressed in any other section of their application. The applicant's plan for effective implementation of a comprehensive system is medium quality and not implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	20	8

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety; ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur; and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;

(b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;

(c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and

(d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--

(1) Are screened using Screening Measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (see section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and that, as appropriate, are consistent with the Child Find provisions in IDEA (see sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of IDEA);

(2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and

(3) Participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care, including the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(3)**

C 3 The applicants TQRIS presents a plan that embeds health and safety into each step. Their assessments - ECERS, ITERS, and FCCRS - clearly assess whether or not the child care setting meets state standards. Training opportunities occur to support caregiver understanding of key health and safety issues related to young children. The applicant describes 2 current initiative Project IMPACT and Project PREPARE that further the skills and abilities of providers. These appear to be promising practices however the applicant does not describe in sufficient detail how they will be scaled up as part of this proposal to ensure a greater depth of knowledge in early care providers. The applicant suggests that two other initiatives will expand to bolster this knowledge and support. The Healthy Homes Mississippi and Healthy Families America. These programs appear to target homes and families based on specific referrals. Though it is implied, no specific plan is described by which these programs will be directly linked to the RTT-ELC initiative. Though Project PREPARE is frequently referenced as a model for developing staff skills related to special needs, it is unclear why this is not planned for scale up. The applicant



states they will conduct a review to assess the needs of their workforce regarding health and safety and consider potential scale up of existing models. This information is conflicting as Project PREPARE is mentioned throughout the proposal as a "beacon of training" to meet high needs populations. The applicant states a plan to assess their needs to do specific cultural and linguistic trainings. Given the scope of work and systems building this project represents it would seem more efficient to use this knowledge to ensure cultural and linguistic relevancy is a part of all program aspects. The applicant did not justify why it would be separate. The applicant describes a worthy initiative whereby they would actively recruit increased pediatric services to their rural counties. This initiative is further backed up by a letter of support. This proposed initiative includes outreach to pediatricians, nurse practitioners, family practitioners and allied health professionals in early recognition of developmental concerns. The applicant has established performance measures that include increased number of screenings based on Early Periodic Screening of Development Table (EPSDT) for high needs children; increased number of referrals increased number of high needs children participating in ongoing health care (well child); increased up to date per well child of high needs children. Their targets are ambitious and achievable provided the systems they propose are effective. These are key areas of work where Head Start has been highly effective. More explicit details related to the applicant's explicit intent to build on the work within their state is needed. This criteria is medium quality and partially implemented.

**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
<b>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</b>	20	7

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--

- (a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes;
- (b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and
- (c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (D)(1)**

D 1 D 1 (a) Though the applicant indicates they have a statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, the evidence presented indicates that this is still very much in the process of development. The only evidence provided is the NAEYC guide -referred to as the Blueprint to developing a Framework. They state working with NAEYC and piloting in 2 counties. The focus appears to be on an analysis using the NAEYC rubric, however, it is clear in the narrative that they are in the process of using the Blueprint as a guide to develop a framework. (b) The existing TQRIS has established a progression of credentials and degrees, differentiated by context of provider that is in the process of being aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework used by community colleges. Though the applicant states that community colleges use such a framework no evidence is provided to ascertain if this is applicable for the purposes of this grant. The TQRIS proposed is differentiated by specific tiers and specific early childhood contexts – center based and in home providers -to varied expectations related to their progression of credentialing. While there is a rationale for doing so with regards to in home providers and center based providers, it is unclear why center based providers are separated from school based centers. The higher expectations of school based early educators would seem to indicate higher quality expectations in those programs than in center based programs. A rationale for this is not addressed in the application. Improving quality in all programs to ensure access for all children in the state via alignment was not demonstrated by the applicant. This appears to reflect acceptance of the status quo. There is no provision for early childhood home visitors though as evidenced in the applicants data section home visiting is part of their early childhood landscape. Though the applicant describes how their tiered progression of credentials and degrees will be aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework this has yet to be fully developed. Without additional details the effectiveness of their approach cannot be determined. Given the limited information provided is would seem unlikely that this could be accomplished. Impacting the abilities of in home providers is a high priority of the applicant. Their proposed mechanism to do so is by supporting their attainment of a CDA credential. They intend to do so through the use of online CDA coursework. While this strategy may be useful for many the applicant does not describe how they will support online learners who may have difficulty being successful. Though they plan to pay for these more planning for supporting the successful completion of this coursework was not addressed. The applicant incorrectly indicates that the CDA credential specializes in working with high needs populations. While the CDA provides a solid foundation in the competencies needed to work with young children and their families it does not target working with special needs populations to the degree the applicant indicates. At one point the applicant refers to this credential as one that comes from NAEYC. The

process and awarding of the CDA credential is through The Council for Professional Recognition. (c) Provisions are made in the proposal for postsecondary institutions and other providers of professional development to develop alignment of training opportunities with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. The applicant states specific training providers and that this process will occur throughout the funding period. The applicant provides a reasonable plan to articulate early care and education course into four year degree programs. Other work the applicant proposes is working with teacher certification programs to increase their infant toddler coursework. The applicant references the use of the NAEYC Workforce Competency Rubric as providing guidance to institutes of higher education and those providing training. The current lack of a more consistently used framework is a noted weakness. Based on the applicant's response this criteria is scored as medium quality and partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	20	4

