



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # NC-5027

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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, 20. Includes detailed text description of the core area and sub-points (a) through (d).

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

North Carolina (NC) has demonstrated significant contributions and commitment to early childhood and is a leader in the country. The overall state financial commitment has increased over time - with some fluctuations in spending from year to year (see Table A1-4). A total of \$644,347,598 is currently committed to a variety of programs and services that support young children and their families, particularly children with high needs. The Smart Start and State Pre-K programs are high quality, long standing commitments (\$268 M per year, plus private contributions). Most programs have increased the number of children served over time. A few programs have decreased their enrollments in the past year - perhaps due to the recession. NC has promoted access to quality early childhood services for children with high needs - so that 68% of children in low income households are in high quality care, and 94% of children receiving subsidies are in high quality Early Learning and Development (ELD) programs. NC has existing early learning and development legislation, policies and practices in place. In addition, the state has strong administrative support from the Governor's office and an active Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC). Judicial decisions also support children with high needs receiving high quality early childhood services - citing the need for children at risk to have a constitutional right to high quality pre-K services. One of the key practices that has been enacted through legislation is Smart Start - a public-private partnership - which has supported state and community level commitment to quality early childhood services since 1993. NC has most of the key building blocks of a high quality early learning and development system in place, although there are a few holes to fill. NC has developed and supports a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) that is linked to licensing of ELD programs. Professional development systems are well designed and implemented. Standards and Assessment Systems are in place. The state uses a number of high quality, evidence-based practices in health promotion, family engagement, and workforce development. Through the Smart Start Initiative, there is a strong community focus that involves key stakeholders in early childhood, business, and families in planning and implementing early childhood services. Two building blocks that need to be added or augmented are the Kindergarten entry assessment and the early childhood data system, as well as augmentation to the comprehensive assessment system. The overall quality of the response to A1 is high, with descriptions and documentation of a strong, long-term financial and programmatic commitment to high quality

early childhood services. The state has numerous resources and many of the key building blocks for an effective system are in place.

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

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

North Carolina has articulated a strategic early childhood reform agenda that builds on a strong foundation. The state has set 10 major goals that have the potential for a high impact and high likelihood of success, that will lead to improved outcomes for young children with high needs. The proposal outlines 3 key strategies that will guide their efforts to improve outcomes for children with high needs. NC will strengthen their standards and assessments so that they are able to gather and use data to drive continuous improvement. The plan includes strong investments in people and relationships to increase quality teaching and system effectiveness. The plans for intensive intervention in Transformation Zones are intended to impact children, families, and communities with the highest needs with a variety of targeted, evidence-based interventions. They also address implementation science and sustainability in their plans. The summary of the plan was helpful in understanding the rationale, resources, and achievable goals for this proposal. In particular, the Theory of Change included in Appendix 5 clarifies how the goals, activities and outcomes of the proposal are linked. The Theory of Change, along with a strong foundation of successful ELD initiatives, evidence-based practices, and commitment across the key stakeholders and systems guide the development of ambitious and achievable goals for the NC RTT-ELC proposal. The plan also clearly addressed the rationale for the selection of focused investment areas. All but one area (D1) is addressed in the proposal, as well as the competitive preference and two invitational priority areas. Overall, NC has proposed a high quality, strategic early learning and development reform agenda that will create positive outcomes for children with high needs, building on a very strong foundation, and this is reflected in the high rating.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	10	9

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)**

North Carolina has written a strong plan for how it will align and coordinate ELD services and resources at the state and local levels. The governance structure is described in the narrative, and an organizational chart with roles and responsibilities is included in Appendix 8. The ECAC, housed in the Governor's office will serve as the lead agency, and has policy making authority. The RTT-ELC committee of the ECAC will support problem solving and dispute resolution. A process for dispute resolution is part of the MOU. Each of the key state agencies and organizations make operational decisions for their respective agencies. The NC proposal has a strong plan for involving local leaders and stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the proposed activities. Using the Smart Start and Transformation Zone communities, a Leadership Collaborative is planned to enhance the capacity of local community leadership and engagement of key representatives in promoting quality early childhood services to support school readiness for children with high needs. State agencies have made significant commitments to this proposal, and their roles are described in the narrative and the MOU and scope of work documents in appendix 9. All required signatures are included in the attached documents. Letters of support from all aspects of the state including all Start Start counties, state agencies, key boards (e.g., Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)), intermediary organizations (Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC), Head Start Association (HSA), Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR), Migrant, etc.), community colleges, the B-K Consortium, and collaborative partners for a possible cross-state data system development are represented in Appendix 10. However, the majority of the letters are almost identical, and don't necessarily represent "persuasive" letters of support. Overall, the response to A3 is of high quality and clearly addresses the requirements of this section.

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

North Carolina provided a detailed budget that builds on the extensive existing resources (See Table A4-1) to achieve the outcomes in the proposed plan. The budget narratives and tables outline the state agency grant activities, and describe the activities and costs of each of the many projects that are proposed in this grant. The level of detail is very helpful in understanding the overall plans and how they will impact children with high needs and their families and communities. The 18 projects included in NC proposal are described in Appendix 6. The proposed projects are intended to be effective and efficient use of funds that support the goal of increasing access to high quality ELD for young children with high needs and their families. In general, the costs of these programs seem adequate and reasonable for the intended purposes. Funding that impacts services at the local level accounts for at least half of the grant allocations. This addresses criteria A4b3 - a significant amount of funding will be devoted to local implementation of the plan. Sustainability for the grant activities will use two strategies - public awareness strategies that focus on the value of early childhood investments, and a strategic sustainability planning process that will begin 18 months into the grant period. These sustainability strategies, along with the use of implementation science in many of the activities increase the probability of sustaining the changes proposed in this grant application. Overall the response to this criteria was high quality, with well conceptualized rationale for funding and clearly detailed information.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	10	9

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)**

North Carolina has developed a TQRIS that has been in place for many years. The TQRIS includes most, but not all of the required elements as outlined by the RTT-ELC application. The ELD standards and effective data practices are not included in the current system, and not all elements of the comprehensive system are present. However, the ECE qualifications are a major aspect of the scoring, and family engagement and health promotion are also included. The state has a strong plan for updating and including the ELD standards and providing training on those standards and the revised TQRIS in this proposal. The TQRIS has standards that have been validated and differentiate between program quality levels. The incredibly widespread use of the TQRIS, systematic training and program improvement strategies associated with this measure are notable. As the TQRIS is updated, programs will be rewarded for learning about the new system. NC's TQRIS is strongly linked to the state licensing system and has a strong positive impact on assuring that children with high needs are linked to high quality programs. The North Carolina response to this criteria is of high quality with substantial implementation of key elements in evidence. The plans for addressing the missing pieces are clearly articulated.

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

15

15

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)**

NC has high implementation of ELD participation in the TQRIS and a strong, high quality plan for continuous improvement. The state currently has extensive program participation in the TQRIS as described in Table B2c. The TQRIS in NC is built into the state's licensing system and 78% of all ELD programs participate in the TQRIS, as well as 93% of programs regulated by the Dept. of Child Development and Early Education. Ninety-five percent (95%) of EHS/HS programs participate in the TQRIS, as well as 100% of the programs funded by CCDF. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of children from low income families attend high quality (4-5 star on the QRIS) ELD programs. Participation by Title 1 in partnership with 619 covers more than half of the programs. New legislation will require that all state funded preschool programs participate in the TQRIS. NC has developed policies and incentives so that families of children with high needs are able to access and afford high quality child care, such as providing grants, incentives, technical assistance, and supports. The ultimate goal is that children with high needs receive the highest quality care. Currently 61% of children in child care subsidy programs are served in high quality (4-5 star rated) ELD programs. Recent legislation requires that all children receiving child care subsidies be served in 3 star or higher rated child care programs. In addition, children with disabilities are served in 4 and 5 star programs. Tiered reimbursement systems support the focus on quality ELD programs. For example, a tiered reimbursement system for child care subsidies includes incentives for services to children who are homeless or in foster care. NC is also targeting religiously affiliated ELD programs and public school preschool programs that are not currently required to participate. The plan is strategic and thoughtful in designing strategies to increase participation in TQRIS. The targets seem ambitious and achievable - and would bring 95% of most programs in the state into the TQRIS system, with the exception of Title 1 and 619 programs (from 54-64% participation). Full points were awarded, based on strong implementation of ELD program participation in a TQRIS and a high quality plan to move NC forward.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

