



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # NE-5022

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CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

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

A. Successful State Systems

Table with 3 columns: Core Area, Available, Score. Row 1: (A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development, 20, 17

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

Nebraska has demonstrated substantial commitment to and investment in high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs. Funding increased, legislation passed, and policies were implemented to improve supports for young children. -- • Legislation authorizing the funding of preschool programs in Nebraska' Primary Elementary and Secondary Equalization Formula resulted in an initial funding level of \$2,232,837 in 2008 which increased to \$12,906,240 in 2011. -- • Local Educational Agencies' funding for State-funded preschool programs increased from \$304,254 in 2007 to \$2,470,957 in 2010 (2011 figures are not available yet) and their funding for children with disabilities ages 3 to 5 years increased from \$2,187,442 in 2007 to \$10,349,606 in 2011. -- • Nebraska exceeded the required Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Maintenance of Effort (MOE) in each of the past five years from \$7,200,746 in 2007 to \$32,549,963 in 2011. -- • The Nebraska Legislature formed the Early Childhood Education Endowment in 2006 and allocated \$40 million dollars from the state permanent school fund to be set aside to fund projects for Children with High Needs, ages birth to three. This is a public-private endowment with investments from the private sector contributing \$20 million by 2011. -- • Comprehensive Early Learning and Development Standards for children ages 3-5 were completed in 2005 and Standards for children ages birth - 3 in 2006. The Standards are in English and Spanish and are aligned with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and with the Nebraska K-12 Standards. Revisions are in progress to align the Standards to the Head Start Program Performance Standards and to the revised Nebraska K-12 Standards. -- • The development of Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals was completed in 2008. There are six levels ranging from skills needed to enter the field to skills comparable to having a Masters Degree. Two-year and four-year higher education institutions are collaborating to provide articulation of courses. -- Although significant work was accomplished by the State of Nebraska in the development of common standards and practices and in obtaining financial investments, other areas were not substantially invested in such as developing and implementing Kindergarten Entry Assessments and child screening measures, promoting health and family engagement strategies, and establishing a common data system to obtain information on the status of young children in Nebraska.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	16

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)
<p>The State's early learning and development reform agenda consists of the following four key components: shared leadership, high-quality Early Childhood Educators (ECE), a comprehensive system of wraparound services, and a unified data system. It builds on past activities and initiatives and ensures evaluations take place to assess the projects implemented. The State selected Focused Investment Areas (C), (D), and (E) and all their subparts to achieve its goals. These Focused Investment Areas work together to create a reform agenda that, if implemented successfully, has the potential to improve school readiness for children. However, the rationale or basis for the goals and objectives identified was lacking in specific evidence. Without this information, it is difficult to assess whether the State's goals are ambitious yet achievable and whether the reform agenda establishes a clear and credible path toward achieving the goals.</p>

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

The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--

- (a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--
  - (1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;
  - (2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;
  - (3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and
  - (4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;
- (b) Demonstrating that the Participating State Agencies are strongly committed to the State Plan, to the governance structure of the grant, and to effective implementation of the State Plan, by including in the MOU or other binding agreement between the State and each Participating State Agency--
  - (1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;
  - (2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and
  - (3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--

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

(2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their representatives; the State's legislators; local community leaders; State or local school boards; representatives of private and faith-based early learning programs; other State and local leaders (e.g., business, community, tribal, civil rights, education association leaders); adult education and family literacy State and local leaders; family and community organizations (e.g., parent councils, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, tribal organizations, and community-based organizations); libraries and children's museums; health providers; and postsecondary institutions.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (A)(3)**

The State Plan has established strong participation and commitment by the Participating Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders and, as evidence, has included the required documentation in terms of letters of support, job descriptions, organizational charts, and signed Memoranda of Understanding. -- Nebraska has built on its existing interagency governance structure by stating the activities of this proposal will be integrated with the activities of its Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC). One of the ECICC's standing committees, the Early Childhood Systems Team, will be assigned the responsibility for working with the Program Manager and Project Coordinators of the Participating Agencies and for reporting back to the ECICC. The Plan also includes a detailed explanation of the decision-making and dispute resolution processes which include a variety of representatives from the Early Childhood community with ultimate authority held by the Leadership Council which consists of the Governor, the CEO of the State Department of Health and Human Services and the Commissioner of the State Department of Education.

	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)**

Nebraska has developed a budget that appears to be adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan and a significant amount of the funding has been directed to local implementation. The budget demonstrates how the State intends to implement and sustain the work of this grant; however the budget does not adequately address the entire required criterion. -- o Table (A)(4)-1 identifies the existing Federal, State, private, and local funds that support early learning and development, however, the narrative does not substantially demonstrate how these funds will be used specifically for activities and services to help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, as required by the criterion. For example, the narrative states these "funds are committed to serving children and families with the highest need" and the CCDF funds, that include quality set asides, will be as an "infrastructure to roll out the new and exciting improvements made possible through the Early Learning Nebraska

Initiative". The narrative does describe the relationships between existing funding for a data system, the HCR Consultants, and the Extension Educators and the goals of the Early Learning Initiative but the amount of funding for these activities is not clearly identified in the budget. -- o The figures listed for Federal, State and Private funds are not consistent throughout the application and the inconsistencies are not explained. -- o The second largest expense in the budget is directed toward supporting the early childhood workforce at the regional and local levels. However, the Plan does not sufficiently demonstrate how these efforts can be sustained. Instead, it states "While there is always more need for training, the intensity of the trainings provided in the next four years will provide Nebraska with the depth and breadth needed to bolster Nebraska's entire system" The intensity of training will hopefully have an effect on programs but the low wages, high staff turnover, and minimum educational requirements will ensure a steady flow of new people into the early childhood workforce who will need training to understand the Early Learning Guidelines, conduct screenings and assessments and use the results to inform instruction, and engage parents as partners in their child's development. The narrative also states "Some strategies for sustainability include evidence of community match or reasonable sustainability plans to sustain staff in the long-term". The budget does not clearly provide evidence of a community match or describe what is meant by "reasonable sustainability plans".

**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)**

Nebraska has drafted and is close to finalizing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System which is named Step Up to Quality (SUTQ). The proposed Standards are aligned with Nebraska's Early Learning Standards and Core Competencies and build on existing licensing regulations, Head Start Program Performance Standards and other Early Learning Programs' requirements. The State's Plan includes a strategy to involve wide participation in finalizing the Standards. A series of meetings will be held with representatives from key stakeholders, focus groups will also be held, and public comment sought from a website posting. -- The five tiers in the SUTQ system are built on research conducted in 2008 when Nebraska was one of four states that participated in a pilot project conducted by the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium to examine Quality Rating and Improvement Systems. SUTQ has a strong focus on developing the skills of the Early Learning Educator which research has indicated is one of the most important factors in providing quality care. In order to participate in SUTQ, programs must be licensed, meet 92 NAC Rule 11, or meet Head Start Program Performance Standards. -- Nebraska has not yet implemented its SUTQ system but it has developed a foundation of support for it. The system is based on research, incorporates a variety of existing rules and regulations, and will have input from many of the programs that will be participating in it. Enrollment is scheduled to begin in August, 2012.

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

Nebraska's plan to implement effective policies and practices to reach the goal of having all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Program participating in the Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) system is in the early planning stages and has not yet been implemented. However, by 2012, all State-funded preschool programs, programs funded under section 619 of Part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA, programs funded under Title I of the ESEA, and all licensed programs are expected to be in Tier One "from the initiation of the system". -- To help families afford high-quality care, the plan stated it will continue to use discretionary TANF funds at the highest level allowed to support the child care subsidy program and will continue to exceed the required Maintenance of Effort which increases child care subsidies. These subsidies help families afford child care but the plan does not describe whether these enhanced subsidies would be directed toward programs that are increasing the quality of care for young children, which is the intent of this criterion.-- The targets set for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in SUTQ that receive funds from the State's CCDF program appear to be achievable but are not ambitious. The chart entitled "Performance Measures for (B)(2)(c)" projects 10 percent of the 1598 programs that receive CCDF funds will move beyond Tier One by 2015. Since receiving CCDF funds is an indicator the programs are enrolling children who meet the definition of having high needs, 10 percent over a three-year period is not an ambitious goal for providing services to the children that are most in need of quality care.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</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 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)**

Nebraska has proposed, but has not yet implemented, a plan for rating and monitoring Early Learning Programs that participate in the Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) tiered rating system and for making this information available to parents. Environmental rating scales validated for each age range and type of setting will be used to measure program quality and a research-based system will be used to measure teacher-child interactions in center-based preschool programs. Head Start Performance Standards will be used throughout the tiers and programs have the option to receive accreditation from the National Association of the Education of Young Children or the National Association for Family Child Care as an alternate way to meet Tier Five Quality Program Standards. Trained "Anchors" will conduct the required observations of programs and follow all protocols for inter-rater reliability. -- A process has been developed for rating the programs as they enter the system and as they move from tier to tier. Programs that are rated as Tier One and Tier Two can request a review when they are ready to be assessed to move up to the next tier. However, the programs in Tier Three, Tier Four, and Tier Five will be reassessed every three years. Based on this, the minimum amount of time it will take to move from Tier Three to Tier Five is six years. This length of time could be frustrating to programs that are ready to move up before the three year period. In addition, the incentive established to encourage programs to achieve a Tier Five rating in order to receive a higher child care subsidy rate may seem unattainable for programs that enter SUTQ at Tier One. -- Nebraska will make the rating information available to parents by upgrading two websites that contain licensing information so they would include information on the program's SUTQ rating. However, the Plan does not provide information on how parents will know about these websites or how they could obtain the website addresses. In addition, a parent pamphlet on choosing child care will be revised to advise parents to ask a program about its SUTQ rating. This pamphlet will be available in English and Spanish. Certificates of recognition of the ratings will be given to the programs for posting. In addition, a public awareness campaign will be targeted to parents and the general public to raise their awareness of the importance of high quality child care and what to look for to find it.

	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>11</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)**

Nebraska's efforts to provide support and incentives to Early Learning Programs to continuously improve will focus on staff development. Grant funds will be used to enhance the State's existing efforts for training, coaching, materials, technical assistance, and substitutes so staff can attend trainings, and improved access to distance learning. Programs located where there is a concentration of Children with High Needs will be targeted to receive funding first. While staff development is extremely important, it is not clear if this approach, alone, will be sufficient to provide incentives to Early Learning Programs to continuously improve their quality ratings. Nebraska's efforts to provide support to working families with Children with High Needs is to expand the number of programs that offer full-day, full-year child care. Grant funds will be used to hire an additional Early Childhood Education Specialist to help school districts and Head Start programs to determine the need and capacity for providing full-day services. Establishing more full-day, high-quality child care programs, if needed, will be a support to working families. However, the plan could benefit from further analysis of what additional supports would be effective in helping parents to access high-quality programs that have the capacity to meet the needs of Children with High Needs. At this time, the State has set achievable targets but they are not ambitious. The Implementation Steps for Strategy 6 seem to recognize this because it states that high level policy discussion meetings will be held from December 2011 to June 2013 to identify incentives for participation in Step Up To Quality and also to identify effective policies and practices to maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs.

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

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)(6)**

The State's application describes a plan to validate their Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) Tiered Rating and Improvement System. The plan proposes to validate whether the tiers reflect differential levels of program quality and the extent to which quality ratings are related to children's progress in learning, development, and school readiness. The State has past experience with this because it participated in the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC) Quality Rating Improvement System Pilot Project that included a research-based evaluation of Nebraska's tiered rating system. In addition, several process evaluations are planned to study the implementation of SUTQ, the Early Childhood Mental Health Project, the Health and Community Resource Consultants, and the effectiveness of coaching. These evaluations will also provide valuable information to the State on the implementation of the SUTQ 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>	15	11

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 use of Early Learning and Development Standards has been implemented on a statewide basis in Nebraska since 2006. The Standards, entitled Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages Birth to 3 and Ages 3 – 5, were based on research and best practices in the field of Early Childhood Education and include the Essential Domains of School Readiness. The domains were aligned with Nebraska's K-12 State Standards, Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, and Nebraska's Rule 11 Regulations. The Standards are also integrally aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and professional development activities. In addition, School Districts that apply for funding from the Early Childhood Education Grant Program are required to describe how the program uses the Guidelines to support their program curriculum. -- The Plan identifies a number of supports that are in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards. The proposed State licensing regulations for child care providers will require professional development activities to be linked to the Standards and, by the 2012-2013 school year, the majority of child care providers will use Teaching Strategies Gold for child assessments, which has also been aligned with the Standards. In addition to providing training to Early Childhood Educators, these supports also include providing workshops to parents. -- Although Nebraska has developed and is using statewide Early Learning and Development Standards the Plan identifies significant work that has to be accomplished to re-align them with the revised Head Start Outcomes Framework and revised K-12 Standards and then to update the Standards and the professional development materials to reflect the changes. Nine strategies are identified in the Plan to implement these changes, however the strategies are very broad-based and do not provide sufficient information regarding implementation.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	15	11

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)**

Currently, Nebraska has an Assessment System but it does not include all Early Childhood Learning Programs and is not yet comprehensive. The State proposes a reasonable plan to develop a Comprehensive Assessment System that is linked with the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and includes more Early Learning programs. -- Since 2006, more than 200 state-funded preschool programs and Head Start and Early Head Start Programs in Nebraska have participated in the Results Matter assessment system. The State plans to improve this system by developing a list of approved screening assessments (Results Matters does not include a screening tool) and using Teaching Strategies Gold as a common formative assessment tool among participating providers. In addition, a minimum of 10 programs that are participating in the Stand Up To Quality tiered rating system will be selected each year to receive staff training on how to appropriately administer assessments. Ongoing training will also be provided. -- State-funded preschool programs and Head Start Programs use a Memorandum of Understanding to identify what assessments are needed, how the teachers will work together to complete the assessments, and how to integrate the reporting. The programs participating in the Results Matter System will be able to integrate information on children's progress and the Teaching Strategies Gold has a function that allows multiple providers to integrate assessment information. The Plan's response to criterion (C)(2) focused on state-funded preschools, including programs and services funded by IDEA Part C and Part B, section 619 and programs funded under Title I of ESEA, and some Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Although it was stated that all Early Learning Programs that participate in Step Up to Quality will be required to use all the assessment components of Results Matter, specific strategies for assisting Early Learning Programs who have minimal knowledge of assessments were not identified. The chart titled "Elements of a Comprehensive Assessment System" shows the Early Learning and Development Programs participating in Step Up to Quality are not currently required to conduct any screening or assessments. Early Childhood Educators (ECE) who work in these programs will have the highest need for training to ensure they understand the purposes and uses of each type of assessment and how to appropriately administer and interpret and use the data to improve instruction. The needs of these ECEs were not adequately addressed in the Plan.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	15	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 State has identified strategies for addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness. They have partially implemented some of these strategies and have proposed a plan to address other strategies. -- Nebraska has partially implemented some of the criterion required for (C)(3) by including health and safety standards that go beyond the licensing requirements in its Early Learning Guidelines Ages Birth – 3 and Ages 3 - 5 and in the Teaching Pyramid Model. In addition, the State is currently implementing the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care initiative (NAP SACC), which is funded by the Center for Disease Control's Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant. It is being implemented in 300 child care homes and in some urban child care centers. Based on the evaluation results of this project, NAP SACC Standards may be adapted and incorporated into the Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) system, the State's tiered rating system. -- To train and support Early Childhood Educators in meeting the health and safety standards, Nebraska proposes to issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) to develop a network of twenty Health and Community Resource (HCR) Consultants based on a child care health consultation model. The Consultants will provide online and phone consultations, group trainings and on-line support. In addition, they will work with Early Learning programs and families to navigate and access health resources within the communities. These services will be targeted to communities with the largest number of Children with High Needs. -- Some concerns regarding the State's response to this criterion include: -- • The State did not address how the HCR Consultants' work in twenty high-need communities will be coordinated and integrated with other activities the State's Plan proposed to implement in these same communities. -- • The Performance Measures for (C)(3)(d) explained how the baseline data information was obtained but it did not explain how the targeted increases were calculated for the number of children who would be screened, referred, provided ongoing health care, and were up-to-date on a schedule of well child care. -- • The plans for sustainability of the HCR Consultants were ambitious but do not include sufficient information on ways to sustain the project except for asking the local communities to commit to financially supporting the Consultants in future years.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(4)**

Nebraska has not yet developed family engagement standards. They are targeted to be developed by a planning group during the first six months of the grant and will then be incorporated in the Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) tiered rating system. Currently, the SUTQ system's requirements for Early Childhood Educators (ECE) to move from Step One to Step Two includes participation in a three-hour workshop on Family Connections, as well as attending two other workshops that are more broad based but also include content on developing partnerships with parents. The plan to increase training includes hiring seven additional Early Childhood Learning (ELC) Coordinators to provide training on family engagement strategies (note these are the same seven ELC Coordinators who will be providing training on other aspects of working with young children and families) and training Extension Educators on the family-centered coaching model who will then train the ELC Coordinators. The training will be provided first to state-funded preschool programs, Early Childhood Education Grant Programs, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs. In the final year of the grant, the trainers will begin to reach other Early Learning Programs participating in SUTQ, "focusing initially on those programs and communities who receive funds from the state's CCDF subsidy program and those who serve the children with the highest needs". Since state-funded preschool programs and Head Start and Early Head Start programs typically have more resources, supports, and staff with higher educational requirements, it is unclear why Early Learning programs who serve children with high needs and/or receive subsidies will not receive training until the last year of the grant. In addition, it is unclear how much training will be able to be provided to ECEs as a result of these efforts; estimated numbers of workshops or training hours were not provided.

#### D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

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

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</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 plan describes the efforts Nebraska has taken to develop a competency framework, to link it to the Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) system through the development of Career Levels, and to identify the Early Childhood Education Degree Programs and the number of credits that can be articulated. However, the plan does not provide sufficient information on how the State of Nebraska proposes to engage post secondary institutions in aligning a progression of credentials to the competency framework. Nebraska has developed and implemented a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes. The framework was implemented in 2008 and is aligned with Nebraska's Early Learning Guidelines and professional opportunities, as well as with credential and degree programs. Materials and resources to support the use of the competency framework, such as self-assessments, professional development plans, and a professional development record, are available in print and on the web. The materials are also included in resources provided to Early Childhood Education students in two- and four-year colleges and to Early Childhood Educators (ECE) who receive training on the competency framework. More than 300 Early Childhood Educators have been trained and one of Nebraska's goals is to provide training to 2,095 ECEs by 2015. Nebraska has also developed the Early Childhood Career Levels which identifies a progression of credentials in the Early Childhood field. Another goal of the RTT-ELC proposal is to integrate the career levels into the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry and to link it to the Step Up to Quality tier system. In regard to the criteria to engage postsecondary institutions in aligning their course work with the competency framework, the plan states some informal activities have taken place, such as some colleges have reviewed the framework, examined how the framework aligns with the competencies required for degrees, and/or revised course syllabi to ensure better alignment with the framework. The plan proposes to provide stipends to college faculty to develop early childhood courses in distance and hybrid formats. The course content would be reviewed by an expert panel of faculty and college administrators to ensure statewide coherence and alignment of course content with the competency framework. The plan also proposes to "Engage two-year and four-year degree programs and graduate programs to promote articulation between post-secondary institutions." Detailed information is missing from these strategies, such as an estimate of the number of stipends that would be provided or the number of post-secondary institutions that would be involved in the development of distance learning, the size of the expert panel and possible subcommittees, and the scope of the plans to promote articulation among post-secondary

institutions.

	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 State has proposed a plan to expand access to professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Competency Framework. Some of the expansion activities proposed include training 300 coaches within a four-year-time period to work directly with Early Learning Programs as part of the Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) tiered rating system, developing ten Early Learning Guidelines Modules for self-paced instruction, CLASS training at least three times per year in various geographical areas, and providing training and consultation to help programs meet the progressive health related criteria within Step Up to Quality and to help staff meet the cultural, language, physical, and behavioral needs of young children and their families. In addition, a policy is pending to revise the State's child care licensing regulations to require training in management, health, and on the Early Learning Guidelines. There are also existing policies that require teachers working in state-funded preschool programs to have a Bachelors Degree and be certified in early childhood education. The incentives identified to increase retention are not overly ambitious but are achievable. They include placing a story and photograph in the local paper when an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) moves a full level on Nebraska's Career Level, free registration to a conference or six hours of training, annual membership in an early childhood education professional organization and free resources. In addition, the State's scholarship program will be expanded to staff working in programs that participate in SUTQ. Nebraska will develop a web-based Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry which is an ambitious goal that is likely to be achieved. It will aggregate data on ECE education, training, and credentials. It will also have data on trainers and on the trainings provided throughout the state. The Registry will be part of the infrastructure of SUTQ and will be used to determine whether ECEs meet the professional development requirements of the various Nebraska Career levels defined for each of the tiers in the SUTQ. This data system will also provide important information to policymakers about the education and training of Nebraska ECEs. Three Post-Secondary Enhancement projects are included in the proposal to increase the number of post-secondary institutions aligned with the competency framework. One project proposes to provide stipends to faculty who convert early childhood professional courses to distance and hybrid formats. The second is to include early childhood development content into other professional disciplines such as including information on brain development in mental health professional training programs. The Third is to create an on-line coaching certification. Each of these activities requires hiring a .33% project manager whose office would be located at one of the four university campuses. While these projects will develop stronger ties with institutions of higher education, there is not enough information provided to assess whether these projects are achievable. The plan does not include an estimate of the number of stipends that would be provided or the number of post-secondary institutions that would be expanding early childhood development content into other professional disciplines. However, the information about creating an on-line coaching certification is sufficiently detailed, is ambitious, and likely to be achievable.</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	10
<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: <b>Quality and Implementation</b>		

Comments on (E)(1)
<p>Although some school districts conduct Kindergarten assessments, Nebraska does not have a statewide Kindergarten Assessment system. Its proposed plan to implement a common, Statewide Kindergarten Entry Readiness Assessment (KERA) will follow the planning process used for implementing Results Matter, an assessment system for children ages birth to five years. The Results Matter Task Force will be expanded and renamed the Assessment Stakeholder's Task Force. This group will guide the KERA implementation process. -- The State has proposed a plan to address the requirements of implementing a statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment. However, the plan does not provide assurances of inter-rater reliability. This aspect of the assessment process was not addressed in the proposal. In addition, while it is very ambitious to begin ten pilot projects in August 2012 to implement KERA, it is not clear that seven months will be a sufficient amount of time to: establish a stakeholder group, review commercial kindergarten entry readiness assessments, align the assessments with State's standards, conduct focus groups, decide which assessment to use, identify the pilot sites, develop a protocol for implementation, and train teachers. Nebraska's past experience implementing Results Matter will be helpful but KERA will be implemented by school districts instead of Early Learning and Development Programs so there will be a number of significant differences. The proposal could also benefit from further analysis regarding its plan to have school districts sustain the ongoing costs to implement KERA.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	10
<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 Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and</p> <p>(e) Meets the Data System Oversight Requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws.</p>		
Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b>		

Comments on (E)(2)



Nebraska will be building an Early Childhood Data System based on the experience it has gained developing its Statewide Longitudinal Data System. The proposal sufficiently addressed all of the selection criterion. However, the distinction, if any, between the Early Learning Connections Registry and the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry was not clear, and it was also not clear whether these registries would be part of the Early Childhood Data System or interoperable with it or separate systems. The Implementation Steps provided a detailed plan on the development of the Early Childhood Data System.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>185</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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 addressed criterion (E)(1) but it not earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</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>Comments on Absolute Priority Nebraska's application identified changes that would take place on a statewide level while also ensuring many of the resources would be directed toward local communities. The application addressed how the State would build a system to increase the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.— The major initiatives identified include:-- • Building a unified data system -- • Implementing their Step Up To Quality rating and improvement system -- • Developing a Comprehensive Assessment System -- • Engaging post-secondary institutions to align their courses with the Workforce Competency Framework and Early Learning Guidelines and move toward articulation of college credits among State two- and four- year colleges. -- • Training the Early Childhood Educators in the use of the systems established to provide more quality care. -- • Informing communities through a public relations campaign -- The development of some of these initiatives will involve establishing a stakeholder group and conducting a process evaluation to provide information on what is working and what is not. Several initiatives will be demonstrated on a pilot basis first before being implemented statewide. -- Substantial training activities were identified to enhance the skills and knowledge of the Early Childhood Educators. Within the framework of the Core Competencies and the Step Up To Quality system, Early Childhood</p>	

Education would have the following available to them: -- • Training modules for required courses. -- • Workshops on assessments, health promotion, family engagement strategies and other topics. -- • One-on-one coaching by coaches who have received a 12 hr. online certification. -- • Scholarships to provide access to educational opportunities. -- • Substitute teaching staff to provide time to participate in professional development activities. -- • Support in developing portfolios and other requirements in SUTQ. -- The State's responses to a number of the selection criterion indicated Nebraska was partially or minimally in the process of implementing activities that addressed the criterion. In addition, the State's responses sometimes lacked specificity because of being in the early stages of developing an initiative. For example, strategies would be "to hold high level policy discussion meetings to identify ..... ". Since specific strategies to meet the criterion had not been developed, the strategies for implementation were broad-based instead of clearly identifying a plan of action to implement an initiative that would address the criterion.