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)

D 2 (a) The applicant intends to expand access to providers to professional development that is aligned to the Workforce Framework. The state RTT-ELC plan includes a proposal to expand the current Resource and Referral network. Currently there are 12 sites throughout the state with 14 trainers and 12 resource technicians assigned to more one on one field work. Coordination of this work is facilitated by the Mississippi State University Extension Service and is currently funded using all quality set aside money. The network maintains a database for tracking the professional development. It appears that their work is primarily focused on centers. The applicant plans to expand this network based on a successful "field test" in 2011. No data is provided to support the "success". The applicant states that this pilot has shown measurable success in improving quality however no evidence of this is provided. A further weakness of this particular expansion effort is that though it is stated that there will be specialized technicians, an assessment coordinator and nutrition advisor as part of newly developed teams, there is no indication of what their qualifications would be. (b) The applicant embeds within their TQRIS a schedule for reimbursement and incentives to reward advanced certifications, degrees and ongoing professional development. The state is currently piloting with the Choctaw Tribal Nation a career ladder with bonus stipends that they state will be implemented in 2011-2012. They will use this to inform wider statewide implementation. The state has partnered with TEACH and WAGES and secured a Kellogg Foundation match to financial rewards targeted to those early educator who currently have a GED or high school diploma. They are recruiting 70 early educators to be a part of this pilot. In addition 72 Directors will be selected in 2011 to receive an advanced Directors certification and will receive a stipend upon completion. Should RTT-ELC funds become available both of these pilots will be scaled up. The applicant describes a reasonable plan to define more specific financial rewards to represent varied steps on the early childhood career ladder. Financial incentives are integrated into the TQRIS and are dependent on the number of children attending that are enrolled through the child care subsidy program. Though center based incentives are in place, the applicant states that in home providers will also receive bonuses in an amount yet to be determined. Given in home providers represent those the project target for the most attention, not having developed a plan for this weakens this area of their proposal. (d) As noted, currently the Resource and Referral (R&R) maintains a database of all professional development they conduct and who attends. The applicant states that they plan to post and make available this information to parents via their website. The applicant plans to add information regarding trainers including their qualifications and contact information so that center directors can access them for their own staff development. Reference is made to the intent to use nSPARC to provide more statewide aggregated data - though the specifics as it relates to professional development are not detailed. This level of data aggregation would be used to inform statewide policies and educational goals for the early care and education field in the state. This plan uses existing data systems to capture training offered and participation. This plan is not fully implemented and only captures one aspect of relevant training. (d) While some goals set by the applicant appear somewhat ambitious and achievable, others do not. For example, the applicant states a goal of all colleges becoming NAEYC accredited or obtaining

NCATE accreditation by the end of funding. Currently only one community college has NAEYC accreditation. Given the magnitude of this process and scope of work involved it is not realistically achievable. Another goal is to increase the number of students attending programs that are NAEYC accredited from 2644 to 4000. Given the time and staff intensive process of NAEYC accreditation, with this as a goal, it would seem that provisions for this support would have been addressed within the proposal. It is not and this is the first reference to using this as a measure of improved access to higher quality care. Given a lack of plans for specific support for accreditation either financial or in technical assistance it would seem unlikely that this is achievable. The applicant states that work on increasing the number of early childhood educators who receive degrees will begin in year three and will begin by aligning these institutions and providers. They propose alignment to grow from 15 to 25 institutions. This seems doable given their plan. They set as a target an annual increase in credentialed providers increasing around 100 over the number each year. This may not be achievable as it does not appear to factor in multiple years required to obtain a degree, nor does it factor in the specific needs on those working full time who would be more likely to need additional years. These goals would be more achievable if the performance measure was a target number of potential early educators entering into a degree program. The applicant's response to this criteria is scored as medium quality and partially implemented.