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

North Carolina has a well implemented system for rating and monitoring the quality of ELD programs participating in the TQRIS and a high quality plan for improving their system for rating and monitoring ELD programs. The system for monitoring programs is valid and reliable. A valid classroom quality rating tool (ERS) is used in the TQRIS. The ERS has strong evidence of reliability and validity. A rigorous training and periodic check in system is in place to assure inter-rater reliability. New system changes will align and streamline the program monitoring process. Quality ratings are required to be displayed at ELD sites, using an easy to understand star rating system. CCRR staff provide this information to families as well as providing information on making informed decisions about choosing quality child care. The child care rating information is also available on the web in a searchable data base. A plan for developing a new program quality tool for the TQRIS, with possible cross state collaboration is proposed. This seems to be an appropriate next step in the development of the NC state system, and is based on the recommendations of the NC TQRIS validation study (Appendix 14). The North Carolina rating on this criterion indicates full implementation of a rating and monitoring systems for ELD programs on the TQRIS and a high quality plan for continuous improvement.

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

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)**

North Carolina has implemented a system for improving ELD programs through supports and incentives linked to the TQRIS. The plan proposed is high quality and will have a potentially significant impact on children with high needs. The narrative, data, and charts provided in this section clearly illustrate the commitment to significantly increasing the quality of ELD programs for children with high needs, in child care and family child care settings. For example, between 2000 and 2011, the number of child care centers with one star decreased from 1470 to 292 and the number of 5 star child care programs increased from 94-1600. Children with high needs have priority access to high quality services, through legislation, policies and practices. NC has implemented a strong system of support and incentives for ELD programs to continually improve their services to children with high needs and their families. Extensive training and technical assistance, tiered reimbursement rates, scholarships, WAGES, and other programs serve as incentives for programs to continually increase the quality of their programs and their personnel as measured by the TQRIS. A number of strategies, including tiered reimbursements, child care subsidy policies, legislation, court decisions, blended funding, local Smart Start policies, and resources provided through the child care R&R system support working families who have children with high needs to access quality ELD programs. The Performance Measures for (B)(4)(c)(1) and (2) set ambitious and achievable targets with effective plans for increasing the numbers of children with high needs receiving services in ELD programs that are highly rated. The targets for NC are for 95-100% of Pre-K and EHS/HS programs, 64% of ESEA Title 1 and 619 programs, and 70% of ELD programs funded by CCDF are 4 or 5 star rated programs by 2015, a very high rate for high quality ELD programs serving children with high needs across the state. Given NC's rate of improvements in the past, the targets seem achievable. The high quality plan focuses on increasing access to high quality ELD programs for children with the highest needs. For example, infants and toddlers are targeted for additional supports in the Transformation Zone activities. The rating for this criterion is based on strong implementation and a high quality plan for promoting access to high quality ELD programs for children with high needs.

	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)**

NC has a strong plan to build on previous validation studies of the NC TQRIS to demonstrate that the tiers reflect meaningful differences in quality. Statistically significant relationships were shown between star ratings and other indicators of quality in a 2001 study. Other studies have shown a relationship between quality ratings and children's learning. A new validation study is proposed that will assist with revision of the TQRIS to better differentiate program quality as well as explore the links with children's progress. The study will explore data across all program settings (child care, family child care, pre-K), age ranges (infants and toddlers and preschoolers) and children (ELL, children with disabilities, etc.). This validation study should be valuable for the state and the field of early childhood. The ratings of this item reflect NC's fully implemented efforts to validate the TQRIS along with a high quality plan for continuing validation 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>15</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)**

North Carolina has developed and implemented early learning standards covering birth to five for all Essential Domains of School Readiness that have been determined to be developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate. The proposal outlines a high quality plan for updating and revising the standards and providing support to incorporate the updated standards into practice. The ECAC has recommended that the Foundations be updated to better align with the current research and literature on early childhood and with the K-3 academic standards. The updated ELDS will be added to the TQRIS, program standards, curricula, workforce framework, community college training curriculum, and embedded into the professional development system. There is a plan for necessary policy changes to support implementation of the revised standards. All aspects of planning and implementing the standards and incorporating them into the state system have been considered. The plan for promoting understanding of and commitment to the ELD standards uses an effective cross-system professional development strategy that addresses the full range of ELD programs that serve children with high needs. Training guides, online training, promotional videos, intensive faculty institutes, and cross-sector professional development institutes, and CEU bearing courses are proposed. This coordinated plan is intended to provide a variety of learning opportunities across a range of ECE providers to promote the new standards, while reducing duplication of professional development efforts. North Carolina was awarded full points based on a high quality plan that builds on a well implemented system for refining and putting into practice early learning standards.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	15	12

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)**

North Carolina has partially implemented the elements of a Comprehensive Assessment System. Their high quality plan for revising and updating this system is based on the recommendation of the Child Assessment Task Force. The NC plan will support strategies and tools for coordinated screening and assessment for ELD programs, based on recommendations from the cross agency Task Force on Child Assessment. An intensive professional development plan is proposed to assure that all ELD staff and programs are able to understand and appropriately use screening, formative assessment, program assessment and other quality rating systems. The revised CAS will be incorporated into the TQRIS and relevant policy changes will also be implemented. A cross-agency training plan will support the coordination of screening and assessment activities and information, appropriate administration and interpretation of assessment data, assuring that all ECE providers will have the knowledge and skills to implement these practices. Training materials will be developed to support professional development at both the preservice and inservice levels. Opportunities to link to the K-12 system through the common use of CLASS observations will be created. A proposal to develop a new environmental quality measure, specifically designed for the TQRIS, as part of a multi-state consortium is included in this section. The North Carolina response to this criteria was rated as having a partially implemented CAS with a high quality plan for improving this element of the state early childhood system.

	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	14

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)**

North Carolina has implemented a number of evidence-based practices that support identification and provision of services to address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs. The plan for augmenting these existing resources is high quality and will have a positive potential impact on children with high needs in NC. All elements of the selection criteria are addressed. NC's current TQRIS addresses children's health and safety and includes screenings of children's physical, social and emotional development. Programs such as the Assuring Better Health and Child Development (ABCD), the Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC), Shape NC, that have evidence of increasing identification of needs and providing supports to meet those needs will be used to augment this component. Strategies will focus on both the state and local levels. At the statewide level new policies, and the expansion of the CCHC and ABCD models will increase the number of children with high needs who are screened, referred and receive needed services. At the local level, through the Transformation Zones, more intensive CCHC, a nurse home visiting model, and obesity prevention programs will be implemented. The Performance Measures on C3d are achievable, but it was not clear how ambitious the targets are. Overall the score reflects high implementation of services that address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs, along with a high quality plan. The questions regarding the level of ambition of the targeted performance measures resulted in a rating of 14 points.

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

North Carolina has implemented a wide variety of effective strategies for engaging and supporting families through TQRIS standards, Smart Start initiatives and Head Start grantees in the state. The plan for enhancing family engagement addresses both state and local levels and addresses all the elements of a high quality plan. The TQRIS will be augmented to address family engagement for families who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The proposed plan uses Head Start grantees to train other ECDL programs to implement family engagement practices, building on the strengths of the Head Start family engagement practices. Within the Transformation Zones, communities can choose among high quality, evidence-based practices that meet the needs in their community for strengthening their family engagement efforts. This should increase buy in and implementation of the practice. The plan has multiple levels of impact and makes good use of existing resources, building on the strengths of Head Start and other quality resources in the state and nationally. Overall, the score reflects full implementation and a high quality plan for engaging and supporting families.