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

## Technical Review Form Page



Application # NE-5022

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: **Reviewed**  
Date/Time: **11/17/2011 - 11:57 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**

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>

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

(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;

(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;

(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and

(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

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

The level of fiscal investments increased significantly over the period 2007-2011. The pattern of increases was consistent across this period for publically funded programs, CCDF subsidies, and funding for special needs populations. (1) Base state, equalization formula, and local education agency funding for public preschools increased 83% from 2007 to 2010. (2) Funding for Part C and B increased 18% and 370% respectively. (3) State contributions to CCDF increased 123%. Additional CCDF funds were available as the State exceeded the required match consistently during this period. The 2011 level of state investment relative to the size of the CHN population is significant, averaging approximately \$2,900.00 per child based on a total state expenditure of \$114,914,496 for programs serving 39,660 CHN. Although weaknesses in the state tracking system limit an accurate count of the number of children participating in public and private preschool programs, a pattern of increased participation in state and federally funded programs is documented in Table A1-5. (1) 6% increase from 2008 to 2010 (years with maximum comparative data available). (2) Available 2011 data documents increases in comparison to the 2010 data. The total number of CHN participation in programs may be over or underrepresented due to the weaknesses identified in the state's tracking system(s). (1) The system does not include children in non-government funded programs. (2) The system does not provide an unduplicated count for participation in federally and state funded programs. Legislation actions expanding the equalization formula (2005) and temporarily protection from funding cuts (2011) support the state's legislative commitment to maintaining and/or increasing the fiscal resources supporting early childhood programs. The impact of legislation including 4 year olds in the equalization funding formula resulted in more state designated preschool funds available for program expansion and pilot programs. The impact of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council, established by statute in 2000, on policy and state level coordination was not addressed. (1) Specific efforts, recommendations and outcomes, particularly those impacting state level collaboration were not identified. (2) This omission of documentation of state level collaboration efforts and their outcomes raises questions regarding the degree to which a base exists for the proposed reform agenda. HHS is a code agency reporting to the Governor; NDE is a separate constitutional agency reporting to an elected State Board of Education with authority from the legislature. These distinct differences in governance authority complicate collaboration, thus reinforcing the need

for documentation of the effectiveness of the ECICC given its 10 year existence. Elements of the key building blocks are in place; however, the level of implementation and/or quality is not consistent with a high-quality, early learning and development system. Variation exists from partially developed to minimally developed components. 1. The following areas are well developed although increased alignment with revisions to other elements and required implementation of elements across programs remain – (1) early learning and development standards (birth-5) and (2) an assessment system measuring child, family and program outcomes have been in place since 2006. Comprehensive family engagement strategies based on evidence-based practices are documented for all programs and systems, except licensing requirements and the current TQRIS. 2. No kindergarten entry assessment is required or implemented statewide. 3. Elements of high quality health promotion practices beyond basic health and safety are required only in federally funded programs such as Head Start and Part C and B of IDEA. The status of health promotion practices beyond these programs is not addressed in the narrative. 4. Baseline data for the number of ECE who hold a specific credential is not available. Levels of education completed and experience are identified as the credentialing system. The lack of linkage of these qualifications to an identifiable state credential or endorsement system limits the generation of workforce data and ease of determining workforce quality and related program quality. The Early Childhood Teaching Endorsements are not linked to or evident in the identified credential system. 5. Current data systems and practices are separate and incompatible. No statewide-tiered quality rating and improvement system for birth to 5 programs.

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

**Comments on (A)(2)**

The alignment of services, leveraging of resources, including incentives, and increased collaboration across state agency expertise and policy are identified as key elements to increase the availability of high quality early learning and development programs and improve school readiness for CHN. The plans within the reform agenda are focused on qualitative change at the system level. Although accountability for implementation appropriately builds on agency expertise, linkages across systems in areas requiring integration at the policy level are not evident. Specific areas include child and family transitions across systems within the comprehensive assessment system, inter- and intra-agency implementation of the QRIS system across programs from birth -8 (the State's definition of early childhood), workforce certification linkages, and the integrated data system. However, the impact of prior collaborative efforts and the current alignment of priorities for early childhood have not been addressed. The reform agenda's core components are appropriate for moving key elements of the system forward to improve and monitor quality outcomes for children and programs. Direct linkages to weaknesses in the current system can be identified in the following major reform tasks: (1) Development and implementation statewide of a quality rating and improvement system across programs and systems serving CHN birth-8; (2) Implementation of all components of a comprehensive assessment system across all early learning and development programs; (3) Development and implementation of an integrated data system at the state level; and (4) Development and implementation of a kindergarten entry readiness assessment statewide. The overall goals of the reform agenda are ambitious yet achievable for the core components of the plan. The quality of implementation plans is enhanced by the level of specificity. Implementation strategies, required steps, timelines, responsibilities are identified for each core component goal of the reform agenda. This level of specificity enhances the implementation and accountability in a complex reform agenda that crosses two distinct agencies and systems. However, goals related to child outcomes for closing the readiness gap are stated as task completion milestones rather than target improvement or expansion goals. Achievement of the targeted milestones is reasonable given the specificity of the plans for development and implementation (i.e., strategies, implementation steps detailed activities, clear and sequenced deadlines, and responsible partner) building on various levels of prior work. However, this approach does not explicitly link the plan to improved statewide child outcomes that close the readiness gap. The plan proposed focused investments in all areas specified in the RTT-ELC application guidelines. The following areas link directly to weaknesses identified in A (1) or support implementation of the QRIS: (1) Screening and measures of adult-child interaction have not been implemented across programs; (2) Expanded use of developed health and safety standards and development of a common workforce competency framework are directly tied to the effectiveness of the TQRIS; (3) Implementation of the kindergarten entry assessment addresses an identified weakness and responds to the need for increased alignment required by the revised definition extending early childhood through age 8; and (4) Justification for development of an early childhood data system is based on the current fragmentation and incompatibility of current systems. While investments in family engagement strategies and enhanced training are valid, the narrative does not link the level of investment with either identified weaknesses and the significance of the impact of the other reform changes for these areas. Given the current licensing or Federal requirements and levels of family engagement identified across all program types, the



proposed plans do not move the quality of programs forward. Further documentation is needed identifying specific areas for enhancement of family engagement strategies. One area documented in the letters from local and foundation stakeholders not addressed was how the initiative would address family engagement for migrant families and families on tribal reservations. The focused investment in changes to training and improved paths for further training does not respond to identified gaps or weaknesses noted in A1. A focused investment in development of a state level integrated early childhood certification or credentialing system would have a greater impact on program quality and workforce competency. Overall, the reform agenda demonstrates the following qualities of an effective plan to impact program and child quality outcomes: (1) builds on past initiatives that have demonstrated results; (2) links the key components and areas of focused investment to weaknesses in the current system; (3) defines scopes of work consistent with the agencies impacting services for children with high needs; (4) outlines a series of implementation steps/timelines for each of the component plan; and (5) incorporates strategies to validate processes and/or practices.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	10	7
<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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(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;</li> <li>(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;</li> <li>(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and</li> <li>(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;</li> </ul> <p>(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--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(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;</li> <li>(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</li> <li>(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and</li> </ul> <p>(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--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and</li> <li>(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.</li> </ul>		
Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b>		
<b>Comments on (A)(3)</b>		

The management organization builds on existing structures to facilitate the level of interagency collaboration required for effective implementation of the proposed reform agenda. Thus, the structure supporting the reform agenda is substantially implemented. (1) The Early Childhood Systems team, the current interagency work team established in 2010, is identified as the integration team for the Initiative. The group's membership reflects the administrative leadership of the various programs and services within the participating agencies. (2) Although the Early Childhood Advisory Council has no formal oversight role for the initiative's management team or cross integration team, its advisory and feedback role is clearly delineated in the initiative's organizational chart. This linkage is critical for accountability and alignment with the state's overarching goals for early childhood. (3) The organizational structure is initiative driven as evidenced by the critical role of the cross integration, with responsibility for cross sector initiatives -- the integrated data system, the TQRIS development and implementation, professional development and family engagement initiatives. The relationships across sectors are further detailed in the job descriptions for key initiative positions and enhanced by the formal Cross Integration Team. Although the roles of each participating entity are documented, specific governance-related responsibilities have not been identified in either the narrative, MOU or Table A2.a.1. The exception is the Leadership Council's ultimate responsibility for oversight of accountability and dispute and policy issue resolution. Documentation of broad stakeholder involvement in development of the plan is limited; however, the intent for stakeholder inclusion across a broad range of initiative activities is well-documented. For example, (1) Prior to implementation of the current QRIS in Nebraska and Program Standard criteria will be examined further by focus groups across the state, comprised of early childhood educators, early learning and development programs, parents, and local stakeholders. (2) The composition of the cross integration and Early Childhood Systems teams represent the key agency and related interagency partners. (3) The plan proposes to use time limited work groups representing appropriate stakeholders for assessment and training initiatives. An integrated MOU documents the broad agreements for each of the participating partners. The partner state agencies represent the required agencies under the RTT-ELC definition. Specific expertise contributed by the university supports areas of the initiative that would require contracts external to the agencies. This partnership builds upon the university's mission and unique Early Childhood resources, such as the Buffett Institute. The MOU documents commitment to implementation of the reform agenda, although there is no identification of leveraged fiscal commitments. Support of state reform efforts to expand services and increase access to professional development opportunities and alignment of the reform agendas overall goal with district goals were themes across the letters from local and intermediary education units. Broad based support of the direction of the reform efforts was documented in letters of support from chairs of key legislative committees, the Buffett educational fund, professional early childhood associations, and the early childhood business roundtable. Although weaknesses have been noted, key structures supporting the reform agenda are in place or identified in detail and reflect appropriate roles and responsibilities for implementing the plans. The elements of a medium quality plan have been documented.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</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 plan addressed the costs associated with each key project and the agency allocations. Agency allocations align with projects for which they will have lead responsibility. Project allocations reflect the required effort associated with the project given the current status and align with reform implementation timelines. (1) Administrative costs represent 9% of the overall budget and support the required collaboration across agencies and systems required for effective implementation of the overall reform agenda. (2) Costs for the TQRIS represent 54% of the overall budget with the pattern of allocation reflecting increasing costs due to statewide implementation. (3) Data base system integration costs are 11% of the budget with decreasing allocations aligned with the implementation timelines. (4) Similar patterns of the alignment of budget allocations with implementation timelines are evident for the kindergarten assessment, evaluation, post-secondary enhancements and family engagement projects. While these elements of a high quality plan are evident, weakness in the projected level of state fiscal commitment, leveraging state resources, uneven project allocations, and sustainability significantly reduce the cost effectiveness of the initiative. The level of state fiscal commitment and the leveraging of state funds and the RTT-ELC do not reflect the resources to sustain the ambitious goals of the plan. Maintenance or decreases are documented in state and private funding supporting early learning and development initiatives. Table A41 documents maintenance funding levels from federal, state and local sources supporting early education health initiatives and early learning and development programs. FY 2012 projections are at the same levels as FY2010 or 2011 as documented in Table A1. Increases across the grant period for both federal and state sources are documented only for LEA contributions to Part B of IDEA and state contributions to Part C meeting continuing compliance with the requirements for these programs. Decreases are particularly noted in private funding for professional development scholarships (Project TEACH) and quality enhancement projects. While this pattern of funding supports the need for an infusion of monies for advancing continuous progress, state leveraging options and reallocations are not identified to support the proposed plan activities or growth in the current level of service. Table A4-1 identifies major levels of state and private support; however, it is not clear how these funds will be used to support the agenda or how they will be leveraged with the RTT-ELC funds to advance the reform efforts. The lack of clarity or inconsistency is further documented in Budget Table I which identifies \$0.00 committed to the reform agenda from federal, state and private sources. For example, development of the kindergarten entry readiness assessment is funded exclusively with RTT-ELC funds with the fiscal responsibility for on-going implementation required of the local education agencies. There is no evidence that changes will be made in the allocations from the state to local education agencies to assist in these costs. Although the critical elements of the reform agenda focus on initial technical development of the TQRIS and data integration systems, sustainability plans are limited to on-going training for staff and shifts in data entry level. Continuing costs of aligned data systems are not addressed. The linkage between the \$45 million in planned investments in projects directly aligned with and supporting the goals of the initiative and the sustainability of the reforms is not clearly established. Derivation of the \$45 million figure is unclear as is the degree to which these funds represent maintenance of current number of children served at the same level of quality or expansion of the quality level of programs. The evaluation project allocation does not support a cost-effective strategy for achieving reform agenda related goals. A large amount of funding supports the partner's research efforts with limited return for the outcomes of the RTT-ELC initiative. While validation studies specific to components of a quality plan are identified, several components specifically address components other studies and associated resources (i.e., faculty, graduate research assistants, etc.) are not linked to the impact of the reform agenda. For example, costs associated with evaluation activities beyond the validation of TQRIS have limited impact on the reform agenda outcomes. Existing state resources and university expertise are not leveraged in ways to increase cost effectiveness. Plans for sustaining the key reform efforts are not adequately addressed to ensure maintenance at the level required to affect child outcomes. (1) The projections for existing funding streams do not support implementation and continuation of the reform initiative changes. (2) The budget tables identify reform activities as supported in total by grant funds. Although many of the initiatives emphasize development, there will be on-going implementation costs, continuous improvement needs, and personnel costs. How these costs will be supported is not addressed. (3) Strategies for aligning the reform efforts with existing agency priorities or strategic plans are not addressed. (4) Although the current early learning and development program and IHE infrastructures are in place, the extensive use of grant funded positions to implement and provide continued support of the reform initiatives is problematic for sustaining the level of support and expanding the initiatives at the conclusion of the grant period. Additional staff, grant supported, have been added to each of the participating agencies to implement the multiple facets of the reform agenda. How maintenance of the initiative elements will be integrated into current systems is not addressed sufficiently to ensure that the gains made will be maintained either administratively or fiscally.

**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>

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

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

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

(6) Effective data practices;

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(1)**

The proposed plan for development of a common statewide TQRIS system addresses identified weaknesses in the current systems evaluating program quality and builds an integrated system. The TQRIS is directly linked to the state's licensing system. Entry into Tier 1 requires child care or early learning and development licensure. Elements of a quality plan are evident in the strategies with associated implementation steps, timelines and agency responsibility identified for this criterion. However, weaknesses are noted in the accompanying narrative description of the plan. (1) The proposed tier level definitions do not identify specific quality indicators across the required elements. The primary differentiation across the tiers is based on enhanced professional development in the areas of environmental assessment and social emotional development strategies. Limited detail is provided regarding differences across the tiers for other required elements. (2) Linkage of the current and proposed program standards to national standards and system requirements for Head Start and IDEA are not addressed. The overall quality of the plan is judged to be a medium quality response based on the identified weaknesses.

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

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)**

Policies are currently in place to maximize TQRIS participation for preschools receiving state funds. Current agency requirements and funding incentives for state-funded preschool programs are identified that will maximize participation by early learning and development programs in the TQRIS. Specific policies and practices are in place and include modified grant agreements, performance-based quality improvement funding, current agency regulation compliance (NDE Rule 11), and higher reimbursement rates for Tier 5 achievement for early learning and development programs receiving CCDF subsidy funds. Less documentation is provided regarding the policies and incentives for the child care programs under the current QRIS program. The state has partially implemented policies and practices designed to maximize participation and documented a plan to address specific areas required by the movement to a broader and more inclusive system. The plan addressed the categories of a high quality plan such as goals, strategies, implementation steps, timelines and responsibilities for addressing the required indicators for this criterion. Although the elements of a high quality plan are addressed, the accompanying and supporting narrative is evaluated as of medium quality. For example, the implementation plan addressed the need for additional review and discussion of policies and practices due to the statewide and multiple program type focus of the new system. Although state agency level discussions are included as a step in the implementation plan, the timeline follows the TQRIS implementation. This later timeline reduces the potential for impacting the reform goals given the areas identified -- effective and feasible monetary and other incentives for programs and policies and practices for enhanced family support and supply of quality care in areas with high concentrations of children with high needs. The rationale for the timeline after implementation is not addressed.



Measures for publicly funded preschools, including Head Start programs associated with education units are reasonable and achievable given the current requirements under Rule 11 and Head Start performance standards and the proposed required participation. Performance goals for the Early Childhood grant program are reasonable given the funding leverage; what is less clear is the degree to which the stated goals reflect expansion or maintenance of quality programs. The basis for the targets of program participation for non-education related programs, such programs receiving CCDF funds (10%) and the remaining early learning and development programs (8%), was not adequately addressed. While the rationale for determination of the projections for program for low-income populations was reasonable, there was not adequate documentation of the comparability of state characteristics and policies. Given past QRIS initiative participation and the following factors specific to the State, the projected targets appear low. (1) The state has a history of significant investments with CCDF funds. (2) Programs are automatically in the system with licensure (Tier 1). (3) The incentive strategy is currently in place, although the level may not be sufficient to meet the projected targets.

	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)**

Elements of the rating and monitoring system are partially implemented. The plan addresses clear strategies, implementation steps, timelines and responsible agency in response the criterion. Strengths and weaknesses of the response to the criterion follow. The rating and monitoring system elements required to impact program quality and continuous improvement have been identified. The selected monitoring tools have solid validity and reliability data and are used nationally to assess program quality. Use of the CLASS is particularly in alignment with the revised State definition of Early Childhood through age 8. The elements of a monitoring system for early education and learning programs are clearly defined; however, there is less clarity regarding the transition of the current QRIS participants into the new system and how that systems rating and monitoring elements are to be integrated. Systems for program monitoring are in place in the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services including a trained cadre of observers/monitors. While a highly qualified pool for monitors and trainers is in place, the implementation level anchors have not been identified or trained. Systematic training for all observers is outlined, including standards for initial and inter-rater reliability with at least annual checks. However, the schedule for monitoring tier 1-3 programs is not sufficient for addressing advancement to the top two tiers. The frequency of review appears to reflect a regulatory monitoring approach rather than support for advancement in quality. For example, programs in tiers 3-4 are to be reassessed every 3 years; tier 2 programs initiate the request for review. In the latter case, limited incentives and this lack of systematic feedback do not provide support for advancing in program quality. Supports for continuous improvement have not been integrated into the proposed monitoring system. The availability of program data and licensure to parents and the public is addressed across multiple levels to ensure access through the inclusion of program quality information in the current state child care roster and on-site postings of recognition. A strength of the State's approach is the broad public awareness campaign to help parents and the public understand indicators of quality programs. This approach expands the base for support of the proposed community level initiatives and access to quality programs. However, the proposed plan does not address strategies for providing the information to two special populations of families with children with high needs – migrant families and the interface with Native American tribes. Both populations were identified in A1 as having a presence in the State and its child care systems.

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

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

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

(b) Providing supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality Early

Learning and Development Programs that meet those needs (e.g., providing full-day, full-year programs; transportation; meals; family support services); and

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

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

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(4)**

Supports promoting access to high quality programs are minimally implemented. The plan identifies key strategies and related implementation steps, timelines and responsible agency/entity. The narrative response addresses the required indicators for this criterion with varying levels of quality. The plan leverages incentives to support continuous improvement efforts in programs currently not required to demonstrate continuous improvement practices (i.e., non-state funded) or programs in designated high risk areas of the state. Proposed incentives include consultation, professional development opportunities, substitute pay to participate in trainings, and coaching. The degree to which these incentives will impact all types of programs in the TQRIS, particularly voluntary participation programs, is not addressed. The incentives appear to align most closely with an education model. In addition, the incentive structure appears to be more positively weighted to programs in the top tiers; with limited incentive for tier two programs to advance. Based on the TQRIS indicators many of the programs serving this population, such as those receiving CCDF and TANF subsidies, would be in tier two. Thus, this limitation coupled with the lack of a specified monitoring schedule for these programs does not encourage advancement in program quality for a significant portion of the population with high needs. The plan identifies the following current resources supporting family access to high quality programs: state funded preschool programs inclusion models, local education agency administration of the Head Start program, and Head Start wrap around services. However, the level of access for migrant families and Native American families on reservations is not addressed. The plan does address a gap in the current system – ease of access to full day programming. Only 14% of the state-funded preschool programs offer full day programming. Incentive funding will be provided through the Early Childhood Education Program Grants to districts moving to a full-day program. Additional funds are committed to provide technical assistance to districts during the transition. The fiscal commitment supporting this expansion is not documented in the level of grant, formula equalization or local education funding for district preschools. Projections across these funding streams are at the same level as FY 2011. The targets for program advancement are not ambitious as the majority of programs remain in Tier 1. Only 28% of the programs will be in the top tiers by 2015 including only 12% of the programs receiving CCDF funding. This latter group of programs serves primarily children with high needs. The linkage between the performance measures for the number of programs participating in the system (B, 2, c) and the number projected in each tier (B, 4, c) is not addressed. Significantly more programs are identified in the tier allocations than are reflected in the goals for expected participation. This pattern is consistent across the four years of funding. This discrepancy raises questions regarding the validity of the performance measures for the number of programs in the top tiers. The performance targets for increasing the number of children enrolled in the top TQRIS tiers are ambitious yet achievable. Given the current continuous improvement requirements for the state funded preschools and Head Start, populations in these programs would enter the system at higher tiers during its implementation in 2012. The increases document a reasonable progression toward the initiative’s full participation goals as well as movement of programs across the tiers for these programs.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

**Comments on (B)(5)**

The plan for validating the system's effectiveness is a strength based on the level of expertise of the evaluators and the quality of the research design. (1) Two randomized design studies are to be conducted by a research unit external to DOE and HHS. (2) Although the university is a participating agency, the research unit with the university is independent of the initiative's management, implementation or leadership teams. This separation ensures an independent review. (3) The initial study assesses the whether the tiers accurately reflect differential levels of program quality. However, what is unclear is the degree to which fidelity of implementation of the program standards affects quality. (4) The second study assesses the relationship of changes in quality ratings to child progress. Further replication of the latter study has potential for similar analysis from the projected data integration initiative. However, the linkage of these components of the reform agenda is not addressed. The State's response presented a high quality plan for validating the effectiveness of the TQRIS based on the quality of design, documented expertise of the evaluators, and the clear identification of two high quality studies addressing the system validity and the impact on child outcomes.