## 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
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>
<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)

E 1 (a) The applicant describes a commitment and plan to use a statewide kindergarten assessment that is aligned with state standards and all essential domains of development. The table provided by the applicant and their narrative show an inconsistency in their state standards with reference to addressing all essential domains as defined for the purposes of this grant. Though the applicant states their intent to modify their state standards to address approaches to learning, for the purposes of this criterion they state that this essential domain is "embedded within all other domains". A review of the standards found in the appendices does not effectively demonstrate this. (b) Though the applicant states its intent to ensure validity and reliability there is no indication that this was a criterion for those schools that are currently allowed to "self select" . In the application a "list" of assessments that are valid and reliable is referenced. However this list is not provided either within the narrative or appendices. Within the narrative description of their assessment plan at times the applicant appears to be confusing the use of a "screener" and ongoing assessment. They indicate they will select only one and that it will serve to screen and provide ongoing formative assessment. This approach is not consistent with the National Academy of Sciences report on the appropriate use of assessments in early childhood. (c) The applicant provides a plan by which a statewide assessment will be selected and administered in the 2013 2014 school year. Their plan is significantly lacking in some key elements that the applicant did not address. For example though they state they will be valid and reliable and they have done work with school already to identify screeners they did not provide the list (sited in their narrative) from which school could select. There was conflicting narrative with regards to exactly where they are in this process and stated benchmarks seemed to conflict with their narrative. (d) It is the stated intent of the applicant to use their statewide longitudinal data system nSPARC to record kindergarten assessment results statewide. Though the applicant states they plan to do this they do not describe how schools

will enter this information, become trained in doing so, nor was a timeline established by which this would occur. (e) The state has allocated a per pupil amount to implement a Kindergarten entry assessment. The applicant states that these funds will be supplemented with \$320000 from RTT - ELC in 2012 and 2013. Given the funding set aside, the availability of nSpark, and their intent to implement a KEA, it seems reasonable that a statewide kindergarten entry assessment could be identified in the timeframe proposed. However the applicant's response lacks specificity and details beyond considering the ease of use and if it is reliable and valid. For example, no specific indicators of readiness to be measured that could inform the work of preschool programs to ensure all children enter school ready for success were identified or presented in the narrative. The applicant does not effectively describe a plan that will identify a KEA. The applicant did not detail a plan to fully ensure those using identified instruments would be trained in their effective administration or use for instructional improvement. The scoring is low quality plan and partially implemented. E 1 (a) The applicant describes a commitment and plan to use a statewide kindergarten assessment that is aligned with state standards and all essential domains of development. The table provided by the applicant and their narrative show an inconsistency in their state standards with reference to addressing all essential domains as defined for the purposes of this grant. Though the applicant states their intent to modify their state standards to address approaches to learning, for the purposes of this criterion they state that this essential domain is "embedded within all other domains". A review of the standards found in the appendices does not effectively demonstrate this. (b) Though the applicant states its intent to ensure validity and reliability there is no indication that this was a criterion for those schools that are currently allowed to "self select" .. In the application a "list" of assessments that are valid and reliable is referenced. However this list is not provided either within the narrative or appendices. Within the narrative description of their assessment plan at times the applicant appears to be confusing the use of a "screener" and ongoing assessment. They indicate they will select only one and that it will serve to screen and provide ongoing formative assessment. This approach is not consistent with the National Academy of Sciences report on the appropriate use of assessments in early childhood. (c) The applicant provides a plan by which a statewide assessment will be selected and administered in the 2013 2014 school year. Their plan is significantly lacking in some key elements that the applicant did not address. For example though they state they will be valid and reliable and they have done work with school already to identify screeners they did not provide the list (sited in their narrative) from which school could select. There was conflicting narrative with regards to exactly where they are in this process and stated benchmarks seemed to conflict with their narrative. (d) It is the stated intent of the applicant to use their statewide longitudinal data system nSPARC to record kindergarten assessment results statewide. Though the applicant states they plan to do this they do not describe how schools will enter this information, become trained in doing so, nor was a timeline established by which this would occur. (e) The state has allocated a per pupil amount to implement a Kindergarten entry assessment. The applicant states that these funds will be supplemented with \$320000 from RTT - ELC in 2012 and 2013. Given the funding set aside, the availability of nSpark, and their intent to implement a KEA, it seems reasonable that a statewide kindergarten entry assessment could be identified in the timeframe proposed. However the applicant's response lacks specificity and details beyond considering the ease of use and if it is reliable and valid. For example, no specific indicators of readiness to be measured that could inform the work of preschool programs to ensure all children enter school ready for success were identified or presented in the narrative. The applicant does not effectively describe a plan that will identify a KEA. The applicant did not detail a plan to fully ensure those using identified instruments would be trained in their effective administration or use for instructional improvement. The scoring is low quality plan and partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	4

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to enhance the State's existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System or to build or enhance a separate, coordinated, early learning data system that aligns and is interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and that either data system--

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;
- (c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;
- (d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and
- (e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (E)(2)**