**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)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	40	40
<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: <b>Quality and Implementation</b>		

Comments on (D)(2)
<p>NC has a very strong foundation in place for supporting ECE in improving their knowledge and skills, certification, and retention. An innovative, strategic plan is presented that supports the key activities of the RTT-ELC proposal. All levels of personnel are impacted, and strong support is provided for ECE staff and administrators. The framework of the B-K certificate and all the EC community college coursework is designed to reflect the standards and is consistent across all IHEs. The system works across all settings and designed to serve all children. Universal participation in the system will be mandated. Several innovations are planned to increase and expand access to effective professional development - at the community college and university levels, as well as through inservice training. Policies and incentives, TEACH Scholarships, Child Care WAGES, tiered reimbursement rates, and continual movement through the certification or degree programs are in place and expanded in this proposal. Targets and strategies that support retention of ECE staff are also proposed, such as financial incentives, providing mentors for beginning Pre-K teachers, or offering courses in flexible formats to facilitate non-traditional learners in accessing coursework as they are working in ELD programs. Reports on Workforce capacity have been conducted and posted on the web. A new study is proposed, and eventually data will be reported through the state EC data system. Targets are established for increasing the number of community college programs aligned with the system, so that every community college in the state is accredited by NAEYC. Professional development providers will receive supports for increasing their skills in coaching, mentoring and providing TA, so that there is a consistent, high quality approach to professional development across all the ECLD systems. A strong cross-agency professional development system is in place and will support leadership development, training on coaching and mentoring, choosing and using curricula and assessment, and other priority topics. All will be in alignment with the content of the revised ELD standards. The chart on the first page of this section is compelling in showing the tremendous progress of ECE staff in building their credentials and competencies. Overall, the very positive rating reflects a well implemented system of professional development with a high quality plan for improving the system.</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

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)**

North Carolina has partially implemented the elements of a KEA and has developed a plan that was of adequate quality. A School Readiness Assessment and a K-2 assessment are in place, but do not meet all the criteria for a KEA as proposed by the RTT-ELC (for example, only two of the five domains of school readiness are included - literacy and math). Therefore, NC is proposing to develop a new K-3 assessment, possibly as part of a multi-state consortium. The new instrument would be tied to the revised ELD standards (which cover all of the Essential Domains of School Readiness), would provide strong linkage to the early elementary assessments, and be designed based on the National Research Council's recommendations for early childhood assessment. The state has a variety of strong existing resources that would position it to develop a valid, reliable measure that would meet the purposes of the RTT-ELC. The plan would phase in implementation over time, beginning in the fall of the 2014-2015 school year and ultimately be linked to the SLDS. A concern of this reviewer is that \$8,769,801 of RTT-ELC funds is requested for development, pilot testing, and implementation of the NC K-3 assessment. The criteria (e) is that the KEA be funded in significant part by sources other than the RTT-ELC, but it does not appear that the NC proposal meets this criteria. The proposal indicates that the Department of Public Instruction will provide resources to support professional development so that teachers complete the assessment appropriately and use the information to inform their classroom instruction. The rating of this item reflects partial implementation of the KEA and a medium quality plan, with concerns regarding the significant amount of RTT-ELC funding allocated for this system, rather than from other sources.

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	20	12

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)**

North Carolina has many elements in place for an early learning data system. Several activities were documented that indicated work towards integrating early childhood data systems (e.g., joint EC data system integration plan in 2008, unique identifiers for K-12 system, development of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System for K-12, a social service data system, and an EC Data work group in Appendix 31). Each of the Essential Data Elements has been addressed in the plan. The statewide integrated data system is "conceptualized as a linked data exchange hub using a data enterprise model." The plan addresses all essential data elements and how they would be enhanced to create a more complete data system. It is not clear how uniform data collection and easy entry of the data would occur. The data exchange among participating agencies is based on an in depth mapping of data structures, formats, and definitions, using a consultant as part of another state initiative (P-20+). The plan for how the data exchange would operate is not specified. The plan for generating information that is timely relevant, accessible, and easy appears to be in the beginning design stages. The ECAC data governance group would guide system design. Exploring how local Smart Start partnerships share and use community level data will provide models for possible innovation that might be "scaled up". It is not clear how the information would be used for continuous improvement and decision making. The plan describes how the Early Childhood Data System Governance Structure of the ECAC will develop a data governance policy with MOUs to ensure compliance with these requirements. A professional development plan is proposed to support implementation of the new data system and help stakeholders understand the purpose and operation of the system. NC's rating on the development of an early learning data system reflects partial implementation and a medium quality plan. Evidence for criteria (b) that addresses data collection and entry and (d) use of the data for continuous improvement and decision-making was not evident.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>256</b>

#### Priorities

##### Competitive Preference Priorities

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (P)(2)
The North Carolina proposal identifies a strong commitment to increasing the number of young children with high needs who are participating in high quality ELD programs. The state has a well developed licensing and inspection system that covers a wide range of ELD programs and includes plans to increase the number of programs that are monitored that serve children with high needs. The TQRIS is linked to licensing in the state, and incentives are in place to encourage participation in the TQRIS. The vast majority of programs are covered by this system. The rating reflects full implementation and a high quality plan for addressing this competitive preference priority of including all ELD programs in the TQRIS.

#### 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 (F)(3)**

North Carolina's description of the state's KEA on Table (A)(1)-12 shows that not all elements of the selection criteria are met. The score for (E)(1) was at 50% of the total, due to partial implementation and medium quality of the plan (with particular concerns about the amount of RTT-ELC funding devoted to this item in the budget). Thus they did not meet the criteria for Competitive Priority 3.

**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 NC application clearly demonstrates how it will improve the quality of ELD programs to prepare children with high needs for school success. NC is a national leader in early childhood, as demonstrated in their ongoing financial commitment and innovation in the field. The state has a strong plan and builds on strong implementation of a TQRIS, ECLD standards, a well aligned professional development system, and strong workforce incentives that increase teaching competencies and ECE staff retention. The state has a strong long-term commitment to quality early childhood services and to meeting the needs of children with high needs and engaging their families in meaningful ways. The foundation of the Smart Start Communities and a range of ECD programs, along with great resources and many existing evidence-based practices position the state for success. The KEA and data systems are areas requiring substantial development, and are not as strong as other areas of the proposal. Overall, the North Carolina proposal meets the absolute priority and offers a comprehensive and coherent plan for how NC will enhance their system to increase access to, and the quality of, ELD programs for children with high needs.</p>	



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

Technical Review Form Page



Application # NC-5027

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 12:20 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

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 description of the state's commitment and specific program details.

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

Comments on (A)(1)

Comments on (A)(1) A -1a North Carolina has demonstrated significant financial investments since 2007 in the provision of early learning programs for the states children, North Carolina has increased spending in contribution for special education and related services for preschool children. The Child Care Development fund was matched, and the state contributions increased. The Targeted Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) spending increased . The contributions to the dual subsidy programs increased, the contributions to preschool services not meeting eligibility requirements for programs. In these challenging economic times, North Carolina has decreased funding for the state preschool programs and the contributions to IDEA. The decreases do not detract from the state spending levels to the extent that North Carolina's commitment is questioned. The TORIS is built into the state's licensing systems. A (1) b The TORIS has a 1-5 rating license with public school program participation. 95% of the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) participates in the TORIS. Children with high needs are served in high quality programs, and 36% of the lead teachers working with birth -five children in licensed child care, Head Start and Pre-K settings have an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood or its equivalent or a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education or its equivalent. North Carolina's Pre-K program is ranked in the top ten in the Nation. These achievements create a strong foundation to build the RTT-ELC activities for the state of North Carolina. Established in 2010 , Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), established by the governor provides broad oversight to the early childhood programs to ensure strength of system, set outcomes for children and families, develop statewide plan to ensure outcomes, and work to sustain investments in early childhood. This advisory council is the lead agency for the RTT-ELC application. Established in 1993-Smart Start is a public/private partnership provides infrastructure to achieve efficient and effective results. The goal is to measurably increase the health and well being of young children birth through five, building the foundation for learning by: improving early education and care programs, provide parents with tools that support them in child-rearing, and ensure that children have access to preventive health care. In 2001, Smart Start established measurable, state-wide goals (Performance Based Incentive system) for increasing the health, well-being, and development of the birth through five population. Local partnerships take responsibility for making decisions about how to address areas of need. Each local Smart Start Board of Directors includes community leaders