**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>15</b>	<b>13</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: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(1)
<p>Policies require the use of the guidelines in all of the state-funded and affiliated programs. Thus, the standards have been incorporated across all current elements of the early learning and development systems. However, the degree of integration into the proposed program standards underlying the TQRIS is not clearly addressed in the narrative or description of the tiers. State licensed (HHS) child care and state funded preschool programs require use of the guidelines. Use is voluntary across all other programs. However, limited incorporation of use of the learning standards is evident in the description of the proposed program quality standards/criteria (TQRIS). The primary assessment in the comprehensive assessment system has been aligned with the learning standards through state requested vendor modifications. The standards have been extensively integrated into the workforce framework and subsequent professional development. Related standards are identified for each of the core workforce competency areas and subareas providing a clear linkage between the anticipated child outcomes and the expected competencies. Progressive professional development sessions provide professionals an understanding of the essential domains and direct experience in designing activities supporting child mastery of the developmental and learning expectations of the domains. Independent study modules have been developed to ensure access to the information and skill development in rural communities. The State has substantially implemented elements supporting statewide use of the early learning and development standards. The response to the criterion provided substantive documentation of the level of implementation and addressed the required</p>

indicators. While of high quality, the responses limited evidence of the incorporation of the standards into the TQRIS was a potential weakness.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	15	13

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 comprehensive assessment system (Results Matter) is in place across all early learning and development programs operated by school districts and half of the Head State programs not affiliated with school districts participate in the current system. Limiting required participation to these programs does not address the range of program types serving children with high needs. A high quality plan has been developed to address weaknesses in the current system, Results Matter, increase data compatibility, and develop an integrated system of assessment that includes all required components. (1) Priority activities are the adoption of a nationally validated integrated online assessment system which includes one on-going assessment for child data and integration of all required elements of an effective system including screening and measures of quality of adult-child interactions. (2) To build an integrated comprehensive system, three interrelated components will comprise the revised system – Results Matter (comprehensive child assessment), the Kindergarten Entry Assessment\*, and comprehensive environmental and child-adult interaction assessments (implemented as part of the TQRIS). (3) All programs participating in TQRIS will be required to implement all components of the comprehensive assessment system. (4) Provision of enhanced training and support to 10 pilot sites during initial implementation of the new system requirements. (5) The participating State agencies will review of data linkages across systems and identify strategies for improved integration. \*A significant concern is the identification of a kindergarten entry readiness assessment that is limited to reading readiness and not the broad domains identified in the application guidelines. An action plan identified broad strategies with identified implementation steps, timelines, and responsible agency or entity has been developed for this component of the reform agenda. The plan builds on the previously implemented Results Matter process. Implementation activities are identified but lack the detail and coherence of a high quality plan. The State has partially implemented a comprehensive assessment system; however, the focus is primarily on programs serving children with high needs ages 3-5. Lack of specificity of the integration of the systems components for assessing infants and toddlers and inclusion of these programs in the system weakens the level of implementation. The State's response to the criterion elements documented elements of a high quality plan.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	15	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)**

Implementation of the TQRIS will be an effective strategy for ensuring that health, behavioral and developmental needs supporting school readiness are met. (1) Research based health and safety standards have been implemented throughout the child care system. (2) Health and safety standards in Early Learning Guidelines exceed licensure standards. (3) The progression of standards is identified across the draft tiers of the TQRIS. The emphasis on continuous improvement provided by progression through the tiers is an effective context for training and on-going support for program personnel. Leveraging state resources to build local capacity is an effective strategy for impacting high need communities in areas with limited resources. Scaling up the current child health consultant model to provide a catalyst in local communities for enhanced community based networking and interagency collaboration is an effective and efficient model for building local capacity. However, narrative provided limited detail regarding the incentives associated with the RFP process providing communities access to this additional resource. This omission is particularly significant given the RFP requirement of community commitment for continued support and the targeted high-risk priority areas, based on location and poverty level. Inadequate evidence was provided that the proposed strategies will allow the state to meet the stated performance objectives. Neither the context for the projected performance targets nor the basis for the projections was addressed. The narrative does not address the linkage between the targets and the local capacity building strategies in the plan. Without this context or identification of the process for determining the projected targets, it is difficult to assess if the increases from baseline continue a current trend or reflect ambitious annual targets. A further limitation of the targets is reliance on EPSDT data only; available Child Find data is not included. This omission underscores the need for increased collaboration and attention to the integration of data across agencies. The State has minimally implemented a plan to address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs. The State's response to the criterion was determined to be of medium quality based on the identified weaknesses relative to the performance objectives and the sustainability of the community child health consultant model in the areas of high need.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families,	15	4

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

(a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;

(b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and

(c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(4)**

The plan identifies strategies to enhance the progression of family engagement strategies in the current program quality systems, child care, Part C and B of IDEA and Head Start and develop an integrated progression within the TQRIS. The current systems have a clear differentiation of level of family involvement that is appropriate to the age range of the children and provides increasing levels of interaction and empowerment in supporting the child's learning and developmental needs as well as family support and leadership. The proposed process recognized the importance of broad stakeholder (early childhood educators, family engagement researchers, parents, practitioners) involvement in refining the TQRIS program standards to ensure that the family engagement standards across the tier progression are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Resources supporting this project have direct access to current evidence-based practice. Attention to ensuring inclusion of migrant families, families with children with special needs, and Native American family systems in the refinement process is not addressed. Training and on-going support of implementation of family engagement strategies is directly linked to the TQRIS tier progression. The Quality Portfolio Process required for program movement will document professional development including family engagement strategies. However, the application provides limited detail regarding the training to be provided. There is no system in place to collect data on training for ECE. Development of the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry will be designed to collect and report training on the state's family engagement standards. Thus, projections of the number of ECE trained and supporting are based on the performance measures related to criteria for program movement to Tier Two of the TQRIS. Limited



evidence is provided of strategies for promotion family support and engagement state-wide. Public television is an effective vehicle for promoting awareness to a broad audience. The plan does not address leveraging other existing resources which could provide more effective assess and support to families with special needs, such as agencies working with migrant families and the tribal social service systems. Given the percent of the population these groups represent and the plan's emphases on cultural appropriateness and capacity building, this omission in the plan is significant. The State's system for family engagement has been minimally implemented. Although the response addressed the criterion elements, the limited information or detail regarding inclusion of special populations, the inadequacies of the data regarding training and the failure to address leveraging of other family support systems significantly weaken the response quality.

**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	15

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 Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework implemented in 2008 contain the required content in the definition of a workforce competency framework. The formal credential system for early childhood is not clearly defined. It is not clear if the Early Childhood Career Ladder developed for another purpose is the recognized credential system. The ladder's 15 level progression is based on level of education and years of experience in early childhood. It is not clear whether an official credential noting the achieved level is awarded, similar to the teaching certificate, or a more informal process has been established. Linkage to other formal statewide credentialing system, such as the early childhood teaching endorsement(s) is not addressed. This lack of clarity of the credential system and linkage to a formal credentialing system are potential issues affecting the efficiency and accuracy the resulting data in supporting the TQRIS, the usability of workforce data, and data integration initiatives. A focused investment in development of a state level integrated early childhood certification or credentialing system would have a greater impact on program quality and workforce competency. The plan's workforce goals, strategies, and detailed action plans address continued alignment of the framework with a credential system, professional development tracking, and certificate and degree programs. However, it is not clear if the outcome of this process will address the weaknesses noted or increase the complexity of managing the current system. Current structures and previous collaborative relationships support effective implementation of the goals and strategies for aligning professional development with the framework. (1) The effectiveness of the plans strategies for engaging IHEs and other professional development providers in the alignment of their programs with the framework are enhanced by previous collaborations, including the development of the framework and the early learning and development standards. Informal agreement of alignment of university certificate and degree programs is documented in Table A-1-11. (2) Training in Early Childhood is coordinated state-wide through the Office of Early Childhood's Early Childhood Training Center. The Center provides a state-wide training calendar, including private developers' offerings that have been vetted as aligning with the framework. The workforce competency framework is fully implemented. The State's response identified a clear path for review of the alignment of the competencies with professional development; however, alignment with the credentialing system is less clear as noted above.

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	20	10

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)

An action plan details a structured process targeting increased university program alignment with the framework and broadens course access. Strategies and detailed implementation steps leading to achievement of the goals supporting workforce development are documented for the following project elements: (1) expansion of delivery formats for high-quality course offerings aligned with the framework; and (2) increased articulation between institutions to support career advancement. The plan also addresses increased and timely access to the training required for effective implementation of the major reform initiatives and continued improvement of the alignment of training with the framework. The identified strategies will result in increased access through expansion of current personnel (i.e., ELC coordinators, ECHRCs) funded through NDE and the grant, greater coordination of training information through the EC Training Center, and incentives to IHEs to develop on-line course and modules supporting their programs. The subcontract to MMI and the level of specificity of the implementation steps/timelines ensures that the required training will be available as the reform initiatives are implemented and monitored. Training priorities specifically target key reform elements that will move programs across the TQRIS tiers. The plan continues to reflect "agency-specific" delivery of professional development. While the need for a comprehensive cross-agency system for planning, implementing and evaluating professional development is acknowledged, the proposed delivery and access remains "agency-specific". The development of seamless systems of comprehensive assessment, evaluation of program quality, and integrated data systems will require increased integration of the professional development system. The plan of action does not address this weakness. The state has implemented a scholarship program to encourage early care and early education personnel to pursue a college degree in early childhood education as a basis for career advancement and retention. Over 224 students across the state were awarded scholarships in 2010 with plans to expand the number of awards. However, there is a discrepancy between the projected expansion and the decreasing levels of fiscal support identified for this program in the budget. This discrepancy is not explained. Given increased tuition and related costs, reduction in the award amount will negative impact progress toward the completion of the degree. Other strategies and incentives such as tuition reimbursement, private support, tuition waivers, were not identified. Current data regarding credentials and training is not available due to lack of a state-wide data system. The reform agenda's The Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry project is designed to create an integrated system that is publically accessible to address this weakness. However, alignment with the Early Connections Professional registry is not addressed; such alignment is required for effective linkages of data across agencies to enhance service delivery and collaboration and to support an integrated system of professional development. The goal of 17 by the 2015 is reasonable, not ambitious, and achievable given the alignment of the framework competencies with teacher education and child development accreditation standards and the limited number of institutions in the State, the project's collaborative alignment process, and previous input into the framework by representatives of the IHE. The goal is based on the total number of institutions in the state offering early childhood education or child development programs. The projected targets for the number of ECE receiving credentials from these institutions are based on 2010 graduation data. The rationale for the 2015 target is not provided. Trend data on graduation rates would provide a stronger justification for this measure given its relationship to the aligned institutions. Performance measures were not identified for the number and % of ECE progressing to higher levels of credentials aligned with the framework. Table D2d2 was omitted. This omission was not addressed and is noteworthy given the linking of the workforce career progression to quality indicators in the TQRIS. The State has partially implemented a statewide system of professional development for early childhood. Training continues to be agency specific in the proposed plan; therefore, a coordinated system supporting early childhood is not evident. The overall quality of the response is rated medium due to the lack of discussion of the alignment of training topics and areas with the framework competencies, the omission of Table D3d2, reasonable but not ambitious goals for the preparation of ECE by aligned IHEs, and lack of a coordinated training system,

**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)**

There is no state mandated kindergarten entry readiness assessment. The process for developing and implementing the KERA builds on previous experiences in implementing the statewide child and family assessment system in 2006. Expansion of the current comprehensive assessment committee to an Assessment Stakeholders Task Force as the advisory committee for the development and implementation of KERA is strength of the proposed plan. This structure ensures continuity across the revisions of the comprehensive assessment system and the kindergarten entry readiness assessments. The detailed action plan and accompanying narrative provide a clear path to full implementation. The plan outlines the sub-projects, implementation steps with related activities, timelines and designated agency, consultant or task force responsible, and decisions required for statewide implementation by Fall 2014. The high quality plan goes beyond a management tool to identify a careful deliberative process ensuring alignment with the state ELD standards, and the essential domains of school readiness, assessment of the quality of the selected instrument, and plans for the development and delivery of training statewide prior to state-wide roll out. A two phase pilot program involving 10-20 sites will be used to document the effectiveness of the assessment process and procedures for data linkage to the SLD system prior to final decisions. Specific strategies are identified to build stakeholder buy in early in the process (January 2012) and inform the protocol for statewide implementation. Timelines document effective integration with the related reform efforts such as revision of ELD standards and their alignment with K-12 standards. Although the KERA will be used in all public schools, the legislative or regulatory basis mandating implementation is not addressed. There is no evidence of fiscal commitments beyond grant funds for this initiative. The overall budget summary Budget Table 1 documents \$0 for non-grant funds to be used to support this component of the plan. Over \$2M of grant funding is identified for the Kindergarten Assessment project with a significant portion allocated to MMI, the contracted lead for the project. No other funding streams are identified supporting development or implementation of the KERA in any of the participating agency budgets. The need to identify funding is acknowledged and included as an implementation step in the detailed plan. However, the lack of identification of policies required for implementation and funding sources for statewide implementation is problematic given the level of investment (fiscal and human resources) in the development of the system and prior experience in implementing a statewide assessment system.

	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)**

There are currently multiple data systems within and across agencies that hold workforce, child outcome, family information, child medical information, and educational information. These systems effectively meet the needs of the specific agency or program. Prior assessment, program quality enhancement, and professional development initiatives have led to implementation of the following data systems in early childhood: Early Learning Connection Professional Registry, the Early Childhood Practitioner Registry, the system support child and environmental outcomes of the comprehensive assessment system, public school Student and Staff Record System and the State Longitudinal Measurement System. Additional systems exist in HHS for monitoring EPSDT and other mandated programs. This data fragmentation highlights the limited capacity for linkage across these systems. Several limitations of data access were noted in the preparation or provision of data supporting the application. Thus, development of an integrated data system is critical to support the achievement of the initiatives outcomes and continuous improvement efforts. Insufficient detail is provided of the federated database (ECDS) including its structure, linkage to other early learning databases and accessibility across program types to programs for improving instruction or practices. (1) The linkage of the early childhood data systems across age ranges is not addressed. The linkage of workforce data across birth-3 and 3-5 programs is not addressed. (2) Policy changes required to streamline data collection and sharing (3) The process for alignment of the essential data elements across systems is not identified. (4) How the tracking challenges possessed by migrant families are to be addressed. (5) How the data system will link child outcome and program quality data. (6) How privacy, confidentiality, data ownership, and related issues are to be addressed for the ECDS as well as assurance of compliance with federal and state laws since the database will be managed by an entity external to the authorized state agencies. The proposed plan does not include detailed strategies or implementation steps for development of a comprehensive early learning data system that is responsive to the data integration needs required by implementation of the data-intensive reforms.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>170</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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 did not meet the required percent on (E)(1).



**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>The application builds on previous statewide initiatives enhancing the child care and early learning and development systems. The overall emphasis of this reform agenda is on quality improvement in the areas of alignments of learning and program standards with assessments and workforce competencies and the integration of data to more effectively support improvement. The plans to implement the key elements of the reform were highly detailed, covering the required elements and led to achievement of goals supporting children with high needs for kindergarten success. The overall application meets the minimum threshold for the absolute priority.</p>	



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # NE-5022

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 9:57 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, 16. Includes detailed text description of the state's investment in early learning and development programs.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)
The applicant has described and documented a stable and growing investment in all early childhood programming and services in the State over the past five years. Sustainable streams of funding have been created for early learning and development programs serving children with high needs through partnerships with private funders. Access to high quality programs for children with high needs has been increased through a tiered subsidy rate structure. The State has expanded the funding for school-based preschool by including four-year-olds in the School Formula thus increasing the money available to fund more grant programs. Formula aid for early childhood has increased from 2.2 million dollars in 2008 to 11.9 million dollars in 2011. A direct outcome of these efforts is more money to meet the needs of high need families and children. In order to ensure that the largest number of children with the highest needs are served by public funds the State Department of Education has established regulations which encourage partnerships with community agencies and Head Start programs. Participation of children with high needs in state-funded preschool has increased by approximately 8% over the past three years. The number of children receiving subsidies for enrollment in private early learning and development programs has increased approximately 9% in three years. The State's Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council and the Early Childhood System Team play key roles in early childhood leadership in the State. Policies and programs such as the State Funded Preschool programs, reimbursement rates for early learning and development programs, scholarships for early childhood educator development, private public partnerships, and a newly established Early Childhood Institute have been outlined as examples of existing early childhood initiatives in the State. A comprehensive set of Early Learning Guidelines for children birth to age three and three- to five-year-olds are aligned with Head Start Outcomes and K-12 Standards. School districts applying for an early childhood grant must show how the guidelines will be used to support the curriculum. A child, family and program outcome measurement designed and implemented to improve program supports for all young children birth to age five includes formative assessments and measures of environmental quality. Use of this measurement system is required for all state-funded programs and a majority of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs in the State. The State Department of Education is partnering with other agencies and organizations to bring a model framework for promoting children's social emotional competence to local early childhood programs throughout the

State. The inclusion of a narrative section describing the early learning and development data systems currently in use in the State would have provided a clearer understanding of the information provided in Table A(1)(13). The State's past commitment to and solid financial investment in increasing the number of children of high need served by high quality early childhood learning and development programs clearly demonstrates the capacity to design and deliver a reform agenda that results in improved school readiness for all children, in particular those with high needs.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	20	14

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 State has outlined five goals for creating a high quality, integrated sustainable system of early childhood learning and development, family services and supports. The five goals address: 1)strong children; 2)strong families; 3)strong early childhood professionals; 4)strong communities; and 5)a strong early childhood system. The reform initiative builds on past successes. Objectives of the proposal have been aligned with existing State priorities so goals are achievable during the grant period and sustainable into the future. The applicant makes clear how each objective will positively impact children with high needs. The core components and key objectives are well articulated and comprehensive, and clearly outline the focus of the proposed reform agenda. In the discussion of objectives the applicant has described the strengths that will be built upon, has identified areas of existing need and has outlined how they will be addressed in the proposed initiative. Strong evidence of the identified needs has not been provided and would have demonstrated that the proposed reform initiatives are well focused. In order to most effectively and efficiently increase school readiness of children with high needs the initiatives and resources of the proposed plan are prioritized and geographically targeted to areas of the State with children and families experiencing the most need. Data collected from two independent studies were used to identify the targeted high-need counties in the proposed initiative. The implementation plan uses statewide and regional structures to deliver services with a primary requirement that efforts be targeted first at the identified counties and then throughout the entire State. This phase-in plan is an effective strategy to ensure that the efforts proposed in the State's plan will be focused on positively impacting young children in the State with the highest need. A timeline for implementation of major milestones in the proposed State plan is provided. More specific information about the steps that will be taken to address each criterion area with corresponding target dates is needed to fully demonstrate the path the State will take to achieving their goals. The applicant has provided a rationale for addressing all of the criteria in each focused investment area. By addressing each criterion in Focus Area C the applicant will build upon priorities for the State and work that has been initiated. Both sections of Focus Area D were selected in order to build upon existing strengths. Each of the sections in Focus Area E was selected to create new systems that currently are not in place.

	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)**

The applicant has described the current organizational involvement of the lead agency and the two participating State agencies. There currently exists a high level of interagency coordination and collaboration between the Department of Health and Human Services (lead agency) and The State Department of Education. The proposed organizational structure will include a Leadership Council with the responsibility of ensuring that the goals and objectives of the proposed plan are carried out, and a Management Team that will oversee the operations of the plan. The narrative addressing (a)(2) of this criterion refers to the Administrative Structure Diagram and the ELN Initiative Organizational Chart. The diagram and chart that are included several pages later have different titles, but are presumably the ones referenced. The applicant has outlined the organizational structure for oversight and management of the proposed initiative but has not provided a full explanation of the structure as depicted in the chart titled Early Learning Nebraska Initiative Management Structure. Inconsistencies between the narrative and the chart have also been noted. For example only two staff assistants (also referred to as project assistants) are included in the chart, but three are described in the narrative. Governance-related roles and responsibilities for the lead agency, the two participating State agencies and the State's Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council are outlined. The applicant proposes to rely on the State's Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council and a standing committee of that council to advise and advance the work of the proposed initiative through regular meetings with the initiative's management team. No details are provided about the scope of this involvement. The joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the lead agency and the two participating State agencies specifically describes roles and responsibilities as well as plans to align and leverage existing funds to support the proposed reform initiative. The applicant has indicated that the 22 pages of the MOU demonstrate the commitment to the proposed plan from a broad group of stakeholders. Further explanation of this would have clarified how the three agencies comprise a broad group of stakeholders. Despite providing very specific information such as detailed job descriptions in some areas of the response to this criterion, the description of the plan to align and coordinate early learning across the State lacks specificity in some areas and overall clarity. Therefore it is considered to be partially implemented and of medium quality.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	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 applicant has described the State, Federal and private funding that currently supports early learning and development in the State including IDEA parts B and C, CCDF funding and set-asides, state funded preschools, Head Start, private initiatives, and public health funds. Solid collaborations are in place among some agencies and departments for the delivery of many of these services and supports. Elements of the State's tiered quality rating and improvement system have been developed through collaborative funding from these resources. However, the narrative section of this criterion does not specifically describe the ways in which these activities and services will help to achieve the outcomes of the proposed plan. Additionally, Budget Table I-1: Budget Summary by Category and the Budget Part II tables for each of the three Participating State Agencies all indicate zeroes along the line item for funds from other sources that will be used to support the State plan. The budget narratives for the Lead Agency and Participating State Agencies make clear roles, responsibilities, activities, time frames and costs for the implementation of the State plan. A description and explanation of other funds that will support the projects of the State plan is not provided. This information is needed to understand the level of commitment of each of the partners to the proposed initiative and how existing funds will be used to leverage the proposed initiative. In considering whether the costs are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design and significance of the activities outlined in the State plan and the number of children to be served, the goals, core components and key objectives outlined in criterion A2 were revisited. The proposed expenditures for research and evaluation projects are not consistent with this information. While evaluation and validation of the projects and activities in the proposed initiative are extremely important and reasonable expenditures, the reasonableness of allocating RTT-ELC grant funds for additional research and evaluation purposes is not adequately explained. The applicant has addressed sustainability of the proposed plan by stating that much of what will be accomplished during the grant period will become self-sustaining once the grant period ends. When the unified data system, the tiered quality rating and improvement system, kindergarten entry assessment, and supports to early childhood educators are all in place no additional investments will be needed to build the systems and the work of maintaining and expanding them will be incorporated into regular operations. No explanation is provided for how the supports to improving program quality and attaining higher levels on the TQRIS will be sustained. The applicant also indicates that the State's philanthropic community may be a possibility for sustainability and includes a description of past and current philanthropic support of early childhood as evidence of their support. However there is no evidence of a firm commitment to assist in sustaining the work proposed in the plan. The description of the budget for the proposed reform initiative did not demonstrate in a cohesive and complete manner how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from the grant to achieve the outcomes. Because of this the response to this criterion is considered to be a medium/low-quality response.

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

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

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

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

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

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(1)**

The State has been working on a tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) for several years and has participated in a multistate quality rating and improvement system pilot project. The State has developed a draft set of program standards and has outlined a plan for obtaining input for the revision and refinement of the standards. The proposed TQRIS describes a continuum of indicators of quality through five levels of increasing program quality. The applicant states that the program standards are aligned with the State's early learning guidelines, the State's core competencies for early childhood professionals, Head Start performance outcomes and the standards and expectations of other early childhood programs in the State. However, no evidence is provided to support this statement. Rating criteria include: minimum operating requirements; required training/education; program assessment; professional development/education requirements; health and safety requirements; family engagement criteria; child assessment and screening; data collection and analysis. The standards include two scales, one for child care centers and the other for child care homes. A review of the draft standards indicated that they encompass the common elements around which a quality rating and improvement system should be built. However, the applicant did not specifically address how implementation of the proposed TQRIS will impact the State's children with high needs. The proposed tiered quality rating and improvement scale, called Step Up to Quality, is comprised of five tiers designed to break down overall proficiency goals into manageable steps with supports built in along the way. The lowest level simply requires that the program is licensed or meets the requirements of the state or federal funding source and participates in an orientation to Step Up to Quality. Performance measures are set for progression into Tiers Two through Five. Tier Two begins to address quality improvement elements by building learning communities for early childhood educators which include training topics necessary to create a Quality Portfolio and coaching. The third tier builds upon the second tier and the two highest tiers include use of appropriate observation tools with score levels established for each tier. Programs may elect to meet the criteria of highest tier by becoming accredited by either the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Association for Family Child Care. Defining a starting point for the system that begins with the State licensing system or other baseline requirements for early childhood programs and then building upon that through incremental progressions to the highest level of quality is an appropriate approach to establishing a tiered quality rating and improvement system. As described, the State is in the final planning stages of developing a tiered quality rating and improvement system. Following revision and refinement of the proposed system the goal is to begin implementation of the tiered quality rating and improvement system in the second half of 2012. This goal is ambitious and potentially achievable based upon the work that has been done to date. For this reason the response to this criterion is considered to be medium quality and partially implemented.