E 2 The applicant describes their plan for statewide data collection and retrieval to inform policy and planning. The National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) seeks to be a comprehensive data system that aligns government, university and industry resources to increase economic competitiveness. This system is designed to help systems allocate resource and identify informed strategic plans. It is stated that the system is up and some related information regarding programs presented in the proposal indicate the system has been tracking data for since 2002. Given this capacity it is unclear why use of this data was not provided throughout this proposal or used to inform its development. In this portion of the narrative the first indication of home visiting programs is found. As stated previously any guidance or provisions for home visitors in notably lacking in the existing TQRIS. Several key projects are noted as part of this data gathering system Project IMPACT, Project PREPARE and Nurturing Homes as well as school district operated pre k programs. No data aggregated or retrieved via nSPARC was stated as such in guiding this proposal. The applicant provides a list of all programs and the data entered into nSPARC. There is a noted lack of specificity. Following the description of each program is the statement, "Data transfer for this program to the state data clearing house is in progress", or "Data for this program have been transferred to the state data clearing house". The applicant states that nSPARC protects information with a "robust, proactive and evolving information security program with a focus on multi-layer protection. This indicates that appropriate security measures are already in place and protecting data is a priority of the system. The applicant presents graphic representation of how data will be stored and retrieved. Their goal is to have a single point of entry. Currently the system is cumbersome to navigate. Though they describe their ideal model for the Early Childhood system no dates are provided as to when a more user friendly system might be in place nor is this specifically identified as a goal. The applicant describes the strategic reporting system they envision. They anticipate these reports will be designed during year one of project implementation. The content of these reports appears to be quite minimal. For example they describe their reports for parents to include: providers in their area, their TQRIS rating; Additional service available in their community, and contact information. For providers they anticipate reports to include: other providers in their community; their TQRIS rating; additional services available for children and families in their community and how to contact them. At the Division Director level these reports would include: what services have been provided by all agencies; how do "counts" compare across agencies; and are certain services more effective than others and how they could be combined to be even more effective; county coverage; what additional services should be available; and how can services become more effective and efficient. Based on the narrative provided in response to this competitive priority, it is unclear if their plan for data integration will be effective. The lack of clarity and minimal use of data aggregation led to a partial score for this competitive priority.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>87</b>

#### Priorities

##### Competitive Preference Priorities

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

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)**

CP 2 (a) Though the applicant mentions a plan to investigate the potential of working with kith and kin providers no details are provided nor is this presented in any connected way to their proposal. (b) The applicant provides a plan in which all licensed providers must participate in their TQRIS system to be effective in 2011. This will become mandatory in the state. This plan will increase participation for those programs that require licensing. However the applicant did not effectively address how they would reach out to those that are not part of the licensing system. The applicant's response to this criteria is scored as medium quality and partially implemented.

#### Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
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**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 table provided does not demonstrate that the state is currently implementing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion as it is only partially completed by elements and partially completed within the state. The applicant did not meet the 70% threshold of points awarded in E (1).

**Absolute Priority**

**Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.**

Met?  
Yes/No

No

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**

AP The applicant appears to assume that establishing a relevant TQRIS and increasing participation in it will necessarily improve school readiness. There is a noticed lack of specificity and detail to essential elements of quality that prepare children for school success in this proposal. A lack of provisions for higher standards, research and evidence based curriculum and assessment, and lack of teacher and caregiver supports linked to a high quality plan makes it unlikely that the work of this applicant could significantly improve the school readiness of children throughout their state—especially those most in need. The applicant did not convincingly demonstrate how they plan to improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs through integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies. Rather than aligning these agencies most frequently, the applicant describes how they are going to shift departmental responsibilities into a new agency - licensing is an example of this. No rationale is presented to justify this and tremendous costs are associated with this shift. Though they describe that a revised statewide TQRIS will do this, given the shift of licensing it is uncertain how this will be effectively implemented. The applicant did not effectively respond to their identified Focused Investment areas. They did not (C) present an effective, research based or culturally relevant plan towards promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children. Their capacity to do so was hindered by a noted unawareness of specific skills and abilities that would be predictive of later academic success. Examples of this were their consistent lack of detailed attention to curricula and at times incorrect information related to that which they did present within their proposal. For example, misrepresentation of what a "comprehensive curriculum" is. Additionally the applicant's plan for developing a (D) Great Early Childhood Education Workforce was lacking as their definition of exactly what high quality competency skills, knowledge, and practice was not convincingly articulated. The applicant presented only a loose plan for (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress for their state for all children entering school and therefore did not either generally or specifically demonstrate how this would be measured for their Children with High Needs to assess the likelihood of their kindergarten success. Given on overall lack of an effective plan to improve the school readiness of the state's children upon school entry, this applicant's response is not considered one that meets the absolute priority of the RTT-ELC competition.