representing businesses, ECE providers, parents, faith leaders, public education, and health care providers. Smart Start has been a national model for using the strength of local community-based partnerships with a strong state system to create good outcomes for children and families. North Carolina has developed standards for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that cover all of the essential domains of school readiness. These standards were published in 2005 and 2008 and are currently under revision to ensure alignment with the Common Core Standards of Kindergarten and reflect the recommendations of the National Early Literacy Panel and the Committee on Early Childhood Mathematics. These standards (located in the appendices) include strategies for educators and strategies for parents. The work on the standards is strong, and reflects a commitment to improved outcomes for high needs children. With the creation of the state Pre-K program, all teachers with a Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) certificate were required to receive comparable compensation to public school teachers regardless of the work setting. This represents a strength in North Carolina's application. In 2009, North Carolina began work on a state licensure system for all early childhood workers. The North Carolina Institute for Child Development Professionals is the certifying body. Any individual providing professional development must have an endorsement to provide workshops and courses of study to the workforce. North Carolina provides an accurate and objective assessment of the state's assessment system which adds strength to this proposal. This section also serves as a starting point and the rationale for the choice in Section E. It is clear that North Carolina has done a thorough assessment on the "state of pre-school" education in this section. Through the completion of data required in this section, North Carolina has strong data and information on services to children of high needs to make a strong proposal for change. This section received the full 20 points due to the demonstration of the state's commitment to resources and the provision of services for preschool children.

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

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)

Comments on (A)(2) North Carolina has set ten goals that will drive the reform agenda and assist the state in meeting the absolute priority required in this submitted application. The goals are a strength in this proposal as they are measurable and reflect timelines for meeting these goals. The goals are missing benchmarks for reviewing progress. As a whole, the ten goals are ambitious reflecting high percentages in improvement. The goals are related to the Focused Investment Areas selected in C, D, and E. Benchmarks will assist the program staff in monitoring the progress of the ELC. A noted weakness in goal 3 is that only 47% of the lead teachers working with children birth-5 in licensed child care, Head Start and Pre-K settings will have an Associate's degree (AA) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) or a Bachelor of Science (BS) or Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) licensure. In light of the support and the professional development incentives provided in the ELL, less than half of the teachers will receive an AA. A noted weakness in goal 4 is that only 75% of preschoolers (3-5) with High Needs statewide will receive developmental screenings. This is a low percentage as it is the "last stop" among the preschool continuum where children and their parents receive individualized attention to close the achievement gap. North Carolina has elected to target communities in the Northeastern section of the state (described as rural counties with young children exhibiting the highest needs) called the Transformation Zone. It is also a strength that this Transformation Zone is the target of North Carolina's Race to the Top Application. The state plan includes three strategies: strengthen standards, assessment and the capacity collect and use data to drive program quality and continuous improvement, invest in people and relationships to increase teacher and system effectiveness and sustain change; and target high intensity supports and community infrastructure-building to turn around poor outcomes for young children in highest need, rural counties. These strategies are strong. The state intends to raise the floor and the ceilings of the TQRIS levels to improve the services to children with high needs. The entry level requirements for early childhood providers will be increased under the ELC initiative. Higher qualified and trained staff will support better outcomes for children. Other quality efforts include: increasing access to high quality college level course work for early childhood educators; building knowledge, competencies and recognition for professional development and technical assistance providers – a strength in this area is the development of a CEU (Continuing Education Unit) course on coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance and making it a requirement for individuals providing professional development, creating a new online Master's degree in early Childhood Leadership and management through the high education system; target high-intensity supports and community infrastructure in the poorest communities with high needs children. This section contains a table of timelines and milestones that establishes activities for years one through four of the grant period. This table is a weakness in this section due to the vague language in the stages of development and it is not possible to connect the stages to the key activities in the grant application. The focused investment areas selected by the state include C1-C4. These choices are strong and reflect gaps and areas which need improvement. In section A-1, Standards alignment is critically important to closing achievement gaps. Improving the TQRIS is critical in achieving the

state's goals, and addressing health, behavioral, and development needs of children with high needs during the early years in critical to improving outcomes for these children. Family engagement is critical to the supporting children with high needs. North Carolina chooses to align family engagement through the TQRIS (a strength) and with those of the state identified strongest family engagement program in the state, Head Start. Focused Area D-2 – The choice of this focus area is a strength because it addresses the needs of children for well trained teachers to produce school readiness in children with high needs. The need for more qualified staff is well documented in Section A. North Carolina will write to Focused Investment Area D.2 because it most closely matches the State plan to support the continued education and professional development of the work force. The state has collected data on which to base its reform area in professional development. Focused Area E-1 This is a strong focus area for the state and meets a critical need. North Carolina elects to write to focus area E 1 and E2. The state does not have a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. The development of a common readiness assessment will help reduce the achievement gaps in all children, particularly children with high needs. The ELC fund will assist in this development. Focus Area E-2 – The state chose to write to E-2 to align data collection with the K-12 longitudinal data system, and collect common data elements across programs in the state. This is an acknowledged need, and will help the state meet the absolute priority of the. The state's plan reflected careful consideration of the data on children, the current status of services to children with high needs, and current status of work in the focused investment areas.

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

Comments on (A)(3) A definite strength in this section is the copy of a governance chart in the appendices that is reflective of the partnerships and the leadership required for the implementation of the ELC grant. The table establishes line and staff authorities in the application and bullets responsibilities on the chart under each agency. The state is building on existing interagency governance structures which has been successful in the past in sustaining the changes made in early childhood services. The time taken to articulate the responsibilities carried out in an ELC grant, develop partnerships that are willing to commit support in writing (MOUs) and include intermediary organizations supporting the ELC demonstrate planning by a broad base of stakeholders. Inclusion in planning is the first step of buy-in for sweeping reform in any agency. The partners signing the MOUs indicated their willingness and readiness for the implementation of the ELC and are the required Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) housed in the governor's office, the Department of Health and Human Services, housing the Division of Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and the Department of Public Instruction which houses, the Department of Early Learning (DEL). The governance of the ELD system is provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, housing the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and the Division of Public Health (DPH) and the Department of Public Instruction which houses the Department of Early Learning (DEL). All of the work will be coordinated through the (ECAC). Evidence provided in A-3-1 further defines the roles and responsibilities. The MOUs for participating agencies are signed and define responsibilities of the lead agency and the participating agencies and include the joint responsibilities of each agency. The scope of work for the participating agencies and the lead agencies have been delineated for each section of this application and signed by the partnerships. These documents are included in the appendices. The ECAC is the formal policy making body for the ELC. Disputes will be solved at the RTT coordinating council. Any unresolved disputes will be decided by the ECAC. The process for handling of disputes is included in the MOU for the ECAC. A strength of this grant is the broad based support from groups and agencies (private and public) found in Table A-3-2. The copies of the letters of support are found in the appendices. For this section of the grant, North Carolina included goals (not measurable), and activities, and timelines (fully described) and related to the activities. The rating in this section is based on the partnership and the commitment reflected in the MOUs and the letters of support. The scope of work is clearly defined, and support is guaranteed from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The state has include a broad range of stakeholders, established the work of the partnerships, garnered support from the community, and in general let the public know of its intent to improve the outcomes for children with high needs in the Transformation Zone. The state's response to this criterion was strong in the development of partnerships and the leadership descriptions. There were no significant weaknesses, and the section was awarded the full 10 points.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	15	12