	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)**

Participation in the State's tiered quality rating and improvement system will be included as part of the grant or funding agreement with state-funded preschools including programs and services funded by IDEA Part C and B, programs funded under Title I, and grant funded programs for children birth to 3. The applicant states that Head Start programs and other licensed early learning and development programs that are not in partnership with school district programs will be encouraged to participate through incentives offered for training, coaching and materials but does not adequately describe policies and practices that will address this intent. The applicant proposes that programs that receive CCDF child care subsidies and that meet Tier Five requirements through accreditation by a national organization will receive higher reimbursement rates as an incentive. Tying the increased subsidy incentive to only the highest tier of the rating scale may limit the potential of the incentive by seeming to be out of reach for programs currently at the lower tier levels. Existing grant funds that assist family child care programs and center-based programs that serve low income families in making quality improvements will be combined with the proposed initiative funds to provide incentives to assist early childhood educators in programs participating in the TQRIS in meeting their professional goals. A description of the proposed incentives and the way they will be distributed is not provided. In addressing how the proposed plan will help more families afford high quality child care and maintain the supply of high quality child care in areas of high concentration of children with high needs the applicant described the current policies that support families and programs through CCDF and discretionary TANF funds and indicated that they will be continued. However, an explanation was not provided for how this will be linked to the proposed TQRIS. The timeline provided for the implementation of policies and practices to ensure participation of all publically funded early learning and development programs in the State's TQRIS indicates that monetary and other incentives for participation in the TQIRS will be addressed December to June, 2013. The same time frame is identified for helping families afford high-quality child care and maintaining the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of children with high needs. It is not clear when planning for these two very important issues will begin. Table B(2)(c) outlines the goal of having 100% of state-funded preschools, Head Starts and Birth to Three grant programs participating in the State's TQRIS at levels two through five by 2015. Far lower percentages are targeted for programs receiving CCDF funds and licensed program not receiving CCDF programs. The applicant has explained that these numbers are based upon results of a national study of states that have already implemented a quality rating and improvement system. While having target goals of 100% of the publically funded programs is commendable, these are programs in which the quality is already somewhat regulated by the funding source and therefore of potentially higher quality. Setting targets for programs that are currently only regulated by licensing requirements based on what has been done in the past by other states without the benefit of RTT-ELC funding is not a sound strategy for improving the quality of child care for children with high needs. For this reason the targets are considered to be ambitious for some but not all types of programs and attainable. The response to this criterion has been rated as partially implemented and of medium quality.

	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)**

The State's proposed tiered quality rating and improvement scale employs an appropriate version of the Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECCERS-R, ITERS-R or FCCERS-R), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) or Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) at differentiated tier levels. The applicant states that these are valid instruments and research-based measures used consistently within the field of early education. No further discussion regarding the appropriateness, reliability and validity of these assessments is provided. Additionally, the applicant did not address the manner in which other program standards beyond the proposed assessments will be monitored. The proposed plan will develop a cadre of Step Up to Quality Anchors by using existing reliable monitors who are part of the professional development system and hiring additional staff. Anchors will complete observations of programs, provide mentoring and coaching to other observers, and serve as the leader of a group of assigned observers to ensure inter-rater reliability. Standards have been established to measure inter-rater reliability against a consensus score. Observers must re-establish inter-rater reliability yearly or every ten visits, whichever comes first. However, no specific information is provided about the training and preparation of the observers such as a description of the components of the training and the amount of time that will be involved in the training. A schedule for monitoring has been outlined: providers in Tiers One and Two may request a review when they feel ready to move to the next level; Tier Three and Four programs will be assessed every three years; Tier Five programs will be reassessed every three years unless they are accredited. This schedule provides a minimal level of monitoring of programs at the lower levels, especially Tiers Two and Three, where stronger support for improving the quality of these programs is needed to assist them in moving to a higher level. Programs' TQRIS rating level will be included in the existing on-line child care licensing roster and information system so that families have access to this information and knowledge about the TQRIS. No strategies are described to ensure that this information will be accessible to all families, especially those who don't have access to a computer and the State's migrant and tribal populations. Because the State's tiered quality rating and improvement system is in the final planning stages but has not yet been implemented the response to this criterion has been rated as medium quality and minimally implemented

	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>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 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**

<b>Comments on (B)(4)</b>
<p>The State will build upon the existing structure of professional development and support by providing training, coaching, technical assistance and materials to programs participating in the TQRIS. The proposed initiative will focus resources and funding to support programs that serve children with the highest need in the State. The applicant indicates that the proposed plan will increase the capacity of current coaching and consultation resources to address current unmet needs across the State. However, details of how this will be accomplished are not provided. A wide range of support strategies are listed (technical assistance and coaching focused on helping programs improve on the TQRIS; health and safety consultation; mental health consultation; evaluation of program environments by trained observers; coordinated professional development for early learning and care providers; materials to enhance environments and promote early learning and development; funds to provide substitutes so staff can attend training or work on-site with coaches; and improved access to distance learning so college courses are more accessible) but a plan for the delivery of these strategies is not included. The proposed plan includes strategies for expanding the access of children with high needs to full day programs including increasing the incentives to school districts who apply for an Early Childhood Education Program grant with the intention of operating a full day program, and providing funds and technical assistance to support school districts in transitioning existing half day programs to full day. Strategies for supporting parents of children with high needs in accessing these programs are not described. The applicant has explained how the numbers were calculated for Table (B)(4)(c)(1) outlining the targets for increasing the number of programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS. An explanation is not provided for why 82% of the programs are still anticipated to be at the lowest tier by the end of 2015. A clearer discussion of why the applicant believes the targets to be ambitious is needed to demonstrate that the targets are both reasonable and achievable. The response to this criterion is of medium quality and minimally implemented.</p>



	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	15	12

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

#### Comments on (B)(5)

The evaluation plan as described in the Appendix is comprehensive and well presented. The parameters of the studies are appropriate for the intended outcomes. The measures to be used are identified and justified for both validity and the purposes for which they will be used. The studies will be conducted by the University of Nebraska, one of the participating agencies in the proposed plan. However, the narrative for this criterion does not adequately address the implementation of the evaluation plan into the overall plan for the proposed RTT-ELC initiative. The implementation plan is general and broad and lacks sufficient information about the key activities, goals and timelines. Additionally the applicant has outlined a series of process evaluations to obtain feedback on the implementation of strategies being employed. These include: a study of the overall implementation of the TQRIS; a process study of the early childhood education coaching; a process study of the Early Childhood Mental Health Project; and a process study of the Early Learning and Development Program Health and Community Resource Consultants. The applicant also intends to replicate a study conducted in 2002 as a measure of progress. Although the purposes of the proposed studies are clear and should provide useful information, these are ambitious and costly endeavors beyond the required components of this criterion. The applicant does not indicate that there are supplemental funds to accomplish this work.

### **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>	15	13

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 has provided evidence that the State's early learning standards for children birth through kindergarten are comprehensive, of high quality, and developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate. The resources that were used in the development of the Early Learning Guidelines for Ages Birth to 3, and Ages 3 to 5 are cited to demonstrate that the Guidelines are based on national standards and research evidence about child development and practices that result in the best outcomes for children. The Guidelines were developed in unity with policies and standards for other programs including those for public schools and Head Start. A look through the scope, sequence and content of the two documents showed that they are in fact developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate and they address all the essential domains of school readiness. The applicant has appropriately described implementation steps and accompanying timelines outlining the plan to update the Guidelines to integrate revised K-12 standards and the revised Head Start Performance Outcomes. Revision and updating of the accompanying professional development for the Guidelines is also included. It is critical that these tasks be accomplished by no later than the proposed timeline so that programs have access to up-to-date information. The State ensures that all state-funded preschools use the Guidelines by requiring school districts that apply for funds to describe how the programs use the Guidelines to support the program curriculum. However, use of the Guidelines is voluntary for all other early childhood programs. A requirement that child care providers complete professional development about the Guidelines is included in proposed licensing regulations for family child care home providers, center-based child care providers and community-based preschools. Requiring training in the State's early childhood guidelines for all licensed programs is an appropriate and important strategy to ensure a foundational level for Tier One of the State's proposed tiered quality rating and improvement system. The State's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals describe the knowledge and skills adults working with children birth to age five are expected to develop over years of experience and/or through a course of study. The Guidelines were used extensively in the development of the core competencies and are referenced throughout the document. Each competency area contains a description of relevant sections of the Guidelines. The applicant has outlined a comprehensive system of professional development around the Early Learning Guidelines that includes an introductory workshop, more intensive comprehensive workshops for each essential domain of the Guidelines, and independent study modules. Different formats of the training are provided to address center-based, home-based and school-based programs. A parent workshop is designed to help families understand appropriate developmental expectations and provide strategies for parents to support child growth and learning. Early development and learning programs operated by school districts and their community partners participate in a comprehensive assessment system, called Results Matter, which includes child, family and program outcomes measurement. This system is in the process of changing so that all programs use the same assessment tool for child data. All state-funded preschools, programs funded by IDEA parts C and B and Title I, a majority of Head Start and Early Head Start programs and all other programs that participate in the State's TQRIS will use the same measurement by the beginning of the 2012-13 school year. This measurement, Teaching Strategies Gold, will be aligned with the State's Guidelines. The measurement tool selected is an appropriate measure for the purpose intended. The movement to a consistent tool for measuring child outcomes across programs is a sound strategy for collecting and comparing information about the learning and development of young children in the State. The applicant has described strategies and activities that link early learning standards with early childhood educator competencies, program standards, comprehensive assessment systems and professional development activities. Because much of what is described is already implemented or builds upon what is currently in place, the response to this criterion is considered to be of high quality and substantially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</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)**

The applicant proposes building upon the processes used in the development and support of the statewide early childhood assessment system (Results Matter). The existing assessment system will be enhanced to include four primary assessment processes: screening; comprehensive assessment for instructional planning and outcome accountability; diagnostic assessment; and kindergarten readiness assessment. The work that has been done to date in developing and implementing the current assessment system (Results Matter) and the accompanying processes for training and support of programs and staff in using the assessment should provide a strong foundation for the initiatives that are proposed in this criterion. Implementation steps, timelines and responsibilities are outlined for each of the four strategies that are being proposed. The process outlined for identifying and recommending approved screening assessments includes determining the reliability, validity and verifying the appropriateness of what is currently in use and establishes guiding principles for the selection of the screening instruments. This is a sound approach to ensuring that programs use appropriate measures for screening the children they are serving. The applicant indicates that the current system for diagnostic assessment of young children for special services will be augmented by the development and implementation of a state-wide "Reading Readiness Entry Assessment" but does not address how such an assessment will be used as a diagnostic tool why this would be an appropriate assessment for diagnostic purposes. MOUs are in place between Head Start, Early Head Start and state-funded preschools to determine the assessment processes for children who attend two or more programs to avoid duplication of assessment and to coordinate services. The State Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services will determine gaps and recommend strategies to improve linkages between the two data systems to maximize coordination for children with high needs who are served in multiple settings. A clear explanation is not provided of how the pilot project that is outlined as an approach to supporting full implementation of the comprehensive assessment system relates to and will be coordinated with the implementation of the tiered quality rating and improvement system. The applicant plans to build upon the assessment training that has already been done across the State through the existing infrastructure for statewide professional development. The strategies outlined to increase participation in training to assist programs and staff in understanding the purposes and uses of the assessments are practical and appropriate. Throughout the discussion of this criterion the applicant has not specifically clarified whether the proposed statewide assessment system will be used across all early childhood and development programs or is limited to a subset of programs across the State. The level of involvement of Head Start programs is also not clear. The applicant has described strategies and a plan to support the implementation of a coordinated assessment system. However, evidence has not been provided that this will be an integrated and cohesive system. The response is considered to be of medium quality and partially 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>	15	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)**

It is very appropriate that the applicant proposes to address the health, behavior and development of children with high needs by supporting children within the context and needs of their families and communities. The State's Early Learning Guidelines already include health and safety standards beyond those required for licensing. The Teaching Pyramid model will be used to addresses social, emotional and behavioral health, Promotion of physical activity and improved nutrition and eating habits will be addressed through an initiative developed by the State's Department of Health and Human Services. Infusing standards that promote the physical, social and emotional well-being of young children into the tiers of the State's proposed TQRIS is a sound strategy to ensure that children's health, behavioral and developmental needs are addressed. The criteria for doing this will be developed and incorporated into the proposed TQRIS by March, 2012. The resources cited are suitable for the development



of appropriate standards to address this criterion and the time frame is reasonable for accomplishing the work. A network of Early Learning and Development Health and Community Resource Consultants will provide training and consultation to early learning and development programs to assist them in meeting the progressive health related criteria in the State's proposed TQRIS. Training will be prioritized for programs located in targeted communities and will include on-site support, online and phone consultation and group trainings. Health consultants will work collaboratively with early learning consultants to integrate the support, materials and training provided to early learning and development programs. Health consultants will also provide community level adaptations that will help early learning and development programs meet the diverse needs of young children and their families including cultural, language, physical and behavioral needs. The Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry will be used for collecting and reporting the provision of training on health related standards. Implementation steps and timelines for actualizing this strategy are outlined. The strategy as outlined is focused on increasing the number of early childhood educators who are trained and supported in meeting the health standards by beginning to implement the strategy with programs serving children with high needs in targeted communities, then broadening the scope of effort to other targeted communities and then statewide. This is an effective and appropriate course of action to ensure meeting the needs of children who are most at risk. The proposed plan addresses the promotion of physical activity and improved nutrition and eating habits by building on the training already provided by the Child and Adult Care Food Program and uses the findings of pilot programs which are supported through a grant from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Community-based information sessions will be offered for families and resources, tools and lessons for providers and families on health literacy topics will be developed. The applicant proposes to develop community-based Health Resource Hubs which will focus on the health and safety of children and provide one convenient place for early childhood services and information. The Hubs will be created by a local contractor through a request for proposal process. The Health and Community Resource Consultant will be located at the Hub and will work with the community to create a network of local care provides, services and resources for families and children. As described, the design of the proposed community-based Hubs effectively allows for the structure and supports that will be provided to be tailored to address the needs of each particular targeted community. By doing this there is a high likelihood that the needs of the families and children in the community who are most at risk will be addressed. The applicant has described how existing programs and resources will be leveraged to address the objectives of this criterion and to build partnerships and capacity in local communities to address the health, behavioral and developmental needs of children with high needs. In the next year Medicaid Managed Care will be implemented in all counties in the State. The proposed Health and Community Resource Consultant positions will provide important links between the care coordination component of managed care and the families served through early learning and development programs thereby increasing the screening, referrals and routine care of children with high needs. The narrative section of this criterion does not discuss the information provided in Table C(3)(d). Because no rationale is provided it is difficult to determine whether the targets are achievable. The response to this criterion is considered to be high quality and minimally implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(4)**

The applicant proposes convening a planning group to further refine the progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of the State's proposed tiered quality rating and improvement system. The strategies for meeting the standards will build upon demonstrated positive outcomes for children and families in recent State programs. Final development of the State's proposed TQRIS will be completed by July, 2012 with implementation beginning in August, 2012. Areas that will be addressed in the standards are listed but not expanded upon. The applicant describes a progression of family engagement strategies across the tiers. At the lower tiers this involves "unidirectional" information-giving to parents and Tiers Four and Five are described as being "bi-directional" and more collaborative in nature. While a progression of strategies is part of a TQRIS, the inclusion of two-way communication with parents at only the top tiers is not consistent with appropriate family engagement standards. Early learning and development programs wishing to move to Tier Two of the proposed TQRIS will be required to complete 24 hours of professional development which will include opportunities to learn about family engagement strategies. The State proposes to increase the capacity of the infrastructure that delivers professional development statewide to reach underserved parts of the State. The proposed expanded training will include a focus on the State's TQRIS standards including family engagement strategies. Specific information about the training such as the content and number of hours involved is not provided. Other proposed strategies for educating and providing ongoing support of early childhood educators in implementing family engagement strategies include involving University Extension Educators in providing training to project coordinators on the family centered coaching model. Project coordinators who



participate in the training will then engage early learning and development programs in a process of observation, reflection, action, feedback and joint planning through individual and group sessions. The proposed plan will use this model to provide professional development on family engagement strategies to all state-funded preschools, Early Childhood Education Grant programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs across the State. In the final year of the proposed initiative the training will be provided to other programs participating in the State's TQRIS focusing initially on programs serving children with the highest need. The applicant has indicated that this strategy will provide training first to programs that serve children with the highest need. However, Head Start, Early Head Start and most state-funded preschool programs have program requirements related to family engagement. While training and support in this area will certainly assist in improving in the way these programs address their requirements, the proposed plan will not offer training for other programs serving children with high needs (such as those that receive CCDF subsidies) that may be at lower tiers on the TQRIS and may have little knowledge of or support in developing family engagement strategies until the final year of the initiative. Thus programs serving children with high needs that are operating at the lower levels of the TQRIS may not be impacted by the proposed plan. The plan as outlined in this section does not discuss how the proposed activities related to family support and engagement will be coordinated with programs and services that currently exist in the State such as home visiting programs and other family-serving agencies. Because most of what is proposed in this section is planned and has not yet been implemented the response to this criterion is considered to be minimally implemented and of medium quality.

#### 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	15
<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: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)
<p>The State's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals, also referred to as the Competency Framework, includes a set of expectations that describes what early childhood educators should know and be able to do in nine core knowledge areas. Each core knowledge area includes a description of how the State's Early Learning Guidelines relate to that area. A system for providing professional development to promote the use and understanding of the Competency Framework has been implemented. Over 300 early childhood educators have participated in the Quality Portfolio Learning Community which includes an overview of the Competency Framework, completion of self-assessments and development of a professional development plan. These trainings will become a component of Tier Two of the State's proposed tiered quality rating and improvement system. This is an excellent strategy for ensuring a foundational level of competency for the State's early childhood workforce. The Competency Framework defines six levels of knowledge and skills aligned with professional preparation through higher education. Institutions of higher education have reviewed and informally agreed to integrate the Competency Framework into their coursework. As part of the proposed initiative the Competency Framework will be revised to incorporate career levels and the sequence of credential, diplomas and degrees available from the State's higher education institutes. Coaches facilitating the Quality Portfolio Learning Community will work with participants to determine their career goals and link them resources and opportunities for increasing their knowledge and moving up their career ladder. This will be an important support strategy for early childhood educators once the Competency Framework is revised. The applicant also proposes a collaborate effort between the State Department of Education and the University's Early Childhood Institute and other public and private colleges and universities to create postsecondary enhancements for early childhood professionals and to promote articulation among the institutions. However, no description is provided about the specific issues that will be addressed by the group or the anticipated outcomes of their work. Because it is proposed that the group will only meet annually it is not clear that substantive work in this area will be accomplished. In order to enhance professional development in rural areas the applicant proposes offering stipends to support college faculty in converting early childhood professional development courses to distance learning formats. This is a good strategy to address an identified need and potentially impact the knowledge level of early childhood professionals who work with children of high need in rural areas. However, no specifics are provided about how it will be determined which courses will be offered in the distance learning format to ensure that the courses offered will</p>

address the needs of the targeted early childhood educators. The applicant has proposed a comprehensive plan to address the knowledge and competency of the State's early childhood workforce. Because the plan builds upon a workforce knowledge and competency framework that is already in place, the response to this criterion is considered to be high quality and partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	20	11
<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 has clearly described how the proposed plan for supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills and abilities will build upon and enhance the existing professional development system which is managed by the State Department of Education and includes a central early childhood training center and seven regional centers. Additional staff will be added to the regional centers which provide localized training to meet the professional development needs of early childhood programs and professionals in that region. Professional development opportunities that are currently being offered will be continued and the proposed plan describes the additional professional opportunities that will be developed and delivered. A chart is provided that outlines the content of training opportunities, the intended audience of the training, who will deliver the training and whether it is an existing or proposed component of the State's early childhood professional development system. The applicant has not demonstrated how the professional development topics listed align with the State's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals. The plan also includes implementing an early childhood coaching model. Training for coaches will be based on and expand the Early Childhood Coach Training series that has already been developed and piloted in the State. The evaluation of the pilot study will be used to make modifications to the training and to inform ongoing practice. This is an appropriate strategy to ensure that the training is aligned with the objectives of the coaching component of the plan. A coaching certificate program will be developed and implemented in order to ensure that there is an adequate supply of highly skilled early childhood coaches to provide the supports to early childhood learning and development programs and staff that is proposed in this initiative. An Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry will be used to gather workforce data about early childhood educators' education, training, credentials and State career levels. Inclusion of this information will allow for measurement of improvements in the education and qualifications of the State's early childhood workforce. Integrating the calendar of trainings offered within the State into the Registry will make it easier for early childhood practitioners to access this information. The data base will be accessible by the public. The plan includes: incentives for early childhood educators who enroll in the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry and complete core competencies self assessments, develop a professional development plan and keep their records in the Registry updated (Tier Two of the TQRIS), expanding the number of scholarships offered to early childhood educators participating in the TQRIS; and developing a procedure for providing incentives and recognition to early childhood educators who move up a full step on the State's career ladder. These are appropriate strategies for encouraging professional improvement and career advancement. The proposed plan does not include wage enhancement supports although the applicant has identified low wages for child care work in the State as presenting a challenge to professional advancement. The applicant has indicated that all colleges offering early childhood degrees will participate in a collaborative alignment process to develop a course sequence in each early childhood credential, diploma and degree program that is aligned with the Competency Framework. Because the work is anticipated to be completed by May 2014 the targets for the number of aligned institutions as indicated in Table (D)(2)(d)(1) are reasonable and potentially achievable. However, because no explanation is provided for the targets for the number of early childhood educators as listed in that same table a determination of the reasonableness and attainability of those targets is not possible. Table (D)(2)(d)(2) was not included in the applicant's proposal and the narrative section for this criterion does not address setting targets for 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. Much of what is proposed in this criterion builds upon and expands the current professional development system and other work that has been initiated. For this</p>

reason the response to this criterion is considered to be partially implemented. The response has been rated as medium quality partially because section (D)(2)(d)(2) was not addressed.

### 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	10

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

#### Comments on (E)(1)

The applicant has outlined a plan to implement a common statewide kindergarten entry assessment by using the same method as was used to develop and implement the State's early childhood comprehensive assessment (Results Matter). The assessment will be aligned with the State's Early Learning Guidelines and include the Essential Domains of School Readiness. The plan includes a framework for the proposed kindergarten entry assessment outlining the assessment domains, alignment with best practices, the target population, data use, and guiding principles. Replicating a process that has already been shown to be effective in the implementation of a statewide project is a good strategy for the efficient initiation of the kindergarten entry assessment. An Assessment Task Force will advise the development and implementation of the kindergarten entry assessment. The process for selecting the assessment will begin with conducting focus groups with key informants to gather information on current practices and recommended tools, processes for implementation, and potential challenges and barriers. Through this process five to seven potential commercial kindergarten entry readiness assessments will be identified. Obtaining input from key stakeholders early in the process is an excellent strategy. National experts in tests and measurements will be asked to review the reliability and validity of the identified assessments. Other state and national models of implementation will be researched and a protocol for implementation will be developed. A two-phase pilot process is proposed that to provide data to refine and improve the assessment prior to full implementation by the start of the 2014-2015 school year. Implementation steps include providing training and technical assistance through the regional early learning centers and developing an online module and materials for parents. Following implementation, the training and technical assistance will focus on the continuous improvement process. The discussion of training and the implementation steps related to training do not address how the State will assure consistency in administration of the assessment. The issue of inter-rater reliability is particularly important for a state-wide assessment and merits careful planning. The applicant states that data from the kindergarten entry assessment will be reported as part of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System. The fact that the applicant has not identified any supplemental funds beyond RTT-ELC grant funds to support the development and implementation of this component is a concern. The applicant has indicated that school districts will be responsible for the majority of implementation costs of the kindergarten entry assessment beginning in 2014 which is the date for full statewide implementation of the assessment. No further information is provided about other possible sources of funding to offset the costs to school districts. This should be an important consideration so that the new kindergarten entry assessment is not negatively viewed because it creates an additional financial burden to school districts in challenging economic times. Because the State is in the beginning stages of addressing this criterion, the proposed plan is considered to be high quality and not implemented.

	Available	Score
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**(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.**

20

2

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)**

The applicant's response to this criterion provides information that is unclear and disjointed. In addressing the essential data elements the applicant indicates that the system already includes these elements. However, the unique statewide child identifier only appears to include children who are attending a program associated with a school district or that is state funded, or those children who will be identified to participate in a proposed research study. The description of a unique statewide early childhood identifier refers to the Nebraska Early Learning Connections Professional Registry. The description of a unique program site identifier refers to the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry. It is not clear what the relationship is between the two registries or if they are in fact two different registries. In the discussion of program-level data on the program's structure, quality, child suspension and expulsion rates, etc. the applicant addressed early childhood educators and did not illustrate how program level data will be included stating that "through RTTT-ELC funds and development of the of the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry, Nebraska will be able to develop the capacity to track this information on the early childhood educators in the state". A clear connection has not been made between the formative evaluation and research questions that are outlined and the development of a coordinated state early childhood data system. Insufficient detail is provided about the proposed early childhood data system federated system. Although the applicant states that the early childhood data system will meet the data system oversight requirements no other information is provided. The description of the plan to develop the Early Childhood Data System and outline of implementation steps do not address how or if the proposed system will be aligned and interoperable with the Nebraska Student and Staff Record System. Because of the lack of clarity the response to this criterion is considered to be partially implemented and of low quality.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>155</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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 has not implemented a common, statewide kindergarten entry assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades. The applicant addressed selection criterion E1. The response was rated high quality and not implemented which did not place it in the scoring range (at least 14 of the possible 20 points) to receive competitive preference points.

**Absolute Priority**

	<b>Met? Yes/No</b>
<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>The applicant has proposed a wide-ranging plan to develop and transform early learning and development programs throughout the State into an integrated system that increases the quality of early learning and development for all children, in particular children with high needs, so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed. In describing the State's past commitment to improving early learning and development programs the applicant has also illustrated how the proposed plan builds upon successful initiatives to create a statewide system of support for the improvement of all levels of early childhood programs. The State is in the final stages of developing a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and plans to implement it within a year. In order to most effectively and efficiently increase the school readiness of children with high needs the initiatives and resources of the plan are prioritized and geographically targeted. The implementation plan uses statewide and regional structures to deliver services with efforts focused first on targeted communities with children and families with the highest need and then throughout the State. The State's proposal also addresses both invitational priorities: sustaining program effects in the early elementary grades; and encouraging private sector support.</p>	



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # NE-5022

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
 Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
 Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
 Application Status: **Reviewed**  
 Date/Time: **11/17/2011 - 1:20 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	15
<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)
<p>The applicant has simply and clearly demonstrated past commitments to the identified population, but the narrative is lacking in several key areas. The substantial new financial commitment from the private sector is an important factor in demonstrating broad-based commitment. The applicant has made a significant financial investment in early childhood over the past five years and state funding for early childhood programs that serve Children with High Needs has risen about \$75,000,000 in the past two years, from \$155,773,571 (2008) to \$224,914,442 (2011). Given the current economic climate, particularly towards educational initiatives, this is an important investment. The state has also moved funding for early childhood programs to a protected fund, thus safeguarding this funding. The State exceeded their required match for CCDF funds in 2011, demonstrating a commitment to Children with High Needs living in poverty. Throughout this section, the importance of leveraging public-private commitments is evident, and demonstrates a broader commitment across the state, beyond the four major state department's collaboration to provide comprehensive early childhood education. Based on the tables presented, the private contribution in 2010 and 2011 matched the State funding, a significant commitment from the private sector. Increased State funding was accomplished through adding 4 year old children to The Formula (Expanded Equalization Formula), which made more funding available for State Preschool Grants, thus the State was able to fund more programs. The applicant provided evidence that while numbers of children remained relatively constant, funding increased. There is also evidence of important existing legislation to support and maintain this funding. The applicant provided evidence that there has been a significant financial investment in reaching Children with High Needs, particularly through public-private financial investments, and their participation in the state early childhood education system. Again citing the fact that the Children with High Needs in Federally funded programs has remained stable (14,500 participating each year), the applicant provide evidence that the number of children served in state funded preschool programs has increased a modest 1.2%. Public-private partnerships have increased the programs and services available to Children with High Needs. In addition, citing the increased funding resulting for the formula changed described in the previous section, the applicant implies that because more funds are available to serve children and families, then there is increased access to high quality environments for Children with High Needs. The major provider for children with High Needs in the State is Head</p>

Start and Early Head Start. From the data presented in the tables there has not been a significant increase in the total number of Children with High Needs that have been served since 2007; in light of the significant increase in funding – more work is needed – and planned through the new initiative to reach these populations. Of note is that the applicant is reaching children with disabilities included in the data regarding services to Children with High Needs. The current status of the “building blocks” for a high quality system is discussed, with some areas more substantially described than others. The applicant provides a discussion of health promotion practices in terms of social emotional and mental health initiatives citing technical assistance to providers in this area and through family engagement strategies. The philosophy, approach, and overall description of how families are engaged – or the role of families in the system – is not discussed. While the tables list the strategies, the list does not fully address how these are integrated into the state system. The same comments apply to effective data practices. However, there are also presented, substantial components of the system regarding standards for the 3-5 population and the birth to 3 populations that are aligned with current Head Start (HS) and NE K-12 standards and will be revised under the RTT-ELC project to align with new or revised HS and K-12 standards, respectively. In the area of Comprehensive Assessment Systems, child outcomes do not examine adult-child interaction, a critically important area. Screening measures are not in place for several of the program types or systems. Professional development is addressed through technical assistance available throughout the state; training based on needs assessments and surveys. Topics are relevant and encourage best practice in terms of child outcomes, inclusion of children with disabilities and Core Competencies. There is no Kindergarten Assessment in place at this time; therefore the applicant could not provide evidence of the status of children at kindergarten entry. There is also no system in place to evaluate program quality across different types of program so this data cannot be presented.

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

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 has identified five commendable goals that encompass the key components of a quality system, strengthening: children, families, early childhood professionals, community, and early childhood systems. These goals were translated into four core components that reflect the important areas of the RCC-ELC competition and are the focus of the Nebraska initiative: shared leadership, high quality educators, comprehensive systems of wrap-around services, and unified data systems. Barriers or current challenges to a comprehensive system are evident in the choice of goals and objectives, and include: competing priorities in existing structures that support the early childhood system and delivery of services; misalignment of state policies and procedures and need for more systemic support for the development and maintenance of high quality programs is needed; lack of focused and consistent support for ELDPs by the two major state departments responsible for early childhood, the Department of Education, (NDE) and the Department of Health and Human Services (NeHHS); Early Learning and Development Standards for children birth to eight are not aligned with existing Kindergarten Early Learning Guidelines; health screening measures are not in place for all publicly funded preschool and all ELDPs; the geographic diversity of the state and the largely rural population challenge the implementation of professional development and access to training is problematic; early learning coursework (higher education) is not aligned with the Workforce Competency Framework; educators do not have skills for data-based decision-making and use of assessments. In terms of clearly articulating the rationale for the projects goals and objectives, the strongest section with supporting evidence was in the selection of geographic target areas, identifying current performance issues in schools, school failure, and social and behavioral problems of students, K-12. In the rationale for selecting the goals and objectives for the project, the applicant employed circular reasoning, e.g., by building a unified data system we will improve program quality, without saying how the data produced by this system would actually inform instruction and program development. The problems presented and listed above were not clearly articulated, e.g., "there is lack of infrastructure" and how this lack of infrastructure impacts on the system. Goals and objectives are then identified "therefore we need to build a strong infrastructure ... and this will sustain program change and innovation and provide a means to leverage resources to implement change on a broad basis." These statements imply that the change will achieve the desired goal, however the how and why, specifically a sound rationale, is not presented adequately. Another concern regarding this area is that the change is targeted at existing state-funded systems and not at the entire system or those systems (e.g., those receiving CCDF funds) who are serving the majority of children with high needs. Of considerable concern is that a very low percentage of these programs (10%) are targeted for participation in the planned QRIS system (TQRIS in the application) by the end of the project period. The applicant did not provide their clear definition of "System of Wrap-around Early Childhood Care" and the discussion did not match the typical definition of wrap-around care (child care provided at times other than education programs, typically used in Head Start). Within this core

component, the applicant presents objectives focused on health and safety. While health and safety factors that clearly address school readiness, there are additional readiness factors that are not described or addressed. In the summary of the plan, the applicant states that the plan responds directly to the needs of the NE community, schools, families, and children; however, a more evidence based discussion would strengthen this summary. The timelines are global, and specific activities to meet objectives and achieve the goals identified are not provided in detail. The objectives are not provided in measurable statements, persons or entities responsible are not identified. The rationale for selection of focus areas reflects the identified needs in the state and the gaps in the system. In the rationale for selection of (C) (3) the applicant is asked to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness. The applicant has limited the discussion to health and safety standards and the expansion of the health consultation model. There is not sufficient evidence in this section that addresses the criteria for this section. The applicant also describes engaging and supporting families (C) (4) as a strong priority of state leadership, however this was not strongly supported in either section A1 or in this section describing the needs and gaps in the system.

	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)**



Several of the components of the section are substantially implemented, particularly around leadership, governance, and collaboration. The remaining components are in various stages of implementation, e.g., engaging stakeholders in the process, will be addressed within the scope of the project. There is not a substantive plan presented in this section for implementing those components that are not currently in place. The response falls within the rubric of partially implemented with a medium quality response. The applicant has demonstrated implementation of an organizational structure regarding leadership, governance, and decision-making. The leadership is strong, with membership of highest ranking positions from the two lead agencies, NeHHS and NDE and the state governor, which will be critical to assuring implementation of the project. Operationally, the structure includes a good use of a working state council, the existing state ECICC whose membership includes HHS – the lead agency and DE – as well as a range of stakeholders including, special education, Head Start, Maternal and Child Health, licensing agencies, parents, parents of children with disabilities, and others. It is important to recognize that the ECICC has been engaged in identifying barriers and developing several types of recommendations regarding the key components of the proposed system, but the applicant failed to adequately discuss the barriers and recommendations in detail. The decision-making process is described in terms of resolving disputes, and not the full range of variables that need to be addressed in decision-making, for example, what kind of decisions are made by which agency, when are collaborative decisions made, and if certain decisions are made by one agency only. The applicant states that there is strong collaboration but it is not evident as to how this collaboration will be employed for decision-making. MOUs and letters of commitment are provided as required. Two strategies for including stakeholders, at levels other than the State, are described: task forces will be developed to implement certain goals and objectives and an annual Summit will be convened to encourage support and provide information regarding the initiative. The Summit is expected to also assist with implementation and help sustain the project after its completion. Several components of a High Quality Plan to implement these strategies were not strongly documented in this section.

	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)**

Virtually all of the categories of funding are flat, with the exception of Federal Medicaid and CHIP funding and State contributions to Part C which increase slightly each year over the four year period. Through presenting this data, the applicant is stating that funding is not anticipated to increase while services are projected to improve to serve greater numbers of children, particularly Children with High Needs. This in itself is commendable, however, the applicant does not provide evidence of how existing funds will be leveraged to accomplish this objective. The applicant identifies costs in broad strokes across core areas: data systems, training (workforce improvement), regional community-based programming, tools, and private investments. These costs that cut across objectives and funding sources are not clear, nor are they directly linked to the stated objectives. The appropriateness of the costs are also discussed along with sustainability which is confusing. In general, the costs identified are not directly aligned with each of the goals and associated objectives and activities of the initiative. The applicant provides cost allocations with insufficient detail, by percentages, with the lowest (10%) allocated to the State and the highest (60%) to support the early childhood workforce. Sustainability is not strongly supported, although private funding is considerable and may not be subject to the vicissitudes of a difficult economic climate at the State level. The applicant does not provide a clear vision for future sustainability and it seems as if realistic costs are not being addressed to sustain this system. An example of this is that the applicant states that there are not additional funds needed to sustain the integrated data system beyond the current commitment because of a reduction in the need for personnel.

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

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

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--

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

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

(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(1)**

The applicant states that the State is completing the planning phase and moving into implementation, placing this component of the system at the partially implemented level. The plan is at best a medium quality response, with insufficient documentation/discussion/evidence that program standards address all areas outlined in the definition. The standards are minimally linked to the licensing system. The TQRIS System is based on the existing QRIS system piloted in Nebraska and three other states. The system was based on quality research and standards. The resulting information was used to inform policy and continuing research and was used in Nebraska to guide implementation and revision of the content standards. However, the applicant did not provide information regarding these identified issues, how they were used/or will be used to improve the Early Learning Standards, and/or how they were used to inform implementation of the TQRIS. The Plan presented is clear and the standards are measurable, moving up in Tiers is linked to higher scores as determined by valid and reliable the respective Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) and the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) for classroom based programs, which provide evidence of teacher-child interaction. Comparable valid and reliable instruments are used for child care home programs. The ERS scales are not used until Tier 3 ratings, based on presented timelines it could be as much as 3 years before a program begins to learn about the impact that environment has on early learning and development and how these ratings can inform teaching strategies. The applicant states that the TQRIS is linked to licensing, in that a license is required to participate. However there is no discussion of actually linking licensing to participation, encouraging programs that are not licensed to reach the status for participation, qualifying for incentives, and ultimately improving quality, moving unlicensed programs to the quality improvement system.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	15	4

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)**

Although the applicant describes a TORIS system that is in place (QRIS), it is not used to provide baseline data, and baseline is reported as zero. Based on this evidence the applicant's level of implementation is not or minimally implemented. The goals established for participation are not ambitious in that by the end of year 2, only 10% of the required programs will be participating, although by the end of the project 100% of state funded programs and Head Start will be participating. More significantly only 10% of programs receiving CCDF funds will be participating at the end of the project, indicating a relatively low impact on Children with High Needs. Licensed child care programs are even lower at 8% by the end of the project. Help to working families is minimal, and highest in relation to families of children who are 4 years of age, based on the state's including this population in the equalization formula, thus providing free services to 4 year old children. In later sections there is also a discussion of free services to the birth to three populations through the State Grants Program and other early intervention funding. Program participation will be required by the programs receiving state funds and licensed programs will be encouraged to participate. The incentives described to encourage other programs not required to participate are minimal at this point with a statement about future collaborative efforts to identify incentives. The place where the most significant incentive, higher reimbursement rates, is identified is in relation to CCDF; however these incentives are not available until the program reaches Tier 5. This incentive, as reported in the targets, does not appear to be expected to result in a large number of programs participating, as the number by the end of the project period is only 10% of the entire number of programs in this category.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</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 rating and monitoring the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

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

The applicant has proposed a plan that identifies valid and reliable instruments to be used for Tier 2 and 3 ratings, with increased emphasis on Tier 4 and 5 ratings using additional instruments to examine social and emotional development. Valid and reliable instruments have been identified for both center-based and family child care programs. The TQRIS will also use Head Start Performance Standards throughout the system. Programs can also achieve 5 ratings through alternative certification by NAEYC and NAFCC. The applicant has provided sound evidence of training and reliability of monitors or raters. Monitors will be trained by qualified observers who have at least 90% inter-rater reliability, and the raters must achieve at least 85% inter-rater reliability. Attention has been given to maintaining the quality and effectiveness of monitoring in that monitors must re-establish reliability ratings ever 10 visits or yearly (whichever comes first). Monitoring with appropriate frequency was minimally addressed. The application process for participation was not described. Tier 1 and 2 applicants can request assessments for Tier 3 "when they are ready", however the applicant does not provide criteria to determine readiness for assessment nor a timeline for the response to this request. Tier 3, 4, and 5 are reassessed every three years. The timing for reassessment appears to move a program up very slowly, it seems that it could possible take up to 9 years for a Tier 2 to reach a Tier 5 rating. The applicant did not provide information as to whether this process could move faster, but did describe re-assessment time changing because of an apparent change in the program status. Dissemination to parents specifically regarding quality ratings and participation in the TQRIS system is not included in the State's plan. Information to parents was described as available on-line through the licensing roster, and provides the basic information about a program, as well as information about program participation in food and subsidy programs, and national accreditation. The applicant did not state that TQRIS information would be added to this roster. The existence of the TQRIS system would be made know to parents through a public awareness campaign. A currently available publication designed to assist parents in selecting child care, published in English and Spanish, will be updated and will "advise parents to ask providers about their involvement

in TQRIS". The applicant has not established implementation of this component of the TQRIS System, and although the tools for monitoring meet the criterion, the other criteria in this section are minimally addressed.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	20	5

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

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

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

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

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

(2) The number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(4)**

The components of promoting access to High Quality Programs are minimally implemented. In lieu of any implementation, the applicant must present a High Quality Plan to promote access. The plan presented does not meet the criteria for a high quality plan. Most significantly, targets for implementation are not ambitious based on the information presented, with the majority of programs remaining in Tier 1 at the end of the project (3550 of total programs 4327) and only 77 of those programs at 5 at the end of the project. The applicant states that 58 programs will enter the TQRIS program at Tier 5, indicating that the project will actually only advance 19 new programs to the Tier 5 level. Support strategies that will be provided at no cost to all ECEs and ELDPs are presented in a list and are a good starting point to provide access to the TQRIS system. However the implementation methods are not adequately discussed. There is a broad reference to the existing training and technical assistance system in the state; a pilot is in place to provide coaching, and guidelines for the coaching component to be built out and extend the coaching programs across the state. This training at no cost will be provided to promote access and additional trainers will be hired to meet the currently unmet demand for training and technical assistance. Cost is identified as a barrier to participating in the TQRIS, however other barriers are not addressed in this plan. The plan presented does not provide key goals for training and detailed activities. Timelines are very broad with most of the work identified as the needs assessment, focus group and planning of the training, and not on actual training to promote access to the TQRIS. The number of Children with High Needs will have increased access to programs that participate through the grants program and the expanding of ½ day programs to full day and in wrap-around services for children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start, however the chart does not present an ambitious target in that only 12% or 2,812 of the 23,438 children in programs receiving CCDF funding will be in programs in the top Tiers.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	15	10

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

**Comments on (B)(5)**



The applicant will use an outside evaluator to validate whether the TQRIS system – referred to as the QRIS system in the appendix and the Step Up to Quality System in the narrative – accurately reflects differential levels of program quality and to assess the extent to which change in quality ratings are related to child progress. A High Quality Plan (provided by the evaluator in Appendix B-08) describes two studies. Specifically the analysis will enable the evaluation to determine if QRIS rating level predicts process or structural quality or differences in professional belief; and, to determine which levels are significantly different from which other levels. Valid and reliable environmental rating scales will be used to measure program quality. Timelines are presented in the plan. The second study examines rating level against child outcomes. The evaluation plan is comprehensive and addresses the criteria. The applicant also provides a discussion in the narrative of four process studies that will tell the State how the QRIS is being implemented. A detailed plan for these studies, with key goals, strategies activities, benchmarks and timeline, as well as other components of a High Quality Plan are minimally addressed and supporting evidence for the plan is not provided for the four studies.

**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>15</b>	<b>8</b>

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)**

Nebraska has standards that have been in place since 2005-06. These are based on sound research, national standards, and are aligned with both the Ne K-12 Standards and Head Start Standards. As part of the project, the EL Standards will be revised and realigned with the newly revised K-12 and HS standards. The applicant provides statements regarding the incorporation of standards into practice, however in response to the "standards that are used state-wide" only the state-funded preschools are required to use the standards. Several statements were included in the narrative that using the standards is "voluntary" for other programs. It was not clear how Head Start Programs will be engaged in applying these standards. Training on standards is proposed in the HHS licensing revisions for child care. In the initial discussion, on "culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriateness" the applicant refers to national best practices and standards and provides an abbreviated bibliography that were used as sources for the development of the original guidelines. However the process – how the sources were incorporated – was not explained. The applicant did not present the elements of a High Quality Plan for revising and aligning the revised standards, incorporating them into use, curriculum and activities, comprehensive assessment, and core competencies. While the existence of professional development opportunities and resources was discussed, a systematic, High Quality Plan for implementation of professional development was not described in detail. Professional development activities were presented in which the state will provide workshops on each domain of development. These workshops will begin with awareness and are followed by more in depth

training on each domain and are also available through independent study. Parent workshops are planned to promote understanding of child development. While the applicant made statements regarding the criteria and provided descriptions of the components of this section, a key element is that the state includes evidence for each of the sections. Evidence was provided regarding cultural, linguistic, and language appropriateness and for alignment with K-12 state standards. However significant evidence was not discussed regarding how the standards are incorporated into curricula and activities and the comprehensive assessment system.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	15	6

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 states that several elements supporting effective use of comprehensive assessment systems are in place. These include the identification of a formative assessment measure and a comprehensive training system. The components that are implemented appear to be limited to implementation in state-funded preschools, Head Start, Early Head Start, Part C and Part B-619 programs. Evidence was not presented regarding implementation across the variety of programs present in the state. While licensed child care programs (serving high numbers of Children with High Needs) are noted in the section regarding understanding the purpose and use of each type of assessment included in the system, these programs are not specifically included in the other sections. By limiting programs that can participate in both the TQRIS and the Results Now (comprehensive assessment system) to state-funded programs described above, the impact on Children with High Needs is diminished. Though the pilot that was described as part of the Results Matter plan, 10 child care programs will be selected to participate each year. This is not significant in terms of the actual number of these programs in the state, but rather a very small percentage. Screening and a Kindergarten Entry Assessment will be added to the Comprehensive Assessment System. A concern regarding the Kindergarten Assessment is that it was described as a Reading Readiness Assessment. Reading alone does not meet the criteria, as the entry assessment must address a full range of readiness skills. Of some concern in this section is the lack of evidence of either High Quality implementation or a High Quality Plan for implementation. This judgment is based on the definition of a High Quality n Plan, in which several elements are not fully described. In addition to the above comments on types of programs and children with High Needs, clear timelines and benchmarks are not indicated except by year, activities are not broken down into key activities, financial resources are minimally discussed. This application outlines an approach in which the Plan for rolling out the revised or added components of the Comprehensive Assessment System will be developed in the first three years with only the most limited implementation in the fourth year.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	15	5

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 applicant addresses a progression of standards to address this component and identifies several sources and varying degrees of implementation across these standards. Health and Safety standards are included in the Early Learning Guidelines and appear to be substantially implemented. The Teaching Pyramid, supporting social-emotional development is being piloted in four sites. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP CCC) will be incorporated into the TQRIS system Tiers in Year 2 after this assessment is evaluated. Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education programs will be included with the NAP CCC after the above mentioned pilots are evaluated. At best, the establishment of a progression of standards in this area is partially implemented. Training and supporting Early Childhood Educators is in the planning phase, with HCR to develop a network of HCR consultants who will train and support the ECEs. This training will be based on a model that has been researched and supported at various levels for a number of years, however evidence of this research and support was not provided to document this statement. The general quality of the response is moderate to low (elements and definition of a High Quality Plan are not adequately addressed). The applicant proposes, in most sections, that a plan "will be developed" or "options will be explored," "resources will be identified", as the major activities of the Initiative. These concepts are not, however, addressed in a fully developed plan. The amount of detail expected in a High Quality Plan, is missing in this section; i.e., specific rationale, how the system will be designed, who specifically will implement the design, and how the design will be implemented overall: specific and detailed activities and clear timelines with benchmarks for evaluation of progress. Absence of evidence on which to judge the application is also problematic. For example, a table references Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (ESPDT), but actually no specific alignment of the proposed screening measure (in the Comprehensive Assessment) to ESPDT and/or to Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) as requested in the criteria. Documentation was not provided regarding the State's existing and future resources for Children with High Needs and sustainability was also not documented. The application did state that the local agencies who received funding for a "Health Resource Hub" would be asked to consider maintaining the Hub after the project and there was a commitment required in the RFP to provided in-kind contributions, e.g. space for the Hub. These statements cannot be accepted as documentation or evidence as defined by the criteria. Baseline data on Children with High Needs showed that substantial numbers and percentages of this population are receiving screening through ESPDT. The targets for subsequent years are not ambitious, ranging from an increase of 1% in year one to a total increase of 14% by the end of the project. The current or baseline percentage is 81% and the applicant projects an increase to 95% by 2015. It is not clear whether the applicant plans to use the ESPDT screening as their screening mechanism, to screen all children receiving ESPDT screening with the new screening tool, or to add to those screened by ESPDT with the new tool. Thus, the data presented does not support the plan.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

(a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;

(b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and

(c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(4)**

Historically and philosophically, the State has considered and supports the critical role that families play in their children's growth and development. The applicant states that family engagement standards will address the Federal criteria. In the TQRIS system the strategies go from unidirectional in Tier 1 to bi-directional in the higher Tiers. There is not a rationale as to why the strategy (unidirectional engagement) was identified as an indication of quality, or why it is appropriate to the population. This initial strategy is passive or one-way; a parent handbook will be distributed. There is no discussion as to the appropriateness of the handbook, reading level, language, or competencies of the family or parent(s) in being able to read and understand the handbook. Daily communication was also identified as a strategy; however the nature of this communication or the content was not documented. A more detailed description of the progression on family engagement standards is not evident, for example, a description of how the standards will progressively address engaging fathers and intergenerational activities. In the discussion of increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported to implement the family engagement strategies these activities continue to be targeted at the state-funded preschool programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Part C and Part B-619 programs. Minimal outreach to child care and other programs will occur, and not until year 4, with only 10% of those programs targeted. This discussion provided little evidence that a significant percentage of Children with High Needs and their families will benefit. Only one resource was identified to help promote family support and engagement, NET (the public broadcasting network in Nebraska). A well-documented plan or rationale, outcomes, objectives, timelines, and evaluation of effectiveness are not provided, nor are other resources or programs in the state identified, leveraged, or incorporated in this activity. There is an established system for training, the statewide Early Childhood Learning Connection Development Regions, providing training and consultation to early learning and development programs. The University of Nebraska Extension Educators will provide support to Early Childhood Educators using the Family-Centered Coaching Model by the end of 2013, the third year of implementation. The Quality Portfolio process will provide professional development opportunities to explore and examine family engagement strategies, and do represent a valid progression from Core Competencies (partnerships with children and families), to Early Learning Guidelines (regarding family engagement and including information about the adult's role in supporting learning and development) to the Family Connections Workshop (role of family and community in educating children).