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)**

Comments on (A)(4) The state plan demonstrates the sustainability of the reform after the grant period. North Carolina has submitted evidence on Table A-4-1, the programs and existing funds that will be used to support early learning in the state. Evidence submitted is reflective of the state's strong commitment to early childhood programs. Examples are included from every agency requested in the application. The ECAC will provide advice to the Governor about building and sustaining a high-quality system of care. The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) supports five major quality projects- Child Care Resources and Referral (CCRR), Improving salaries, Rated License Project using the ERS for the TQRIS, and the NC Health and Safety Resource Center. North Carolina Pre-K provides an early learning program the year before kindergarten entry. The funds also support

professional development. Head Start and Early Head Start supports high-quality programs that support their kindergarten entry skills. Title I— a portion of these funds are expected to be spent on pre-school children. IDEA funds will be spent on early intervention and supporting the least restrictive environment for young children. The Statewide Longitudinal Data System will support the development of data entry and analysis of ELD programs. Smart Start's local decision making will support family access for high quality programs, improving quality improvement of ELD programs, and workforce development Home visitation and family strengthening programs are supported by the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. North Carolina's request is within the \$70,000,000 limit designated in the application regulations. A budget is included that delineates the personnel and salaries to be provided by the grant. It also includes budgets for each of the initiatives described in the project. The state has applied for budgets to cover partners' expenses described in the MOUs for their part in the work of administering the ELC. These costs appear to be reasonable and necessary to support the scope of services and activities (of one time investment) in the grant. The work in the transformation zone, and North Carolina's commitment to serve on a consortia of states in strengthening the programs and providing for continuous improvement across the state based on the data gathered is evidence that the state intends to maintain its efforts. The establishment of a longitudinal data system which includes Pre-K data will be evidence of that commitment. This section is strong in that it provides line item budgets and narratives to explain the use of ELC funds. The budget for the Longitudinal Data System (K-3) is covered in its entirety with the grant funds. For this reason full points have not been awarded for this section.

## B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<p>The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--</p> <p>(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Early Learning and Development Standards;</li> <li>(2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;</li> <li>(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;</li> <li>(4) Family engagement strategies;</li> <li>(5) Health promotion practices; and</li> <li>(6) Effective data practices;</li> </ul> <p>(b) Is clear and has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards that lead to improved learning outcomes for children; and</p> <p>(c) Is linked to the State licensing system for Early Learning and Development Programs.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)
<p>(B)(1) B-1-a North Carolina's TQRIS is based on a set of Tiered program standards that include the required elements listed in the application. North Carolina has a strong foundation for continuing its work on the TQRIS. It is only one of three states in the nation that has built the state TQRIS into the licensing system. Licensing is required for a one star rating under the TQRIS. The documentation in this section is strong and supports a substantially implemented high quality response rating. Table B-1-1 describes the current TQRIS and its coverage of Program Standards Elements. The standards are based on the best practices and reflect high expectations relative to national standards. The coverage is nearly complete. The standards are measurable across the areas. The standards may be rated by observation or the review of documents by an independent reviewer. The TQRIS rating of a program is easily understood by the star rating licensure. The standards of the licensing systems are not addressed in IDEA part C or Licensing Standards for a licensing certificate. The licensure of a program does not require the use of Early Learning and Development Standards. The Tiered Quality Rating System is included in the appendices, and is a document that clearly reflects the expectations and documentation for each rating from a 1 star to a 5 star program. The program standards are clearly described in the document submitted in the appendices. Point requirements for the awarding of each rating are included. The standards for the TQRIS are measurable and have been validated in a 2010 validation study. Ratings are applied through observations and documentation (i.e. teacher education transcripts). Training is provided for the raters and inter-rater reliability checks have been implemented to ensure that the ratings are reliable. The TQRIS is embedded in the state licensing system. A license is required for a 1 star rating. The plan reflects a high quality response in this section is strong in that it uses work that has been done earlier as the basis for making changes. The plan additionally proposes activities for revising the TQRIS, and gives further definitions and differentiation among the tiers. The plan includes timelines and delineation of personnel responsible for meeting the revision. The comprehensive assessment system changes include the addition of Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Education requirements for ELD staff will be strengthened through credentialing, and the Department of Child Development and Early Education(DCDEE) has recently instituted an attendance reporting system required for subsidized</p>

early education. North Carolina has based the reform efforts on past successes and used the data collected in Section A to design the program changes makes the changes in the proposed changes in the TQRIS meaningful to the participants in the ELC. The changes in the assessment system will assist agencies, programs, parents and children in understanding the quality of services offered by the centers. Changes in early childhood screening and assessment will help ECE teachers and childcare workers create quality experiences to ensure that all children have the opportunity for entering school ready to learn. There were no significant weaknesses noted in this section of the application, resulting in the award of the full 10 points. Comments on (B)(2) To promote participation in the TQRIS system, the state has implemented some new policies and practices. This section is strong in that it addresses participation by requirement and removed the exemption clauses traditionally afforded to programs included or operated by public schools. This has been accomplished by: 1. State funded pre-schools have been moved to the Department of Child Development and Early Education. Programs in public schools (previously exempt) are now required to participate by July 12, 2012. Community-based childcare settings are now required to participate. 2. The state addresses Head Start and Early Head Start participation. 90% of the programs participate in the TQRIS. Those that receive funds to serve children in the NC Pre-K will have to participate by July 2012. 3. Part C of IDEA provides support in the child's natural setting, home care, residential care or family care. IDEA Part C is not a childcare setting. The licensed program would be required to participate in TQRIS. 4. Children served by Part B of IDEA and Title 1 are served in the public schools. Part B children are currently served in public school Pre-K and the requirement to participate is addressed by the move to the DCDEE. 5. Program receiving CCDF Funds are currently required to participate in the TQRS. Another strength of this section is the activities to scale-up participation. The activities are fully described and include timelines. A weakness in this section is the absence of information on the effective policies and practices designed to help families afford high quality child care in areas with significant population of children with high needs. The targets for achieving increased participation are described. The state has included baseline data in the table and the targets are ambitious and achievable, providing for an increase in participation each year. The one exception is the the Title 1 and IDEA participation is low at 64%. These programs traditionally serve children with the highest needs, and should be required to participate in the TQRIS at the highest levels. These programs are traditionally operated in the public schools, and the need for academic support and parent engagement is high. A higher percentage of participation could support improved achievement. The state has set targets with the intent of increasing participation. It has also designed incentives and subsidy programs to improve participation by families of children with high needs. The Transformation Zone is an area of the state with a large population of children with high needs. The area is in the geographic mountains of northeast North Carolina. Resources will be directed to the Transformation Zone. The specific targets set, and the targeting of the population in the Transformation Zone are the basis for the score of 13 points. Full points were not awarded because of the absence of policies and practices specifically designed to help more families afford high-quality child care.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</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)

Comments on (B)(2) To promote participation in the TQRIS system, the state has implemented some new policies and practices. This section is strong in that it addresses participation by requirement and removed the exemption clauses traditionally afforded to programs included or operated by public schools. This has been accomplished by: 1. State funded pre-schools have been moved to the Department of Child Development and Early Education. Programs in public schools (previously exempt) are now required to participate by July 12, 2012. Community-based childcare settings are now required to participate. 2. The state addresses Head Start and Early Head Start participation. 90% of the programs participate in the TQRIS. Those that receive funds to serve children in the NC Pre-K will have to participate by July 2012. 3. Part C of IDEA provides support in the child's natural

setting, home care, residential care or family care. IDEA Part C is not a childcare setting. The licensed program would be required to participate in TQRIS. 4. Children served by Part B of IDEA and Title 1 are served in the public schools. Part B children are currently served in public school Pre-K and the requirement to participate is addressed by the move to the DCDEE. 5. Program receiving CCDF Funds are currently required to participate in the TQRS. Another strength of this section is the activities to scale-up participation. The activities are fully described and include timelines. A weakness in this section is the absence of information on the effective policies and practices designed to help families afford high quality child care in areas with significant population of children with high needs. The targets for achieving increased participation are described. The state has included baseline data in the table and the targets are ambitious and achievable, providing for an increase in participation each year. The one exception is the the Title 1 and IDEA participation is low at 64%. These programs traditionally serve children with the highest needs, and should be required to participate in the TQRIS at the highest levels. These programs are traditionally operated in the public schools, and the need for academic support and parent engagement is high. A higher percentage of participation could support improved achievement. The state has set targets with the intent of increasing participation. It has also designed incentives and subsidy programs to improve participation by families of children with high needs. The Transformation Zone is an area of the state with a large population of children with high needs. The area is in the geographic mountains of northeast North Carolina. Resources will be directed to the Transformation Zone. The specific targets set, and the targeting of the population in the Transformation Zone are the basis for the score of 13 points. Full points were not awarded because of the absence of policies and practices specifically designed to help more families afford high-quality child care.