**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>
<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: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)
<p>In 2008, the State implemented a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. In referring to the appendix, statements were provided indicating that the Framework was evidence-based, using widely respected and accepted standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Standards for Initial and Advance Professional Preparation Programs, the Council for Professional Recognition Child Development Associate Standards, the National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs (NCATE), the Head Start Performance Standards, and the expertise of many early childhood professionals working in the early childhood field. This Framework will be revised under the RTT-ELC Initiative. Based on the discussion presented in App. D-01, the Alignment of the Framework with the Federal definition, the applicant provided evidence that the Framework meets the Federal definition. There was limited evidence, with the exception of a statement about adapting the environment for children with disabilities, that the needs of special populations, and working with Children with High Needs, were included in the Framework. The applicant provided the NE Early Learning Career Levels, identifying 6 levels and skills. Skills were described as "skills one should have..." or "skills one might have..." There was no evidence documenting how the applicant determined what these skills should or might be. The TQRIS System will use the career levels to determine Tier ratings and specifies the percentage of staff that must be at a certain career level for rating. The details of this were not provided, i.e., the specific alignment of Tiers and career levels. Partnerships with higher education were described as reviewed and some higher education organizations "informally agreed" to integrate the Framework into their coursework. Some professors also agreed to revise their course syllabi to align with NAEYC Standards of Professional Practice and NE Core</p>



Competencies. These informal agreements and revisions, while supportive, do not meet the criteria for a High Quality Plan. Partnerships with higher education were described as reviewed and some higher education organizations "informally agreed" to integrate the Framework into their coursework. Some professors also agreed to revise their course syllabi to align with NAEYC Standards of Professional Practice and NE Core Competencies. These informal agreements and revisions, while supportive, do not meet the criteria for a High Quality Plan. Based on the discussion presented in App. D-01, the Alignment of the Framework with the federal definition, the applicant provided evidence that the Framework meets the federal definition. There was limited evidence, with the exception of a statement about adapting the environment for children with disabilities, that the needs of special populations, and working with Children with High Needs, were included in the Framework. The applicant provided the NE Early Learning Career Levels, identifying 6 levels and skills. Skills were described as "skills one should have..." , or "skills one might have...". There was not evidence documenting how the applicant determined what these skills should or might be. The TQRIS System will use the career levels to determine tier ratings and specifies the percentage of staff who must be at a certain career level for rating. The details of this were not provided, i.e., the specific alignment of tiers and career levels. Partnerships with higher education were described as reviewed and some higher education organizations "informally agreed" to integrate the Framework into their coursework. Some professors also agreed to revise their course syllabi to align with NAEYC Standards of Professional Practice and NE Core Competencies. These informal agreements and revisions, while supportive, do not meet the criteria for a High Quality Plan.

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	20	8

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to improve the effectiveness and retention of Early Childhood Educators who work with Children with High Needs, with the goal of improving child outcomes by--

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

(b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;

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

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

(1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and

(2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

#### Comments on (D)(2)

There is a system of professional development in place, managed by the Nebraska Department of Education that delivers professional development through a central Early Childhood Training Center and seven regional ESU (Education Service Units). Regional coordinators at the ESUs provide local training using a variety of media. The applicant states that this training network will be expanded by adding seven additional trainers or coordinators. The applicant listed many topics and areas for professional development, but these were not discussed in direct relationship to the Workforce Competencies. Rather they described general training in early childhood. Although the topic areas for training were provided in a list, there was a limited discussion of the implementation plan or clearly identified targets for improvement of the system. The involvement of the university system reflected the involvement described in the previous section, with limited strategies for coordination and collaboration. Evidence was not provided to document an increase in the numbers of institutions and professional development programs that are aligned with the Framework. The number of ECE who have been trained was presented, but a target number for new training was not documented. The data system described will track the number and percentage of ECE who are progressing to higher levels, however the applicant provides a rationale that tracking will increase numbers and help in retention, and evidence for this is not provided. The data system will be web-based and available to the public, however no strategies were presented to inform the public of its availability or how to use the data base. Challenges to professional development were listed, and financial stress, low paid workforce, and lack of incentive were identified as challenges, however financial incentives to participating in training were minimal. As noted above, there was relatively no evidence, with the exception of a statement about adapting the environment for children with disabilities, that the needs of special populations, and working with Children with High Needs, were included in the Framework or in the professional development opportunities.

## 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)

Since there is no current Kindergarten Entry Assessment in plan in Nebraska, the reviewer is examining this Focused Investment Area for evidence of a High Quality Plan, as described in the definition. In the introduction to the discussion, the applicant states that the process for implementation of the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (which has been named KERA) will build on the successful process used for implementing the Results Matter initiative. It is interesting to note, however in the next paragraph, the applicant refers to the Technical Report from the National Research Council, as a "superb framework for implementing school readiness assessment." There is evidence presented for the quality of the Results Matter implementation however this second process does not support or add to the understanding of how the Kindergarten Entry Assessment will be implemented. The KERA will be closely aligned with the Early Learning Standards; however the process for this alignment is not described. The charts outline steps to be taken in developing the KERA, however the strategies – e.g., how the task force will work, are not clearly defined. The timelines are very problematic. In the narrative, the applicant states that implementation of KERA will begin immediately and identifies January – June 2012 six months for extensive activities, convening of advisory groups, work groups, and task forces, selection of instrument or instruments, validity and reliability testing, several other preparation tasks and identification and training of initial pilot sites. Another example of inadequate timing is in reference to implementation of the assessment by the 2014-15 school year, Activities 3f and 3g area all planned to occur in one month – March 2013. Given the scope of the activities to determine the training needs of all constituents and train 10 new pilot sites, one month is not a realistic estimation of time needed. The applicant states that Race to the Top funds will be used to fund the implementation of KERA, and LEAs will support implementation in years 3 and 4.

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

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)**

The applicant did not fully address the definition of Essential Data Elements or evidence that a data system is in place, nor was there a High Quality Plan, with supporting evidence, provided. The applicant described very minimal components of an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies, as in place. For example, "assigning a unique identifier to children enrolled in various programs" does not provide supportive evidence to document implementation of unique identifiers across all of the constituents and entities (children, programs, early childhood educators). The identifiers are assigned to state-funded programs and Federally funded programs, others will have identifiers assigned on a voluntary basis. No plan was presented to encourage these other programs to become part of the system. A discussion of site identifiers was not provided for programs or professionals beyond state-funded programs, with the exception of a brief discussion of the TORIS system and the registry. There were limited elements of a High Quality Plan identified. As evidenced in the entire application, a statement asserting that an activity will be done, e.g. "the program will enable uniform data collection" does not provide evidence that there is a high quality plan to accomplish this activity. Timelines were even more vague and general than in other sections. There were general statements that the new system would be integrated into the current longitudinal data system but the absence of how this would be done, by whom, with benchmarks and timelines indicating successful implementation. In reference to information collected on demographics the applicant cited "extensive information is collected" but the content of that information was not documented. Demographics on Early Childhood Educators were cited as "demographics on public school teachers" are collected, and that the RTT-ELC initiative will develop a registry that will be able to track this information for others. Child information regarding attendance and participation referred to "inconsistency" across programs, and that the registry will provide a picture of the child's learning experiences, however there were no references to participation and attendance. Regarding uniform data collection and easy access and entry of information a cross-system data work group has been operating since 2003, and through various continuing projects, 12 indicators (medical home, early care and education, parent education, family support and mental health) have been identified and are currently being used to gather information. The Summit recommended that policy barriers to accessing and sharing information must be removed, but these policy barriers, as well as how they will be removed, were not documented. The 2011 Summit on data was the single reference to disseminating this information. The time frames for the accomplishments of the tasks are very general – with some groups meeting annually (4 times) to accomplish major tasks, and other activities and timelines difficult to match to the narrative (different terms used in charts vs. narrative, e.g. the Inaugural Nebraska Early Childhood Research Conference – cited in Activity 31h is not described in the narrative..

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

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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 has not already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets the selection criterion (E) (1). The applicant has not addressed the selection criterion (E)(1) to earn a score of at least 70 per cent of the maximum points. The plan presented for implementing a Kindergarten Entry Assessment provided very little evidence to document how the activities would be accomplished. There were several statements that asserted that the plan would address the criteria (restating the criteria) but the applicant also failed to describe a plan that would address all types of programs serving young children, birth to five, and in particular those children with high needs.

**Absolute Priority**

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

As stated above, philosophically the applicant made many statements and has historically engaged in - and identified - many activities and strategies that would appear to improve and coordinate systems of early education and impact on all children (birth to eight [identified for this application]) in the state. The application failed to meet the requirements in several areas, but most significantly, there was not a coherent and comprehensive plan to address how the State will build this system. The needs, beyond issues that related to geographic diversity of the state, were not discussed in sufficient detail to build a plan. It was evident from statements that these needs, if cited and discussed, might have lead to a better understanding of and a rationale for the components that the applicant presented. Specific project activities for better recruitment of programs and providers who serve children with High Needs and who those children are, were not comprehensively addressed. Although four state agencies were identified in Sections A and B that would be collaborating, the lead agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education were the two entities that were identified throughout the application to conduct most of the activities, with the other two entities playing tangential parts, and rarely identified in the action plans. The application failed to present a coherent picture of how this reform agenda would look and operate. The stated outcomes, while matching the RTT-ELC identified goals, did not illustrate how these outcomes would reform/change the system in Nebraska. Of particular note, was the absence of recruitment of the workforce and programs who serve great numbers of children in the state with High Needs for the TQRIS. When these programs were discussed, their participation was consistently noted as voluntary. Incentives to encourage participation were also minimal. Family participation and disseminating information to families was another area of weakness of this application. In general, families were passive recipients of information. Strategies to include families on committees, workgroups, and in leadership positions were not concrete, extensively explored, and culturally matched when including families was included in membership lists. The entire commitment to cultural relevance was minimal. The overarching weaknesses of the application were: failure to present the High Quality Plan as defined by the criterion, failure to provide evidence to document needs and initiatives, and a failure to include clear descriptions and evidence of the needs or barriers in the state that were to be addressed to meet the stated outcomes.





Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

Technical Review Form Page



Application # NE-5022

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 11:27 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, 20. Includes detailed text for each criterion (a-d).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

The Early Learning Nebraska Initiative (ELN) is Nebraska's response to the RTT-ELC. The ELN is based on strong partnerships between and among the Departments of Health and Human Services, the lead agency for the initiative, and Education and the University of Nebraska. (a) Nebraska has demonstrated their past commitment to early learning and development documented in the increased funding for early childhood programs for all children, with special attention to children with high needs. Even as funding and enrollment (14,500) in federal Title 1 and IDEA Parts B and C has remained stable, state funded preschool funding has increased along with enrollment. Children with high needs served in state funded preschool programs have increased from 5,510 to 6,816, a total increase of 1,300 or 1.2%. This information is documented in Table (A)(1)-5. Table (A)(1)-4 provides documentation that state funding has increased from \$155.7M in 2008 to \$224.9M in 2011. While the NDE Office of Early Childhood Education Grant Program budget remains fairly stable (\$3.5M), the state is able to fund new programs because four-year old children are included in the state school funding equalization formula. The direct result is more dollars to meet the needs of high need families and children, thereby increasing access to high quality environments for children with high needs. This Formula aid for early childhood has increased from \$2.2 in 2008 to \$11.9 in 2011. Inclusion of young children in the school funding formula is a strategy that increases the likelihood of sustained funding over time. Nebraska Child Care subsidy amounts and rates of reimbursement under the Child Care and Development Funds have increased. State contributions for child care subsidies under CCDF are almost equal to the amount of federal dollars received to help low income families access high quality early learning programs. Nebraska exceeded the required MOE for each of the past five years, exceeding it by \$32.5M in 2011. Additionally, funding for the early learning and development programs operated by schools and Educational Service Units has tripled over the past six years. The state has been successful in leveraging private funding for early childhood programs. Partnerships with private funders support Building Brighter Futures, a community driven response to disparities in achievement, Teachers Education and Compensation (TEACH) a scholarship program for early childhood educators and the Early Childhood Grant program are funded through an endowment established in 2006. The endowment funding, comprised of \$60M in private funds has distributed grant awards to public schools in partnership with community programs. Evidence of

the funding is found on Table (A) (1)-5. In addition, a home visitation pilot originally funded at \$200,000 is now established as an ongoing RFP program with funding at \$600,000 per year. b-Nebraska state taken specific actions to increase in the number of children, with high needs, participating in early learning and development programs. These actions include broadening their school funding equalization formula to include four-year olds and adopting policies that encourage collaboration with Head Start and other community-based programs serving high needs children. Participation of children with high needs in state-funded preschool programs has increased from 5,510 in 2008 to 6,816 in 2011, a total increase of 1,300. Numbers of children receiving subsidies for enrollment in private early learning and development programs (ELDP) have increased from 21,583 in 2007 to 23,292 in 2010. (c) Nebraska provided evidence of existing early learning and development legislation that have contributed to increased funding and enrollment. The legislation authorizing the inclusion of four-year old children in Nebraska's Primary, Elementary and Secondary Equalization Formula combined with the Nebraska Early Childhood Grant program legislation encourages collaboration between schools and early childhood providers and provides up to 50% of the funding to operate early childhood classrooms. Another policy requires schools using multiple funding sources to collaborate with other partners, and implement sliding fee scales to ensure families with high needs children have access to the programs. The Early Childhood Education Grant Program, Birth – 3, is funded through an endowment established in 2006 by state law and an amendment to the Nebraska State Constitution. Nebraska, through legislation, created an integrated early childhood council that brought together three different councils to form a unified group to advise the Governor and the legislature, and advise and assist state agencies regarding issues in early childhood care and education, birth through age eight. Legislation was signed in 2005 that established the Home Visitation Programs. The Buffet Early Childhood Institute is a new research, policy and teaching institute funded through a gift by the Buffet Early Childhood Fund to the University of Nebraska Foundation. The Institute will serve a critical role in the state, providing a central early childhood academic focus for three primary areas: an integrated program of early childhood research and scholarship; teaching and professional development; and outreach and policy concerning the early childhood years. Nebraska has administrative code in place that requires state funded programs to use Results Matter in Nebraska, the state early childhood assessment system. (d) Nebraska provided documentation in the narrative of the application to explain current efforts in all of the key areas that form the building block for a high quality early learning and development system. As stated in the application they have comprehensive Early Learning Guidelines for ages 3-5 in 2005, and Early Learning Guidelines for age birth – 3, developed in 2006 that address the essential domains of school readiness [Table (A)(1)-6]. School districts applying for the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant must document how they will use the Guidelines in support of the curriculum. Nebraska completed a nature education supplement to the Early Learning Guidelines in 2008. The Guidelines are aligned with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and with the Nebraska K-12 Standards. Work is underway to revise the Guidelines to align with the new Head Start Performance Standards and the revised Nebraska K-12 Standards. Nebraska has implemented the assessment system in 2006 entitled Results Matter. It is a child and family and program outcomes measurement system designed and implemented to improve programs and supports for children birth to age 5. There is a state regulation in place that requires all state-funded early childhood programs, special education programs and a majority of Head Start and Early Head Start programs to use the state assessment system. The child outcomes component of Results Matter measures young children's progress using authentic child assessment and online reporting. Beginning in 2012-13 Teaching Strategies Gold will be added to the system. The TS Gold has been cross walked with the Nebraska Early Learning Standards. Nebraska currently does not require screening measures or measures of the quality of adult-child interactions for state funded programs. Head Start, Early Head Start, IDEA funded programs, Early Childhood Grant programs and early learning and development programs participating in Nurturing Healthy Behaviors/Teaching Pyramid sites do implement a comprehensive assessment system. This information is documented in Table (A) (1)-8. Health Promotion practices in Nebraska early learning and development programs are implemented through the research-based Teaching Pyramid program. Pyramid is a framework for promoting children's social-emotional competence and to assist in prevention and/or address challenging behavior in young children. Nebraska was selected by the Center on the Social Emotional Foundation of Early Learning to receive technical assistance regarding the implementation of the program. The Pyramid framework includes a comprehensive approach of increasing levels of intervention, beginning with a foundation of an effective workforce. A complete description of the program is documented in Appendix A-03. Table (A)(1)-8 documents which programs are implementing high quality health promotion practices. It is noted that the practices are not included in the current tiered quality rating and improvement system. All of the programs listed implement health and safety requirements and only Head Start, IDEA funded, state-funded home visitation and Building Bright Futures implement all of the health promotion practices. Family Engagement Strategies that are implemented in Nebraska's early learning and development programs are documented in Table (A) (1)-9. Programs offer a variety of strategies such as written information, home visits, parent conferences, supports based on family needs and interests. Programs funded under IDEA Part B and Part C and federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start have additional family engagements strategies they are required to implement based on federal regulations. Nebraska has a defined early childhood professional development system that is facilitated through the Early Education Training Center. The Department of Education has the lead on the Center, which includes 7 full time Early Learning Connection coordinators that is part of the resource and referral system. A variety of trainings, based on needs assessment of the regionally based trainers and local partners and feedback from program observers and monitors. Nebraska completed the development of Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (Core Competencies) in March 2008. The Core Competencies address nine core knowledge areas such as child growth and development, learning environments, observation, assessment and documentation, partnerships with families and communities. No kindergarten entry assessment is currently implemented by the state. Table (A)(1)-13 documents a profile of all early learning and development data systems currently in the state. All of the essential data elements are listed. However, not all of the programs collect all of the data elements or not in the same way. Nebraska provided evidence and described in its narrative clear and concise information for each of the selection criteria in this section that explains past commitments and current efforts.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.	20	16

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 ELN Initiative five overarching goals and descriptions of the key objectives in the core components clearly align to the RTT-ELC goals of improving program quality and outcomes for children with high needs statewide and closing the readiness gap. Core Component 1: Enhance state leadership alignment and support for high quality early childhood programs. To accomplish this goal Nebraska plans on aligning and coordinating the leadership of the departments of Education, Health and Human Services, the Early Childhood Interagency Council and the ELN management structure; partner with the University of Nebraska to conduct research, communicate the findings and develop policy recommendations; implement a common, statewide TQRIS; revise and use the Early Learning and Development Standards; and support the effective use of a comprehensive assessment system. Component 2: Develop high quality early childhood educator through reform, training support, and resources. To accomplish this goal the plan is to: develop and align Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials; provide an integrated system of professional development; build capacity of the state's early learning connection coordinators and cadre of trainers through master coaching; provide training, coaching, and material to providers participating in TQRIS; and align Core Competencies and Early Learning Guidelines in course curriculum, articulate courses among high education, and integrate early learning curriculum into other child and family serving professional coursework. Core Component 3: Support a comprehensive system of wraparound services for early childhood care. Addressing the lack of access to comprehensive services will be accomplished by addressing health and behavioral and developmental needs through community-based Health and Community Resource Consultants; embed early childhood content into the training of other professional discipline; engage and create a system of supports for families; and develop a partnership between schools and early learning and development programs to promote alignment of programming and smooth transition. Component 4: build a unified data system involves. This component includes the development of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment; building a linked early learning data system that will provide data to improve instruction, practices, services and policies; and use assessment data both individual and program-wide for program continuous improvement. The goals and objectives outlined are ambitious but achievable over the course of four years. They are a logical progression in system building based on their current accomplishment. While the goals are appropriate based on the data tables in Section (A) they do not address specific efforts in the service of children with high needs. (b) The application documents and overall summary and timeline for the ELN Initiative. The chart organizes a number of objectives described in the overarching reform agenda under the four focused investment areas. The objectives and strategies included in the chart clearly build on existing strengths as describe in (A)(1). The activities selected provide a credible path for achieving each Focused Investment Area goal. The narrative explains the process and rationale for implementation of the State Plan in geographically targeted areas of the state. A strength of the proposal is the focus on high risk counties with children and families experiencing the most need. Because of the high concentration of high needs children this approach increases the likelihood of having the greatest impact on closing the readiness gap. The ELN Initiative Implementation Map overlays the counties identified based on the findings of two independent studies. The application also notes that 80% of Nebraska parents are employed, making high quality child care and other preschool settings an important factor in addressing school readiness gap. However, the proposal lacks sufficient detail on realistic timelines, key milestones for implementing each activity appropriate financial resources to support implementation; and how the plan will address the needs of the different types of early learning and development programs. (c) Nebraska's application provides a specific rationale in the narrative that justifies the choices to address the selected criteria in all four of the Focused Investment Areas selected. It is not clear from the information provided how the focus investment areas selected are linked to the goals and objective in the four core components in the ELN Initiative. (C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards. Strategies include updating the standards to take into account recent changes in K-12 standards, further alignment with the K Guidelines and expanding the use of the standards in more early learning and development programs. (C)(2) Supporting effective use of Comprehensive Assessment Systems. Nebraska needs to update its assessment system to include a screening measure. They plan on implementing a health screening measure for all publicly funded preschool programs and those that participate in their TQRIS program. The plan to provide training on the use of the assessment tools to improve child outcomes. (C)(3) Identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness. Nebraska has implemented research-based health and safety standards but need to incorporate them in the the TQRIS program. (C)(4) Engaging and supporting families. The application does not provide a rationale for selecting this focus investment area. Nebraska has chosen to address both criteria in Focus Area (D) (D)(1) Developing Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials. Nebraska has a standards-based Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework that is aligned with early childhood credentials, degree programs and professional development events. More programs will receive training on the framework as a part of the Quality Portfolio in Tier 2 of Nebraska's Step Up to Quality. (D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities. This initiative supports the necessary changes in training topics, expanded one-on-one coaching, and improved pathways to further training through higher education. Nebraska



has chosen to address both criteria in Focus Area E. (E)(1)Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry. Nebraska does not currently implement a kindergarten entry assessment. This strategy will promote success of every child by building on each child's strengths and individualizing instruction and learning opportunities. (E)(2)Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies. Currently data systems are separate and not compatible, department and agencies can't exchange data, families can't get reliable information about programs and policy makers do not have data to back up decisions.

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

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 application documents that the design of the governance structure builds on the exiting relationship between the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (NDE) The application states that the two agencies co-lead the administration of Part C of the IDEA. And through a memorandum of understanding the Child Care Development Fund quality dollars are administered through shared planning and implementation. The participating state agencies for the RTT\_ELC include the Departments of Education, and Health and Human Services and the University of Nebraska. A strength of the proposal is with inclusion of the University, the University Extension offices will be involved and are typically viewed and trusted translators of research and policy to the early childhood community. Another strength of the proposal is the structure will incorporate the



existing Training Coalitions and Educational Service Units for development and disseminate and outreach. While it is clear that relationships have existed, the governance structure introduced in this proposal is in the planning and development phase. (a)(2) The proposal provided documentation and a table of organization that outlines the governance related roles and responsibilities, staffing and organization needed for the three partners. Education, Health and Human Services, and the University of Nebraska. The partners have developed detailed job descriptions for the key positions including how each position interacts and respond to each other. A Leadership Council and an ELN Management Team will be created to meet the aggressive timelines in the plan. The Leadership Council will consist of the Governor, CEO of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Commissioner of the Department of Education. They will have the ultimate responsibility to ensure the initiative is implemented, policy issues area addressed and disputes resolved. The ELN Management Team will function at an operational level and be led by a Program Manager who will be a discretionary employee of the HHS. The Leadership Council will select the Program Manager the three partner agencies will select the three Program Coordinators and Staff Assistants to oversee and carry out the work assigned to their respective organization. The Program Manager and the three Coordinators will work together and form the ELN Management Team. Another strength of the proposal from both a fiscal and process for including other stakeholders, is the inclusion of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC). The current responsibilities of the Council align well with the scope of the ELN Initiative. The work of the ELN Initiative will be a standing agenda item for the quarterly ECICC meetings. Additionally, one subcommittee of the ECICC, the Early Childhood Systems Team will function and the integration team for the initiative. Table (A)(3)-provides a detailed listing of the governance related roles and responsibilities. (a)(3)The process for making different types of decision and resolving disputes in described in the application and is in the planning phase. As stated in the application, the Management Team will continually communicate with the Leadership Council and key leadership and essential staff within their own organizations to the keep the work moving forward. Disputes will be resolved at the levels closest to the work, through group decision making process when possible or within agency protocols as needed. If a dispute arises that cannot be resolved, a decision or resolution will be made by the Leadership Council. (a)(4) The proposal lacks specific information about how the State will involved representatives from participating programs, early childhood educators, or other representative. Even though each of these entities are represented on the ECICC a process for including others beyond the council is not addressed. Again, the application states that opportunities for involvement occur at the Integration team and subgroup levels of the ECICC but detail is lacking for what and how that will occur. (b)(1)-(2)-(3) Appendix A-12 has signed copy of a single MOU between the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education and the University of Nebraska. The MOU clearly documents the responsibilities of the lead agency and then shared responsibilities. A detailed Scope of Work describes the goals and activities for each of the Focus Investment areas, the agency responsible and details at the responsibilities associated with accomplishing the goal. The MOU certifies that the participating state agencies will implement the State Plan and agree to use the statewide Early Learning and Development Standards, statewide Program Standards, the statewide TQRIS and the statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and credential progression. (c)(1)-(2) Appendix A-13 contains letters of support that represent a wide variety of organizations and professional associations. There are letters from legislators, school districts, divisions with the participating state agencies, early childhood providers, education associations and professional early childhood association. The letters state their commitment to the RTT-ELC Nebraska State Plan and many of the letter state specific things they will do in support of the grant if funded. Table (A)(3)-2 documents a list of the early learning intermediary organizations and the fact that a letter of support is included in the Appendices. The High Quality Plan for aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State does not include key goals, activities with realistic timelines, appropriate financial resources for operations of the governance structure; and how this structure will have a positive impact improving the outcomes for children with high needs. The proposal is considered as partially implemented since the criteria in this are all in the planning and development phase.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</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-Nebraska states in its application and documents in Table (A)(4) the \$1.1B in federal funds, \$871.8M in state funds and \$76.0M in private funds will be invested in early learning and development over the next four years. However, these dollars amounts are not listed in Budget Table I-1. So it is not clear as to how these existing funds will be used in relation to the requested RTT-ELC funds. It is also noted that these dollar amounts are not consistent with figures in Table (A)(1)-4 at the beginning of the application, and are different from Table (A)(4)-1 in the Budget section. While a lot of information is provided on how existing efforts are being funded it is not clear as to how those dollars will be leveraged to accomplish the activities outlined in the State Plan in Section (A)(2). The efforts described include: local level Head Start programs have partnered well with child care providers through the Infant Toddler Initiative designed to build quality, support and capacity for infant/toddler care funded with CCDF quality funds; the NDHHS and NDE MOU to jointly administer the CCDF funds used for professional development and program quality improvements; the CCDF set-asides are currently used to implement Nebraska's TQRIS program entitled Step Up to Quality; the DHHS, Division of Public Health has played an integral role in Early Childhood Systems Planning and will play a major role in carrying out key strategies outlined in the plan to promote access to needed health, dental, social emotional and family supports; the Health and Community Resource Consultants will use existing services available through Medicaid, EPSTD, public health and home visitation to assist families with access as well as work with communities to identify and fill gaps in services; and the current Extension Educators will have a specific role of assisting early learning and development programs serving English Language Learners or newly arriving refugees to understand licensing, contracting, billing practices and how to integrate newly arrived citizens into local professional development systems. (b)The application contains all of the completed budget tables requested for each of the participating state agencies and the accompanying narrative. The proposal lacks clarity as to connections between the four components, goals and activities in Section (A)(2)and expenditures in the budget tables and accompanying budget narrative. An example is the funding designated in the budget summary table for research and evaluation doesn't appear in any of the objectives or activities in the plan. Another concern, is the small amount of dollars budgeted for developing the kindergarten entry assessment. The total for all four years is \$2.7M which doesn't seem adequate for the scope of work. An there is no mention of state or other federal dollars being used for development and implementation. (c) The proposal lacks clear evidence and strategies for how key components and activities of the plan will be sustained after RTT-ELC funding ends. The proposal sat The sustainability plan for data systems relies on the fact that once the system is built and in place that no additional investments will be needed. However, the application does not address the potential cost of maintaining the system or the reallocation of exiting funds to do that. While it is a strategy explained in the narrative the certainty is not clear that by including evaluation components to the activities at the local level interest from the philanthropic partners to continue to the work. The application state that school districts will be expected to pick of the costs of purchasing assessment and making modifications to their local data systems for the implementation of the kindergarten entry assessment. It is not clear if school districts will be in a position to assume all costs of the implementing the kindergarten assessment due to uncertain economic times. In the Budget Narrative regarding Health and Community Consultants the expectation is for the local community to continue to fund the position when the RTT-ELC funding ends. The application needs to demonstrate a cohesive and clear manner how dollars will be used to achieve outcomes and provide a clear set of strategies for sustainability or the work beyond grant funding.

**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) Nebraska partially implements their Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. The timeline in the application states that Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) system it will be fully implemented by 2012. The current system is based on a study done in 2008 by the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium. The QRIS Pilot Project tested Nebraska's SUTQ program standards. The application states that participation in the study influenced the current implementation plan and programs standards. However, it is not clearly stated in the application as to how the findings were used to inform the current SUTQ. The current standards were developed by the NDE utilizing existing state and federal program standards and regulations as resources and references. As stated in the application, the SUTQ program standards are aligned to the Early Learning Guidelines, Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals, regulations and standards for special education programs, Head Start Performance Outcomes, Early Childhood Grant program requirements, Early Learning Fund Quality Criteria and Child Care Licensing Regulations. The application does not provide evidence the the Program Standards integrate health promotion and family engagement strategies. SUTQ program standards integrate and streamline expectations from all of those sources into one system with progressive levels of quality. Program standards are developed for both centers and family child care homes. The tiered program standards are contained in Appendix B-03 and document that they include the use of comprehensive assessment, qualifications for early childhood educators, family engagement strategies, effective data practices and health and safety promotion practices. What is not evident is the use of the Early Learning and Development Standards. Table (B) (1)-1 document that programs participating in SUTQ use the Early Learning and Development Standards, however, there is no mention of them in the Program Standards. The application states that the plan is to refine the current program standards by involving representatives of all of the key stakeholders to ensure the Program Standards meet the criteria requirements under this section. While health and safety, family engagement, assessment were mentioned, alignment with the Early Learning Standards was not. (b) The application states that the SUTQ Program Standards are based on the research conducted as a part of the MCCRC Pilot, ideas from professionals working with young children, behavior changes known to improve environments and interactions and promote learning, measures to track progress, and ever changing information on best practice. A summary chart of each tier of SUTQ provides evidence that the standards are measurable and differentiate program quality levels. An example of this differentiation is the use of the Environment Rating Scale to measure of environment. Tier 1 is licensure, Tier 2 focusing on the Quality Portfolio which provides an overview of ERS, Tier 3 is an introduction to use and purpose of ERS, Tier 4 requires using the ERS and Tier 5 requires use and maintaining an average score of 5.0 or higher. There is not clear documentation that the standards reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards. (c) This criterion is partially implemented. The application states that the child care licensing regulations are linked because in order to enroll in SUTQ tier 1 an early learning and development program must be licensed. The application also states that the licensing regulations will be revised to require participation in SUTQ. The proposal lacks specific information regarding key activities and the time frame for the legislation to be adopted. The High Quality Plan for developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System is partially implemented. The plan does not include key goals, sufficient detail and rationale for the activities, appropriate financial resources to support successful implementation, how the plan will address the needs of different types of early learning and development programs or how the implementation of SUTQ will positively impact the children with high needs.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</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) Nebraska is planning to implement the policy that all licensed programs will automatically participate in SUTQ. This policy will ensure all programs enter at Tier 1. In addition, Nebraska has set goals for participation and advancement into the upper tiers. It is anticipated that 100% or 207 of publicly funded preschool programs will participate in SUTQ and receive support for improvements by 2015; 10% or 160 programs receiving CCDF funds will participate and receive support; and 8% or 202 of the remaining programs will participate and receive supports. There isn't data available in the application to understand these numbers in relation to the total number of licensed and/or regulated programs in the state to determine impact. These goals seem achievable but not ambitious considering a majority of children with high needs are enrolled in licensed programs funded by or not funded by CCDF and this goal only brings 362 of the 4,000 plus programs into the system. b) Nebraska's application documents a number of funding strategies in Table (A)(1)(a) designed to ensure children with high needs have access to early learning and development programs. The application states that professional development and other supports will be offered first to programs serving children with high needs but does not provide sufficient detail or evidence regarding the content or how the professional development will be provided or what the supports will be. In addition, the application describes efforts to launch a statewide public relations campaign to inform communities, families and early childhood providers encouraging them to take part in the ELN Initiative. Part of the campaign will focus on community resources for improving access to high quality child care. A strength of this activity is that it is community-based and will touch all counties. The application states that TANF is used to support families to access but high quality programs but did not explain what the meant in relation to the SUTQ. Information was provided about providing higher reimbursements at Tier 5 but not clear as to how and what will be done with the other tiers. The proposal lacks information on other policies or practices, such as, affordable co-payments, or providing other incentives and a way of helping more families afford high-quality child care. (c) According to the Performance Measures for (B)(2)(c) none of the early learning and development programs are enrolled in SUTQ. It would have been helpful if the rationale for setting targets was based on Nebraska data versus the experiences of other states. The goal is that 100% of the state-funded preschool programs, Head Start and Early Head Start and the Early Childhood Education Grants will participate by 2015 with a 10% increase for licensed programs receiving CCDF and 8% for licensed programs not receiving CCDF. The targets are ambitious for some programs but no rationale is provided for not including CCDF funded programs, with significant number of high needs children enrolled. With the high number of licensed programs, and licensing as condition of Tier 1 in the SUTQ program it is not clear as to why all of the baseline data at the current time is 0 for all of the programs. In addition, it is not apparent from the plan as to what the incentives will be for getting programs currently licensed to enroll or for those not licensed. If programs are currently enrolled then more effort would need to be placed on increasing the number of programs moving up a tier. The High Quality Plan for participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement system includes is partially implemented. Information is not provided to fully explain efforts to addresses each of the selection criteria. The timeline is broad and lacks sufficient detail to be clear as to time frame for accomplishing the key activities. Adequate funding resources are not identified and does not address impact on children with high needs.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</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 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)**

a-Nebraska will use the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales for center-based programs and the Family Child Care Rating Scale for family child care programs. These are research-based measures that are used consistently within the field to measure program quality. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System tool will be used at tiers 4 and 5 for center based care. The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool and the Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale will be used at tier 3 and an option for tiers 4 and 5 for family child care homes. The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association for Family Child Care accreditation programs will serve as an alternative ways to meet tier 5 program standards. These standards and rating systems have been tested for validity. The information provided only addresses the measurement of program environment and adult-child interactions. Information is needed to explain how the other program standards will be monitored for compliance using a valid and reliable tool and processes to ensure consistency of implementation across the different types of programs. Based on a review of the monitoring schedule provided it is not clear as to how the schedule provided will ensure how a program could move up in the rating levels in a timely fashion because there is 3 years between tier reviews. With this time frame it could take up to nine years for a program to reach to Tier 5. The length of time is too long for programs at the lower levels. b-SUTQ Anchors will serve as the monitors for programs needing outside observation on one of the measurement tools listed and provide mentoring and coaching to other observers; and during observer training serve as a gold standard or



leader of an assigned group of observers achieving inter-rater reliability. Anchors will be individuals who have a degree in child development, early childhood education or a related field and experience in early childhood education. Anchors will be required to obtain a program reliability of at least 90 percent within one of the consensus score and there should be no more than one item that is not within one of the consensus score during the inter-rater reliability process. The application states that the Anchors will follow protocols around inter-rater reliability according to the stipulations of the tools being used. The Anchors will be required to re-establish inter-rater reliability yearly or every 10 visits whichever comes first. Nebraska needs to consider establishing a process to determine inter-rater reliability regarding the consistency of Anchors assigning a tier designation. b-Nebraska has an online child care roster that contains basic information regarding all licensed programs. The roster will be updated to include information indicating the current tier rating of a program. Nebraska will distribute certificates of recognition to programs for posting at the program site in addition to a public awareness campaign to aid parents and the public in understanding what characteristics of quality to look for and why high quality child care is important for child, community and economic outcomes. A publication entitled "The Right Place" designed specifically for parents seeking child care, includes sections on choosing child care. It will be revised to provide parents with questions to ask providers about their involvement in the Step Up to Quality system. However, the document only suggests that the parent ask the provider about SUTQ. This would have been an area to address how this information will be provided to tribal children, and other English language learners, in addition to Spanish. The High Quality Plan for rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs includes all of the required components and addresses the minimum implementation of selection criteria with approaches to planning that are feasible and have a high probability of successful implementation.

	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)

a-ELN plans on providing training, coaching, materials and technical assistance to programs participating in SUTQ. In addition, ELN will focus resources and funding to support programs that serve children with the highest needs in the state. Nebraska will implement these practices by building on the existing infrastructure of professional development and support for early childhood educators and early learning and development programs. The application needs to address policies and approaches to financial rewards, incentives and higher subsidy reimbursement rates and compensation as means of supporting programs to participate in SUTQ and move up in their tier ratings. b-Nebraska's early learning and development programs have been targeted to serve children with high needs. The Early Childhood Education Grant program is provided at no cost to parents, and must offer at least one meal a day. Early Head Start and Head Start offer wrap around services for children that extend beyond the school day and offer at least one meal a day. State funded preschool programs are encouraged to offer transportation to and from the program site. All of the programs support families through family engagement activities as outline in Table (A)(1)-9. Programs are encouraged to be inclusive and braid resources to provide full-day services at the same location. If programs provide joint services for high needs children but cannot co-locate services in a single site, transportation must be provided. The process of providing more full-day programs will be studied and a cost-benefit analysis completed to determine if the approach is feasible. If so, NDE will commit funds to support existing half-day programs to transition to full-day programs. c-Nebraska plans on enrolling programs in SUTQ in 2012. All 4,327 licensed providers enter at tier 1. Some state-funded programs, Head Start and Early Head Start, and Early Childhood Education Grant Programs are expected to enter at tier2 or3 due to their programming level. In addition, there are 58 accredited programs in Nebraska that will enter at tier 5. From 2012 – 2015 the number of tier 1 rated programs will decrease with movement of programs in to higher tiers. The targets set for increasing the number of early learning and development programs in the top tiers and for increasing the number of children enrolled in programs in the top tiers are achievable but not ambitious. The target is to move only 3% of the programs to a higher tier which leaves majority remaining in Tier 1 at end of project. The application 58 Head Start and NAEYC accredited program entering at Tier 5. Based on that data only 19 new programs will be advanced to Tier 5 by the end of the project. Table (B)(4)(c)(2) documents that there are 37,194 children currently enrolled in programs not participating in SUTQ. The goal is not ambitious because the table indicates only 28% of the children will be enrolled in higher tiered programs. The High Quality Plan promoting access to high quality Early Learning and Development Programs for high need children includes all of the

required components and addresses the selection criteria with approaches to planning that are feasible and have a high probability of successful implementation.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

#### Comments on (B)(5)

(a) The application provided evidence, in Appendix B-08, of a very detailed statement of work for validating the effectiveness of SUTQ. As noted in the MOU, the University of Nebraska will have the lead on the evaluation activities. The plan is to examine the relationships between the ratings generated by SUTQ and SUTQ program standards and learning outcomes. A series of process evaluations will be conducted to obtain feedback on implementation of the strategies being employed. The four components include: QRIS Implementation will focus on the extent to which intended elements are in place and being utilized; Process Study of the Early Childhood Education Coaching will study coaching data in the Training Registry, coaching visits, number of teachers each coach worked with, other coaching services provided, and length of coaching interactions. Multivariate analyses of service utilization data and observational data will be conducted to assess fidelity of the early childhood coaching project; Process Study of the Early Childhood Mental Health Project will be conducted to assess the implementation of the Teaching Pyramid model in programs. Indicators will be collected from each classroom on the fidelity of implementation of the Teaching Pyramid Model; Process Study of the Health and Community Resource Consultants will focus on the extent to which the consultants act as liaisons and navigators in local communities to support physical health and safety, and physical, social and emotional development for children; and a study which compares the findings of SUTQ affects the factors of interest and the extent to which teachers and providers are embracing SUTQ. This will be a replication of the 2002 Child Care Study done by the Midwest Childcare Research Consortium. The study will provide a comparison to determine progress 10 years later. A full overview of the studies is documented in Appendices B-01, B-08 and B-09. The University of Nebraska will conduct a validation study to determine whether the different tiers represent differential levels of program quality in the 20 Nebraska counties where SUTQ is being implemented. The study will randomly sample 75 center-based and 75 family child care homes with 15 at each of the 5 levels of quality, within the center-based programs, 50% of the classrooms will be randomly selected for participation from 225 classrooms. The University of Nebraska will assess process quality using the ERS or ITERS in order to obtain a valid measure of global quality and for centers only, the CLASS to obtain a more rigorous assessment of instructional and interactional quality. Structural quality related to education, training, and wages of providers using the Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Register for evaluation purposes and will administer a survey to teachers and providers in select classrooms and family child care homes to measure professionalism attitudes shown in other studies to be associated with levels of quality. Complex multivariate analyses will be used to determine if levels of quality predict observational, structural and attitudinal quality variables, controlling for type of care, rural/urban status, and time of data collection. b- The University of Nebraska will conduct a validation study to determine whether the different tiers represent differential levels of program quality in the 20 Nebraska counties where SUTQ is being implemented. The study will randomly sample 75 center-based and 75 family child care homes with 15 at each of the 5 levels of quality, within the center-based programs, 50% of the classrooms will be randomly select from children who will be 3 years old the following fall and a second group of children who will be 5 years old the following fall for a cross sectional sample of 600 children for each of three years from the same program. Spring trajectories of children on the PLS-5, DECA, PPVT-IV and the Bracken when children are 3 and 5 to compare scores to well established national and state norms. The study will also collect data on family demographics, support for literacy, and risk factors. The study will gather child data in the same programs over three years so relations between child outcomes and quality can be examined. Each child will be assigned a unique identifier so preschool outcome data can be linked to kindergarten - grade three school data, to see the extent that levels of quality have sustained effects. The proposal contains a well designed evaluation plan to determine whether the tiers in SUTQ accurately reflect differential levels of program quality and to determine the extent to which changes in the 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>	15	9

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)

(a)The application includes evidence to support that Nebraska's Early Learning and Development Standards, entitled Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for ages birth to 3 and 3 to 5, were developed and implemented in 2005-2006. Application provides documentation and evidence to ensure the Guidelines are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers and are based on research and evidence of developmentally appropriate practice. First it was noted that The Guidelines were developed by a diverse team of experts that included representatives of the departments of Education, Health and Human Services, professional associations, the Early Childhood Training Center and specialists from across the state. Secondly, the application contains an appropriate and comprehensive listing of the sources used to determine content. The complete research based is discussed in the Guidelines in Appendix C-02. Further evidence is found in the Guidelines introductions for each age cohort which address specific information regarding children from diverse cultures and in the Approaches to Learning gives specific strategies to support inclusive learning environments. A copy of the Guidelines articulates expectations for child development and learning in seven essential domains of school readiness: social and emotional development, approaches to learning, health and physical development, language and literacy development, mathematics, science, and creative arts. The Guidelines contained in Appendix C-02, provide examples of what to expect and what teachers can do to support learning across the domains. Each standard includes four sections: Widely Held Expectations describes what children should know and be able to do; Learning in Action provides examples of way children might show that they meet the expectations and strategies teachers can use; The Environment lists considerations for organizing indoor and outdoor spaces for learning; and Related Standards aligns the Guidelines with the NebraskaK-12 Standards, Nebraska Regulations for Early Childhood Education Programs, and the Head Start Outcomes Framework. (b) As stated in the application and documented in the Related Standards section of the Guidelines there is evidence that the early learning standards are aligned to the K-12 Standards. However, the state revised its K-12 standards in language arts in 2009 and mathematics in 2010 and currently revising standards for science and social studies. NDE will revise the Guidelines to address any gaps between Guidelines and the Head Start Frameworks and the new K-12 standards. (c)There isn't evidence to support that the Guidelines are incorporated in Program Standards. The application speaks to the fact that the licensing regulations proposed in 2011 include required professional development about the use of the Guidelines for licensed child care programs. The Guidelines support the curricula used by the early learning and development programs as documented by the fact that early childhood educators must reference the Guidelines when they examine the adequacy of their chosen curriculum and then supplement that curriculum with additional activities. No other evidence is presented other than the application narrative. Nebraska is currently modifying their assessment system – Results Matter. There will be only one assessment for child data –Teaching Strategies Gold. All state funded preschools; programs funded by IDEA; programs funded under Title 1; a majority of Head Start programs and programs enrolled in SUTQ will use the TS Gold by the beginning of 2012-2013. Nebraska has worked with the vendor to align TS Gold with the Guidelines and the new Kindergarten Entry Assessment that will be developed and fully implemented by 2014 will be aligned with the Guidelines. The Competency Framework contains a description of relevant sections from the Guidelines. Capability in helping children master the expectations of the Guidelines is



embedded in the Core Competencies as documented in the copy of the Core Competencies in Appendix B-06. Two-hour professional development programs acquaint early childhood professionals with the specific Guidelines' essential domains. More comprehensive six-hour professional development sessions for each domain are designed to allow early childhood staff the ability to understand the domain and learn hands-on embedded activities into routines and lesson plans. To make professional development to remote rural areas of the state, self-paced independent study learning modules are available. In addition, workshops have been created for parents to help them understand appropriate development and provide strategies to support their children's growth and learning. (d)-As stated in (C)(1)(c) the proposed licensing regulations will require the completion of professional development regarding the Guidelines for family child care home providers and center-based child care providers and community based preschools. Paraprofessionals in the school-based programs are required to have at least 12 hours of college credit hours in early childhood education. The completion of the training modules in each of the seven domains of the Guidelines is recognized as equivalent to three college credit hours. Guideline training opportunities are advertised on the training calendar maintained by the NDE Early Childhood Training Center. As documented (C)(1)(c) the Guidelines were used extensively in the development of the Core Competencies of Early Childhood Professionals. Higher education institutions use the Guidelines in child development classes. Copies of the Guidelines are posted on the NDE website and hard copies are distributed to all licensed early learning and development programs. The High Quality Plan developing and using, statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards is partially implemented. Most of the selection criteria are in the planning and development phase. The plan does not provide sufficient detailed activities and rationale including key milestones, there is some evidence as to how the guidelines will eventually be implemented statewide. Appropriate financial resources to support implementation are not identified and it not clear from the narrative as the impact of this effort for improving outcomes for high needs children or how the state meet the needs of high need children with address all of the required components and addresses the selection criteria with approaches to planning that are feasible and have a high probability of successful implementation.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	15	9

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) Nebraska currently implements an assessment system, which is called Results Matter. The application states that a screening instruments needs to be added to meet the definition of a comprehensive assessment system. The plan states that it will be added in Year 1 of the ELN Initiative. Results Matter measures children's progress using authentic child assessment and online reporting. The plan lacks information to explain how the assessment system will be implemented statewide. Only state funded preschools; programs and services funding by IDEA Parts C and B, programs funded under Title 1, of ESEA and a majority of Early Head Start and Head Start programs are included and ten child care centers will be included each year. The application states that eventually it will be integrated into SUTQ and eventually all programs will be in the licensing system. However, even at that, the comprehensive assessment will only be required at the high tiers. The plan states that the University of Nebraska will survey all of the programs to determine what is currently being used and the reliability and validity of the tools. The information will then be given to an Assessment Stakeholder Task Force for their review. They will use the National Research Council reports on the selection of tools that are appropriate for children with high needs to guide their review and discussions. The Task Force will develop a list of approved screenings assessments for programs to select from. This information provides documentation of meeting the criterion of working with the early learning and development programs to select assessment instruments. The University will work the early learning programs enrolled in SUTQ to determine their needs and resources necessary to successfully incorporate screening practices into SUTQ rated programs. Beginning in 2012-2013 Nebraska will be requiring early learning programs to use Teaching Strategies Gold online assessment system. The need to go to a single instrument was based on sustained data collection; reduce data errors and improve efficiency; capacity and infrastructure for managing a statewide system. The move to a single assessment system will enable the comparability of child data. The Environment Rating Scale will be used by early learning programs in SUTQ to measure environment. The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool and the CLASS will be the primary measures of adult-child interactions. So the approach is to limit the choices of measurement tools for programs to use. While the application stated that programs would be provided supports to help them understand results and inform practice there wasn't any specific examples of how that will be accomplished. (b) The University of Nebraska will select early learning programs in SUTQ to participate in a pilot project. The educators and administrators will receive coaching and training to build their capacity on the administration and effective use of assessment data.