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

Comments on (B)(3) A strong component of this application is the system that is currently in place for monitoring early childhood centers. This is evidenced by procedures that provide for announced and unannounced visits for monitoring licensure requirements, requests for monitoring visits due to changing circumstances that might change the rating (i.e. change of ownership), as well as investigation of parental complaints. Evidence provided indicates that the state has a substantially implemented plan in place for conducting these visits. Since the tools used in these visits are more reflective of the environment of the centers, the tools do not adequately measure the scales across the TQRIS, especially the North Carolina Foundations Standards and assessment. Centers, such as Private childcare centers and licensed centers, are not required to use the Infant/Toddler and Pre-School Foundations developed by the State. Foundations standards are reflected in the curriculum used, the assessments used to assist teachers in planning small groups and individual instruction. Assessment of young children should be ongoing and provide for screening, as well as the administration of formative and summative instruments. The state has plans to develop a new TQRIS rating scale with a consortium of states. It provides timelines for and milestones for each key activity. North Carolina uses the Environmental Rating Scales to measure observed classroom quality (schedule, space, and materials) and is widely used. These scales are only applied to levels 3 through 5 of the TQRIS. The scales include ratings for infant and toddler environments, early childhood environments, family care environments, and school-age care environments. These measures provide feedback on program structure, space, care routines, staff evaluation, provisions meeting the needs of students with disabilities, and interaction between and among staff and children. These measures were developed at the University of North Carolina and have been validated in a 2007 study. The use across programs of these measures is a strength. The weakness is that these tools do not provide enough information for centers to develop high quality programming related to foundations standards and achievement. The interaction ratings provided in these scales do not provide enough information for teachers to develop skills and practices that provide developmentally appropriate classroom procedures for student interaction, questioning for student understanding, and extension of language to increase a child's understanding and use of concepts and language. The planned addition of CLASS, a tool rating the adult child interactions will strengthen this section. CLASS rates interaction among many domains including interactions around language and literacy. The state requires licenses (with quality ratings) to be posted in each center. The DCDEE website provides information about the star rating system and includes a page to assist parents to use when a child care program provider is being considered for the child or children in the family. It also includes FAQ's and is available in Spanish. The Child Care Referral and Resource centers provide information about the ratings when assisting families in locating childcare centers. The DCDEE provides documentation of licensing violations, rating assessments for program and standards and as well as complaints or substantiated instances of abuse and neglect. This section is strong in that the Department of Child Development of Early Education is providing critical information on childcare facilities for the parents and the public. North Carolina has no fully implemented a TQRIS system. The ratings only include licensing at Tier 1 and

Tier 1 which will not substantially impact the use of standards and curriculum for the infant and toddler population. Full points could not be awarded because of this omission. The work that North Carolina has done in the monitoring of the ELD programs, and the changes proposed under this ELC, specifically the inclusion of CLASS in the rating adult child interaction provide the criteria used to raise this score.

	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>20</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**

Comments on (B)(4)
<p>Comments on (B)(4) North Carolina's previous work in providing high quality care through a rating system have proven successful. The centers with five star ratings, increased from 94 to 1600 in the past eleven years. The state credits the subsidy system for driving the improvement. 61% of the children in the subsidy system are served in a four or five star center. The state referenced other incentives such as workforce development strategies to improve the services and instruction for children with high needs. The state has implemented policies to prioritize the access to high quality programs for special populations. The state budgets limits the awarding of subsidies to centers at the 3 to 5 star quality, with the intent of children with the highest needs being served at the higher quality centers. The state uses multiple funding streams to provide full day and full year care for working families, providing incentive for families to enroll and participate with their children. Successful centers provide services in time periods that meet the needs of working families. The goals are ambitious, and are established on the baseline data for the number of high quality centers and increasing the number of high needs children served in high quality centers. To assist in the development of the high quality services, an Infant-Toddler specialist will be assigned to serve centers in the Transformation Zone. In addition, the state will establish some part time slots to serve more children. These goals are achievable, have timelines delineated, and the responsibilities have been assigned by the DCDEE state office. The technical assistance provided ensures that the centers are focusing on meeting the needs of children with high needs, particularly infants and toddlers. The state has created a thoughtful plan that includes partnerships to meet the criteria required in this section. The creation of the partnership, the focus of the changes in the plan based on the data provided in section A and the working in the Transformation zone have given this section a high rating. There are no points deducted.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to design and implement evaluations--working with an independent evaluator and, when warranted, as part of a cross-State evaluation consortium--of the relationship between the ratings generated by the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System and the learning outcomes of children served by the State's Early Learning and Development Programs by--</p> <p>(a) Validating, using research-based measures, as described in the State Plan (which also describes the criteria that the State used or will use to determine those measures), whether the tiers in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System accurately reflect differential levels of program quality; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

Comments on (B)(5) B-5 This section of the plan reflects a high quality response to the indicators and strong commitment of the state to ensure quality in ELD programming. NC has conducted and published two studies (2001 and 1010) on the tiered quality rating systems in place. The state will use these studies to revise the TQRIS and differentiate quality more between each tier. These studies represent a strength in this section of the application. The validation studies are located in the appendices and concluded a statistically significant relationship between star ratings and other quality indicators. This study was conducted by independent observers-not state raters. The 2010 study was conducted by the UNC-G team which gathered data on toddler and preschool classrooms. The higher rated four and five star rated centers had significantly higher ratings on the ERS and CLASS as compared two centers with one through three stars. In 2003, Smart Start conducted a study in which the relationships between the classroom ratings (used in TQIRS) and child outcomes. A flaw in the study appears to be controlling for other child and family characteristics. Cognitive and social and emotional experiences were studied. In classrooms with higher ratings – children demonstrated a more positive affect, toddlers were perceived to have fewer problem behaviors and pre-school children demonstrated higher skills in flexible thinking and considered themselves smarter than children from lower star centers. A strength in this section lies in the intention to use the studies to revise the TQRIS and conduct further validation studies. The state has a plan for conducting validation studies and has defined key activities to be conducted in three phases. A timeline and milestones are provided for each key activity beginning with the selection of an independent evaluator, and includes training a research team on program classroom and assessment tools through the completion of the validation study. Another strength is the dedication of \$2,393,000 of its ELC budget for the TQRIS validation project at the DCDEE. Child outcome studies in center based classrooms will be sampled at two time points in phase 1 of the validation so that the state can examine children's progress over time. This will occur in Family Care Centers in Phase 2. North Carolina will continue with the validation studies for use throughout the TQRIS revision process and to provide for continuous improvement. The validation studies, and the plan to use the research design to determine if the TQRIS is related to the child outcomes is a significant strength, and will provide the basis for ongoing plans for strengthening the TQRIS. The willingness to participate in a cross state consortium also strengthens this section and is indicative of North Carolina's commitment to continuously improve the quality of services. This is the basis for the award of the entire 15 points.