Effective strategies will be identified for replication as a result of the pilot. NDE will provide intensive assessment training across the state to educators and administrators as part of the implementation of Results Matter. The methods will include direct training, workshops, informational resources and webinars. The professional development is competency based to ensure providers reliably use each type of assessment; know how to accurately interpret and use the results; and provide parents with useful information. The training and technical assistance provided will enhance the continuous improvement process at all levels. Documentation of the Comprehensive Work Scope is contained in Appendix C-06. Nebraska will evaluate the effectiveness of the comprehensive assessment system through annual focus group interviews and surveys. The University of Nebraska will analyze statewide child data on the TS Gold to evaluate trends and subgroup differences. The Assessment Stakeholder Task Force, NDE and NDHHS will review the findings and consider ways of improving the comprehensive assessment system. (c)-Typically MOUs are used to integrate data from agencies for children who are served by multiple agencies. All of the early learning programs participating in Results Matter will have access to an integrated system that will allow teachers to observe children in multiple settings or at multiple times and enter the observations in one central location. This data system will be linked with the NDE longitudinal educational data system by a unique child identifier. The alignment work is in the planning phase. The Assessment Stakeholder Task Force will work with the University of Nebraska to determine the degree to which the four Results Matters assessment components are aligned across agencies and systems. They will develop a plan to implement strategies to improve alignment. NDE and NDHHS will evaluate strengths and gaps of the current ability to link data and determine strategies to improve integration of the data systems. (d)-A strength of the Nebraska system is a well established statewide training system of regional Education Service Units. The application states that the Education Service units will provide training on appropriate administration, interpretation and use of results of the assessments in Results Matters. In addition, the University of Nebraska will conduct a survey of early learning programs to determine training needed to build the skills of early childhood educators and providers to successfully implement each of the tools and processes related to each assessment component. Based on survey results, the University of Nebraska will develop an integrated assessment training plan for each year of the ELN Initiative. The application provides a listing of professional development topics but specific information regarding the plan for who will be trained and how and within a time frame is not included. The High Quality plan for this section doesn't include key goals, activities with milestones and appropriate financial resources. Evidence is not provided in the plan for addressing the needs of different types of programs and how the assessment system will address the unique needs of special populations of children. Evidence is provided for the elements of the selection criteria indicating the state has an assessment system, but is in the planning phase regarding the selection of screening tools and professional development opportunities supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.</b>	15	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)**

(a)Nebraska's application states they developed and implemented standards for physical, health and safety, social and emotional development. However, there is not evidence provided to support that statement. At best, what is documented as developed is the health and safety standards in the Early Learning Guidelines. (b)NDHSS Division of Public Health will collaborate with NDE to expand a network of HRC Consultants who will train and support early childhood educators and early learning and development programs to meet the health standards. The child care consultation model is based on the standards for child care health consultants –Caring for Our Children, Standard 1.6.0.1:Child Care Health Consultants. The expansion will occur through an RFP for community organizations to provide the HCR consultant services on the local level. Leveraging the Education Service Unit training model and resources the HCR Consultants will provide professional development and

consultation to early educators to help them meet the progressive health related criteria within SUTQ. Training will be prioritized for early learning programs located in targeted communities described in section (A)(2). The professional development will consist of on-site support, online and phone consultation and group trainings. The HRC Consultants will provide training to the SUTQ Anchors, who rate and monitor the participating programs. Consultants will assist the Anchors to understand the health and safety criteria to ensure effective use of the rating tools. The state currently does not have a system to collect data on the number of early childhood educators receiving training to meet health standards. The Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry will be used as the vehicle for collecting and report training in the future. The projected numbers and percentages of early childhood educators to receive training and support in meeting the health standards is based on the 596 programs in SUTQ by 2015. c-As stated in the application, the training on the health and safety standards will also address promotion of physical activity and improved nutrition and eating habits based on Preventing Child Obesity in Early Care and Education and the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care. In addition to providing training the HCR Consultants will organize and conduct community-based informational sessions for families through the Health Resource Hub described in (C)(3)(d). d-The ELN Initiative leverages existing resources in high needs local communities by creating the Health Resource Hub, which creates a network of local care providers, services, and resources for he HCR Consultants' scope of work will require collaboration with other federally and state-funded educational and health professionals. The HCR Consultants will not duplicate the work of these professionals, but augment their efforts by offering expertise in early childhood. This section of the application provides some information about addressing the diverse needs of young children because the HRC Consultants will provide community level adaptations to help the early learning programs meet the needs of children with high needs. Documentation of the state's existing and future resources that will be used to address health, behavioral and developmental needs of children with high needs is not provided. Performance targets for increasing the number of children to be screened, referred for services and receive health care is documented in Table (C)(3)(d). The targets are ambitious and achievable based on the successful expansion and expertise of the Health Community Resource Consultants and creation of the Health Resource Hubs. The High Quality plan for this section doesn't include key goals, activities with key milestones, appropriate financial resources, plans to address the needs of the different types of early learning and development programs. The evidence provided for the elements of the selection criteria indicate partial implementation. There is no evidence regarding the projected numbers and percentages of early childhood educators who receive training and support in meeting the health standards.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	15	6

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

- (a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;
- (b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and
- (c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (C)(4)**

(a)The family engagement standards in SUTQ are in draft format and are described in Section (B) of the proposal. As stated in the application they address the federal criteria: parent access to the program; ongoing two-way communication with families; parent education in child development; outreach to fathers and other family members; training and support for families as children move to preschool and kindergarten, social networks of support; intergenerational activities; linkages with community supports; adult and family literacy programs; parent involvement in decision-making; and parent leadership development. The next phase of the work is to develop and finalize the criteria for each tier in the progression. (b) The application documents a number of professional development opportunities for increasing the number and percentage of early childhood educators trained and supported on an ongoing basis to implement the family engagement strategies in the Program Standards. All of the events are proposed. A strength to ensure implementation statewide is requiring all programs wishing to move up to Tier 2 will need to complete the Quality Portfolio Process for programs wishing to move from tier 1 to tier 2 must complete a professional development series. Three of the trainings explore and examine family engagement strategies in the Core Competencies, Early Learning Guidelines and Family Connections Workshop. This has the potential for statewide implementation when all licensed programs will be required to be enrolled in SUTQ in 2012. Early Learning Connection Professional Development Regions -- will provide training on the program standards of SUTQ including family engagement strategies. The Early Learning Coaching Coordinators and Extension Educators will provide professional development on family engagement strategies as a part of SUTQ to all state-funded preschool, Early Childhood Grant Programs, Head Start and Early Head Start reaching all 207 programs by 2015 and 160 CCDF subsidy funded programs. As previously stated, Nebraska currently does not collect data on the number and percentages of early childhood educators receiving training in family engagement strategies. With all of the professional development opportunities described it is concern that more of the early learning and development programs do not have access. (c) The application states that the NDE will leverage existing resources to promote family engagement in early learning programs statewide with innovative programming and supporting materials created in partnership with Nebraska Educational Telecommunications

(NET) public television station through its Community Engagement and Educational Outreach Unit. NET reaches every home with television. One million people across 93 counties. In 2012, the NDE in collaboration with other key stakeholders will finalize a plan with NET to provide television programming and community engagement sessions that will support parents and families in the education and development of their children. The High Quality Plan for engaging and supporting families does not include key goals, activities with milestones, and appropriate financial resources. The evidence and narrative provided addresses the selection criteria is minimally 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	10

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)

(a) The application states that Nebraska implemented a common, statewide, standards-based Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework in 2008. Evidence of the the framework is included in Appendix B-6 of the application. The narrative indicates that Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals includes a set of expectations for early childhood educators that describes what they need to know for working with children with disabilities, English language learners and other children of high needs. Appendix D-01 provides documentation as to how the Nebraska framework is: based on NAEYC standards, Council for Professional Recognition CDA standards, NCATE, Head Start Performance standards and other experts in the field; incorporate knowledge throughout regarding skills needed to address all domains of learning in accordance with the Early Learning Guidelines; a section is devoted to observation, assessment, documentation and reflecting on children's learning; one core knowledge area describes skills needed to address health, safety, nutrition, working with families and communities and recognizing and discussing with families their cultural practices and ensuring the programs reflect the communities' cultures and diversity; mathematics and literacy instructional practices are included in the Planning Learning Experiences/Curriculum section; the use of data for program improvement can be found in the Administration and Program Planning section; two section address behavior management and positive social emotional development and a section and skills needed to assist children in communicating with other and building trusting relationships, and finally, an explanation of how teams of experts who developed the Core conducted statewide focus groups and made changes in the final copy based on the recommendation received. This process provides evidence that appropriate activities were implemented to ensure the framework is evidence-based to promote children's learning and development to improve child outcomes. The application states that the NDE provides Competency Framework self-assessments, a professional development plan and a record form. Copies of the Framework are distributed to early childhood educators, early learning and development programs are posted on the website and used in the Quality Portfolio training series and to the student enrolled in early childhood programs in the two and four year colleges. (b)The application states that Nebraska has a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned to the Competency Framework and aligns to the six levels of knowledge and skills sequence of professional preparation through higher education institutions. Two and four year institutions have reviewed the competencies and informally agreed to explicitly integrate them into their coursework. The application lacks information on how the alignment process will be formalized. Currently, none of the 16 institutions of higher education align their coursework with the Workforce Competency and Knowledge Framework and the progression of credentials. The application states that Nebraska has Early Childhood Career Levels to formalize the knowledge and skill levels in the Core Competencies Framework. The levels are described and documented in a chart in the application in s section (D)(1) and provide a clear understanding of the possible way to progress and advance in the early childhood field. The plan is to integrate the Career Levels into the Early Childhood Practitioner and Training Registry and will use them in SUTQ as criteria for teacher and director education at the different tiers of quality. A chart is included in this section that documents the current status of articulation of courses between the associate degree programs and the four year degree programs. Nebraska plans on revising the Core Competency Framework content to incorporate the Career Levels and the sequence of credentials, diplomas, and degrees available from Nebraska's two and four year higher education institutions. The Early education coaches, facilitating the Quality Portfolio



Learning Community series, will work with early childhood educators to determine their career goals and link them with appropriate resources that can help them pursue credentials and move up the career ladder. (c) The ELN will offer stipends to support college faculty in converting early childhood professional courses to distance and hybrid formats. To ensure alignment with the Competency Framework, selected faculty, college administrators and a panel of experts will meet annually to review course syllabi, articulation agreements and other relevant documents. A full description of the project is contained in Appendix D-02. The High Quality Plan for developing and Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework does not include key goals, activities and milestones. appropriate financial resources, how the needs of the different types of programs will be addressed. Evidence is provided to support the selection criteria are partially implemented.

	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)

(a) The application documents a number of factors that contribute to lower participation in the professional development events offered in the state. These factors include low expectations for formal education in the licensing regulations, low wages, geographic isolation and barriers to accessing professional development. The 2007 report on economic impact estimated that there are 12,000 early care and education workers in the state and approximately 600 held a CDA or higher degree. NDE manages the professional development system in Nebraska. Professional development is delivered through the central Early Childhood Training Center and seven regional Early Learning Connection Professional Development regions across the state that is run by the regional Educational Service Units (ESU). The regional coordinators provide localized training for each region and have access to distance education equipment, technology and meeting space for offering training through a variety of media. The ELC coordinator works with local early childhood education partners to determine professional development needs for the region and provides training through these partnerships. The ELN Initiative will add seven additional ELC Coordinators to develop and provide expanded professional development opportunities aligned to the Workforce Competencies Framework. The application contains a plan that describes the audience, if new or existing, the trainers, and the training content to be offered regarding SUTQ, program management, the Early Learning Guidelines, Environment Rating Scale, CLASS, Health and Safety Standards, Anchor Training, Coach Training, math and early literacy. Nebraska has successfully implemented an Early Childhood and Development Coaching Model and through the ELN Initiative will expand the number of trained coaches to meet the increased demand for training and support. The ELN Initiative will increase training and support for Early Childhood Coaches so that the seven ELC Professional Development Regions have ELC-trained or recognized coaches and consultants, with specialization of expertise to address the breadth and depth of early childhood services and supports needed. At the same time, the ELN Initiative will expand and refine the individual specializations that coaches provide. The NDE will develop a strategic implementation plan to add 300 coaches over four years for a total of 480 coaches distributed statewide. Coaches Learning Communities organized through an online information management system, conference calls, and face to face refresher opportunities will provide follow-up and support for the coaches. The ELN Initiative will develop and implement a coaching certification program. This approach will provide an ongoing way to sustain the cadre of qualified coaches in the system. The Buffet Early Learning Fund supports two Educare sites to serve as learning laboratories for students working toward a degree in early childhood education. Plans are to expand the Educare sites across the state to offer high quality learning experiences for teachers in working with high needs children. One of the sites will be located on Tribal land. The ELN Initiative will continue to look for ways to expand TEACH. A partnership was formed with Omaha Spanish speaking child care providers to offer a core set of training courses in Spanish for providers interested in pursuing higher levels of credentialing in early childhood educator. The community colleges in the state have been working together to create a core sequence of courses with common course names, numbers and common objectives and competencies (aligned to Core). A significant increase is documented in the number of students taking online courses, 34% in the fall of 2009 to 45% currently. The ELN Initiative plans to



improve the state systems capacity by using the Early Learning Connection Registry to gather workforce data on early childhood educators' education, training, credentials, and Career Levels. This information will be a critical piece of infrastructure needed for SUTQ. Based on the information provided, it is clear that Nebraska has a cohesive and broad-based plan to address the barriers identified to increase access to effective professional development opportunities. (b) In 2002 NDE established the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Nebraska scholarship program to assist early childhood professionals in pursuing a college degree in early childhood education. In 2010, 224 scholarships were provided in 47 counties across the state. Twenty percent of the students were working towards a bachelor's degree and 80% toward an associate degree. Nebraska will expand the number of TEACH scholarships to educators committed to advancing along the Career Ladder and in programs enrolled in SUTQ. More information is needed in the application to address other types of incentives that promote professional developments and career advancement and that are designed to increase retention. (c) The Early Childhood Practitioner and Trainer Registry is in the planning phase. The database will include information on formal education levels, number of credit hours, and work history, retention and clock hours of training in my competency areas. The NDE early childhood team and the data system team are working together on the development of the database. The information will be accessible by the public and have a link to sites where parents, families and other professionals can readily access licensing sites, forms and reports. Data will be used to generate state workforce reports related to the Core Competencies and Career Levels. The application does not explain how the information will be used to inform policies and practices that will (d) The ELN Initiative will increase the number of degree programs aligned with the Competency Framework to 17 institutions. A collaborative process with all colleges with ECE degree will participate. The process will take place over the course of the Initiative with a final report on the alignment process generated by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and completed by 2014. The goal is ambitious since currently no degree programs are aligned formally but achievable because there has been work done on an informal basis so the interest and commitment exists. No performance target data is provided on (d)(2) for increasing the number and percentages of ECE educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials. The High Quality Plan for supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills and abilities does not include key goals and activities, realistic timelines and milestones and appropriate financial resources. The application was scored as partially implemented and of medium quality because the performance targets were not included for Table(D)(2)(d)(2).

**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	12

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)**

(a) Nebraska does not currently implement a statewide kindergarten entry readiness assessment (KERA). The Results Matter Task Force, which advised the state during the adoption of the early childhood comprehensive assessment system will be expanded to include kindergarten teachers, school administrators and parents to advise the state and guide the planning and implementation of the KERA. This is a strength to ensure continuity and consistency with the early childhood assessment system. The narrative of the application documents that the KERA will align to the Early Learning Guidelines which cover the essential domains of school readiness as evidenced in (C)(1)(a). (b) Nebraska will select national experts in tests and measurement to review the technical soundness of 5-7 commercially published assessments considered for use as KERA. The review will address appropriateness for the age and use of the assessment for KERA. The Task Force will determine that the assessments under consideration are valid and reliable measures for the diverse population of children entering kindergarten, especially children of high needs. Nebraska will carefully select 10 pilot districts and ensure they represent the diverse geographic settings and populations of children. Data from the evaluation of the pilots will help the state determine the extent that the KERA is effective in providing the needed information. A subgroup analyses will be conducted to determine the efficacy of the assessments for different populations of children. These data will be used to inform the final selection of the tool. (c) The state implementation plan for KERA documents that the assessment will be fully operational at the start of the 2014-2015 school year. (d) NDE currently has a longitudinal data system that contains child level data, including demographic data and state required assessments scores. The KERA data will be added to the assessment data and will be able to be linked to the results of both the early childhood assessment data collected on all children in state funded programs and the school-age data collected as a part of the state system. (e) RTT-ELC funding will be used to develop and implement the KERA and the data linkages needed to import the results into the NDE data system. Sustainability is a concern because the application states that when KERA is fully operational the school districts will assume the continued cost of purchasing the assessment, providing training to staff, and modifying their data systems to make the appropriate linkages to the state data system. The application narrative does not comply with the criteria in this section because total funding for the kindergarten entry assessment is the RTT-ELC grant. A detailed plan is included in Appendix E-01 regarding the design and development of the kindergarten entry assessment. What isn't clear from the information is relationship of that plan to the state plan for implementation. In addition, the High Quality Plan for understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten does not include key goals and activities, milestones and appropriate financial resources. The application was scored as not implemented because the kindergarten entry assessment is not in place and will not be fully implemented until 2014.

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	16

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-Nebraska currently assigns unique identifier to children as they enroll in various states and federally funded early learning programs throughout the state. Currently, state funded programs and only public schools teachers, all public schools early childhood educators are identified in the state data system. Nebraska plans on developing a voluntary system where all early childhood educators may register their information and receive a unique identifier in the Early Learning Connections Professional Registry which will be linked to SUTQ. Currently, public school programs, Head Start and Early Head Start grantee, CCDF funded programs and licensed programs receive a unique site identifier and are tracked in the different systems. Through the ELN Initiative these programs will be identified in the Practitioner and Training Registry. Child and family demographic data is currently collected. Refinements are going to be made to the system to focus on methods to best track the progress of Nebraska's highest need and vulnerable children. Early childhood educator demographics are collected on public school teachers at the current time. As described in Section (D)(2), RTT-ELC funds will be used to expand the capacity of to collect and track this information for all early childhood educators in the state. Not clear if linking or integrating systems or continuing to keep separate. RTT-ELC funds will be used to develop the capacity of the system to collect child suspension and expulsion rates, staff compensation, staff retention, work environments and SUTQ data. Nebraska has extensive child-level data for children in publicly funded programs. However, it is not yet accessible across all programs. b-Currently, Nebraska collects a significant amount of early childhood education data. However it is not easily accessed by participating state agencies and programs. The Early Childhood Data Coalition in collaboration with the Early Childhood Coordinating Council held a data summit in June. Appendix

E-02 documents the details and participant list for the summit. The consensus from the participants was the need for Nebraska to create a system that collects and shares data in a formalized and routine way that will improve instruction, practices, services and policies across the state. The University of Nebraska will take the lead on this effort in the ELN Initiative. They will convene a formative review panel to review research questions of interest in the state and ones that can be addressed; assess current status of data elements collected and easy entry of the data elements; and options for providing information to practitioners and policy makers. c-As a result of the University of Nebraska's work with the Formative Review Panel will create an Early Childhood Data System that will allow key end users to have access to multiple state and statewide data systems in a live, virtual environment while local control over component data systems is maintained. A detailed statement of work for this project is included in Appendix E-03. d-The University of Nebraska will take the lead in establishing principles and mechanisms for transferring findings to practitioners for continuous improvement. The will work with the appropriate partners in reporting findings through reports and other mechanisms. The ELN Initiative will make reports available for the cross-agency data camps for discussion and analyses. The Data Management Team will facilitate engagement of other relevant stakeholders to use the reports to inform policy and program improvements. e-The application states that the Early Childhood Data system environment, identifying information of children, families and programs will be secured and protected in accordance with all policies, regulations and statutory contexts. However, it does not address a transparent data governance policy being adopted. The High Quality Plan for building an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices and services does not include key goals and activities, milestones and appropriate financial resources. The evidence and documentation provided in the narrative supports that the selection criteria are partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>194</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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.

<b>Comments on (P)(3)</b>
(a) Nebraska does not currently implement a Kindergarten Entry Assessment. (b)The points available and received for the (E)(1) did not earn them a score of 70% of the maximum points available.

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.

<b>Comments on Absolute Priority</b>

Nebraska documented in the narrative and tables in Section A their commitment to early learning and development programs over time. They have developed a unique strategy of including the counting of four year olds in the school equalization funding formula. They are now in the process of designing and implementing the components of an early childhood system. The most developed components are their Early Learning Guidelines an Early Childhood Assessment system and their Professional Development system. The strategic investments they will make in developing their SUTQ tiered quality rating and improvement system with program standards aligned to the Early Learning Guidelines and the assessment systems will have a positive impact on improving the quality of their programs. They understand the importance of highly qualified educators as a means of improving programs and outcomes for children. Expanding the proven coaching model and working with the universities to align coursework to the program standards, assessment systems, early learning guidelines and the core competency will improve practice. Other higher education strategies will increase the number of early educators having access to degree programs. The creation of the early childhood data system will enable them to target their improvements and focus on children with high needs. Their reform agenda is a logical set of strategies that build on their current efforts.