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

Each State must address in its application--

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

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

**C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

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

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</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)**

Comments on (C)(1) North Carolina's Foundations for Infant's Toddler's and Pre-School are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for use with all children birth - five. The foundations provide for learning experiences across the domains, and include tools with each volume for teachers and parents. These volumes lend themselves to widespread use among pre-school programs which is an intent of this ELC application. This section provides information on the standards and their use in the state and North Carolina has supplied evidence in the appendices to include the infant and toddler standards as well as pre-school standards. The volumes reflect all of the learning domains including language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (mathematics and science, approaches to learning, physical well being and motor development and social and emotional development). A validation study is included in the appendices, which examines the foundations at the infant toddler level, and finds that the standards are developmentally appropriate. The standards reflect a range of normal development. The validity of the pre-school standards was published in October 2010. The study was conducted by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the SERVE Regional Educational Library. The validation study indicated a weakness in how the document looks at play. This is a weakness due to the fact that play is critical work for the pre-school child and provides the basis of learning across the critical domains. In addition, the validation study suggests that the revision committee work on cultural relevance for the standards. This weakens considerably the state's assertion that the standards are culturally responsive. While the cultural differences may be recognized, cultural sensitivity should be reflected in differences in the subculture of ethnic groups, families, and individuals. North Carolina has provided an alignment document that reflects current alignment with the K standards. An alignment study shows good alignment in the area of Language Arts and adequate alignment in Mathematics. North Carolina's response is strong in that it provides for wide distribution of Foundation Standards. North Carolina is currently implementing the learning foundations across multiple programs by incorporating them into the program standards, in curricula and educational assessments, and the workforce knowledge and competency standards. The state has made these foundations widely available and they are used to guide instructional planning. Resources have been developed to provide extensive training on the foundations and they are being implemented into the college and university system. The availability of training and the opportunity to use the standards training in the workplace (i.e. relating the training to the work) increases the understanding of the Foundations documents. North Carolina has responded to the implementation and validity studies provided in this section with a Revision plan for the Foundations. Goals have been established, and the ECAC will convene a diverse standards revision committee. The goals are to enact policy changes to ensure the use of the foundations, and implement strategies that will ensure that the standards are understood and used by the ELD service providers. A timeline with roles and responsibilities is provided. North Carolina will ensure that the standards are appropriate for children with high needs, and will be culturally and linguistically appropriate for all children. This strategy is strong in that using standards based activities and strategies for all children and will ensure that the state can "close the achievement gap" experienced by children with high needs. North Carolina has developed high quality standards for and a plan to expand the use of these standards in the Transformation Zone. The weakness around the use of play to provide high quality learning experiences and the cultural sensitivity references indicate that the state needs to provide additional professional learning in these areas. Due to the importance of these components in standards based instruction, full points were not awarded.

	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)

Comments on (C)(2) The state has submitted a partially implemented high quality response to this section. North Carolina recognizes that assessment can drive program improvement and better outcomes for children, particularly those children with high needs. The state has implemented (or has available) for implementation some assessment pieces. These are not in place for screening and follow up for children with high needs in the behavioral, health, and developmental domains. In selecting this focused area of improvement, the state is responsive to the data collected on the Comprehensive Assessment area. The TQRIS did not require programs to administer assessments, lending credence to the partially implemented status. Key activities and timelines have been developed and included in this section of the plan with responsible parties and key personnel assigned to complete the tasks. The following criteria contribute to the strength and to the high quality response due to the focus on the developmentally appropriate approaches to assessment, valid and reliable screening assessments normed on children with high needs, and training the instructional staff to use the assessments. Training is significantly important if the assessments are to be of any value in guiding instruction and closing the achievement gaps in children with high needs. The budget includes support for training in CLASS, and the DCDEE will provide

support to increase awareness and understanding of CLASS. The TORIS will be revised to support EDLD programs' use of assessment. The state has developed a plan to develop an assessment system that includes key goals in which screening efforts are coordinated, centers conduct and use formative child assessments, the state works collaboratively with other states to development a new measure of environmental quality designed specifically for the TORIS, use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) measuring the quality of adult – child interactions, and develop a Kindergarten entry assessment. A cross-agency Task Force on Child Assessment will be created. This agency will be responsible for the selection of reliable and valid screening assessments. The task force will develop a process to make recommendations for formative assessments to be used and develop professional development activities to be used in pre-service and in-service programs. Policy changes will be implemented. Sharing assessment data across program lines is important in assuring quality of programs and achievement of children. The Task Force will make recommendations for the sharing of data. Due to the lack of specificity on the membership of this Task Force, it is not clear how the decisions will be made, and the qualifications of the members will bring to the table. The state does not currently provide a comprehensive assessment system across all programs serving children with high needs. The plan has implemented the use of a cross agency task force to make recommendations on the screening and formative assessments. This includes policy changes and requirements for professional development in these areas. The state's response is aligned to the data presented on assessment in Section A of the application. The strength of the state's plan in this section is responsiveness to the need for developmentally appropriate assessments for all children that will inform instruction and ensure that the readiness gap is closed by Kindergarten entry. The state has established a Task Force to make recommendations for assessments to be used, and establish professional development. Based on the current status of an incomplete and comprehensive assessment system, full points were not awarded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

#### Comments on (C)(3)

Comments on (C)(3) The state has included evidence of the existing Health and Safety Standards addressed in the TORIS which is embedded in the licensing system. The plan for revisions will include health and safety standards within the TORIS. The changes proposed are to be implemented in health and safety, behavioral screening and follow-up and promoting physical, social, and emotional development across the levels. The state plan has two goals: Improve the efforts to ensure that children with high needs are screened, referred and receive appropriate service at the earliest opportunity, and supporting the health and behavior needs of young children in the ELD programs. The activities provided support the goals, and will take place at the center level. The ELC will provide a health care consultant. The health care consultant will provide coaching and education for center staff to assist children and their families in making wise choice about nutrition and diet, exercise, and health practices increasing the numbers of EC educators delivering high quality instruction to children and families on these issues. Training and support at local centers strengthen the plan. Training related to the duties and responsibilities of educators and childcare workers is more readily received if provided in the center and modeled for the staff. To address the physical and nutrition education, Shape NC will be replicated in the Transformation Zone. Timelines and assigned agencies are defined in this section contributing to the strength of the rating. The resources are adequate to provide these services. Over \$4,000,000 of ELC funds will be invested. Smart Start local partnerships will contribute over \$15,000,000 during the four year period. The ABCD will expand to cover the entire state, hiring seven new coordinators. Two new coaches will be hired in the transformation zone, bring training at the local level. Another strategy is the replication of the Evidence based Child Find and Triage Initiative. This will provide home nursing visits for families of children with high needs. This is at a cost of \$700 per family - a wise investment in a strategy that can assist the state in meeting children's needs. The goals and targets are based on the data collected in tables on performance measures and are achievable. North Carolina has MOUs with other agencies



to assist in meeting these goals and participating in the sustainability of this section. With the implementation of the proposed plan, healthier children will be more able to fully participate in school activities that will close the gaps in achievement. The goals are ambitious, due to the fact that the health of children is largely controlled by the family's ability to participate in wellness activities and understand how nutrition and a clean environment impact a child's growth and development. Targets are ambitious in light of the task before the ELC staff and partnerships. The state has proposed bringing the training to the center level and training teachers to provide instruction in these areas. For this reason, the proposal warrants a rating of 15 points.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</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)**

Comments on (C)(4) A wide array of family engagement strategies are described in section A of this plan. Most of the activities are program requirements and only a few are currently tied to the TQRIS. The changes proposed in this section are an adaptation of the Head Start family engagement strategies, (the strongest strategies, identified by the state) currently implemented. The new standards will reflect culturally and linguistically appropriate materials for families. There is a high probability of success in these higher standards, because the standards and the changes in the activities provided will be linked to the TQRIS and the technical assistance and coaching will be supplied through the TQRIS and delivered through Head Start staff, currently providing the strongest parent engagement program. Timelines have been provided for the key activities provided by the Head Start hubs and the family strengthening services in the Transformation Zone. There will be an investment of \$5,000,000 in these activities from the ECL funds. The ECAC will be responsible for developing the sustainability plans. The real strength of this plan lies in the intent to assess the families' high needs through assessing the needs and approaching families on family strengths. This will provide for a high level of engagement and ensure that families benefit from the program. The coaches may improve their skills and ability to train teachers and center directors on assessment of family strengths and engaging families program activities by accessing training in Family Strength based assessment through the National Center for Family Literacy based in Kentucky. The current implementation of the family engagement strategies and the lack of guidance and requirements from the state level for centers to provide family engagement strongly impact outcomes for children. This seems to detract from the state's understanding of these activities. As a result, full points were not awarded.

**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)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>

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)**

Comments on (D)(2) The strength of the plan rests in North Carolina's commitment to a high quality workforce and documented achievement over the past 30 years. The state has increased the number of credentialed and degreed workers in the ELD programs. Improving the knowledge and understanding of teachers in implementing the standards, using curriculum, and planning instruction for children based on individual needs, improves the outcomes for all children – particularly those with high needs. The plan for expanding the access to professional development which is aligned with the workforce knowledge and credential include: Teacher Licensure – The strategy activities, timelines and responsibilities delineated for this activity. The strategy is strengthened by the inclusion of mentoring of newly licensed teachers, recruitment of newly licensed B-K teachers to move up to full licensure. Educator Efficacy Endorsement – Timelines and responsibilities are delineated for this activity. This strategy is strong in that a statewide committee will establish standards. The endorsement certification will be available at a reduced cost. The DCDEE will oversee this activity at a cost of \$625,000 to the ELC. Performance measures are included based on the current status of the workforce. Community College Accreditation – The ELC will assist the colleges through grant provision for the college programs to receive NAEYC accreditation. Timelines and milestones are included. The DCDEE will oversee these timelines and monitor activities. Improving access to Community Colleges – The strength of this activity lies in coursework being available in Spanish, while students are learning English. Another strength is that Early Childhood Content is embedded in remedial coursework. As students are learning, content and basic literacy knowledge will improve their comprehension and application of the content within the classrooms. The use of the selected curriculum will improve and standards will be more clearly understood. Resources have been allocated and are indicated in the budget. The DCDEE will provide support to issue and monitor the grants. Ambitious targets have been set. Online Master's Degree – The allocation of ELC resources is low at \$50,000 for the provision of Master's degree coursework. As directors, managers, and instructional staff increase the knowledge of curriculum choices, how to choose and use curriculum and align the work to the standards, and assess children on the standards, use the assessment results for planning for the individual child, as well as small groups, the outcomes for children will improve. The ECAC will oversee the activity. Coaching and Mentoring – This activity supports the achievement of goals because continuing education is important to the development and quality of coaching strategies. The DCDEE will oversee the activity. Timelines and benchmarks are included. Cultural Competence – This activity is strong in that is responsive to the independent reviewers of the on the state standards. DCDEE is responsible for this project and a change manager will lead all activities. The Leadership Institute adds to the strength of this project. Well prepared directors can provide leadership and assist with curriculum development, oversee the assessments, and select and provide support to coaches. Strong coaches can improve classroom instruction which leads to improved outcomes for children. This will provide support at the center level and ensure ongoing development of a competent and highly qualified staff. The leadership institute will cost \$1,213,340 and is provided by the ELC. Timelines and responsibilities have been included. The CCR&R system will participate and provide continuing education units (CEU) for center staff. Specialists will be provided in social behavior to support the social emotional development of young children. This is a strong strategy. Positive interactions with caregivers and teachers and close knit positive family relationships are important in the social emotional development of young children. The ECAC will create and convene a council on Early Childhood - This council will create an annual report on the goals and action plans related to quality early childhood programs. Four million dollars have been provided from the grant funds to supplement wages and create rewards for staff to improve retention of workers in the state. Timelines and milestones have been included for this activity. Scholarship options are being developed. This strategy will assist childcare workers and leadership to continue their education. This is especially important in high poverty communities where wages are usually consistent with the community at large. Continued education will provide incentives for educators to remain in the field. \$600,000 has been set aside from the ELC budget for the provision activities for reporting data on the annual report. The DCDEE will oversee this program. Reporting will take place annually. The analysis of the data included in this report should provide for ongoing change in the ELD system. The targets are ambitious and achievable. North Carolina's Transformation Zone is a high poverty community. The development of high quality teachers, in an area where it is difficult for teachers to complete an education, lends support to the selection of this area. High quality teachers must be retained after they have completed required levels of certification. Teacher and staff retention must be reported so that the state can continue with supports for developing and retaining a high quality workforce. The baseline data has provided the information on which the targets are created. Buy in from multiple organizations including the community colleges and universities strengthen this section of the application. Multiple agencies at different levels will be working on these strategies to meet the targets. This section warrants a high score due to the buy in from partnerships and commitment from the DCDEE. North Carolina has submitted a plan in which the state establishes the standards for the credentialing of teachers at the state level. Leading the dialogue, working with colleges and universities, and issuing the license at the state levels will improve outcomes for children (providing a highly qualified teacher and caregiver) not only in the transformation zone, but in the state as a whole. Due to the wide array of support offered, the choices provided, and the partnerships which will participate in the professional development, this section is awarded 38 points.

## E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

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

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that—</p> <p>(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p> <p>(d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and</p> <p>(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).</p> <p>Scoring Rubric Used: <b>Quality and Implementation</b></p>		
<b>Comments on (E)(1)</b>		
<p>Comments on (E)(1) North Carolina's decision to write to E-1 is based on the following: the limited sample of children included in the School Readiness Assessment. Only a few children took the assessment. It is not clear in the application if the sample included children with high needs. The assessment tool does not provide information on the readiness levels of the children to be used by K-2 teachers and particularly children with high needs. Readiness information is critical in designing instruction that will assist in closing the achievement gap. The new plan is strong in that the new readiness assessment will be aligned to the improved Foundations standards. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will be developed in the context of a K-3 assessment. The work will include experts from UNC to provide leadership in the development and the alignment. The K-3 Assessment Task for from the Office of early learning and the curriculum content specialist will insure that the assessment is aligned with the K-3 assessments. This is a strong strategy for developing a readiness assessment in that it provides for vertical alignment across the domains (including broadening the domains in K-2). The validity and reliability will be established on the children with high needs and will include children with disabilities and dual language learners. These children were not included in the first sample. An additional strength to this section is the provision of an alternative assessment for children with disabilities. Some children may not (for physical and developmental reasons) be able to participate in the K-3 assessment. The assessment will be administered by 2014 – 2015 in line with the requirements of the grant. Timelines and milestones are included. Goals for this activity have been established. 8,769,801 will be reserved from ELC funds to develop, pilot and implement the K-3 assessment to include training of teachers on the administration and interpretation of the assessment. Continued administration will be funded through the state programs. The state has recognized the limitations of the current Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and has established a strong plan for completing the new assessment. It acknowledges that other states may have ideas that will strengthen their new assessment, and they are willing to work on the new assessment with a consortia of states. The high score is reflective of a high quality plan based on the current state of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.</p>		
<b>(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(2)
<p>Comments on (E)(2) The development of this data system improves the method by which the state collects information on the ECD across the required data elements. The data system development is designed to cover the gaps in the data collection of agencies across the ELD programs. The essential data elements are included, and will include all of the ECE programs in the state. Joint agreements will form the basis for the sharing of data. Collection and entry of data will be enhanced by providing professional development on the system. The information provided by the data system will be available to stakeholders, parents and teachers to ensure program improvement and use of data for instructional improvement. A Data Governance policy will be enforced by ECAC to ensure that the data complies with federal privacy laws. This is important in that centers and families will be reluctant to provide and enter data if it is used for reasons other than program improvement and closing the achievement gap. Goals, activities, and timelines are included in this section. The state has ensured that the centers, staff, and parents are willing to participate in the data collection. It is not clear how they can make this statement. Centers, staff, and parents may not make their personal information available for entry into a data system. Assuring that privacy laws will be followed in the dissemination of data meets the criteria for this section of the application. The state has provided comprehensive information on the plan in this section of the application and deserves the full points awarded. This is a good plan that is yet to be implemented. Full points were not awarded because it is unclear will how families, children, and staff will be required to submit their data.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>256</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (F)(2)
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Comments on (P)(2) The state has articulated a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of services provided high needs (and all) children through the new licensing requirements. The licensing standards provide for equity of the environment and the quality of services to children across the continuum of service providers. North Carolina is commended for recognizing the importance of equity. The state has included a plan to cover all programs currently exempted by licensure to include federal programs, state pre-k programs located in public schools currently exempted, and IDEA programs where children may be served across multiple programs. This ensures high quality services across the continuum, and ensures that programs will continue to provide high quality instruction by well qualified and well-trained teachers and caregivers. This will ensure that all children are receiving services from high quality programs. The state is implementing an improved TQRIS in which all state regulated systems are required to participate. The state is raising the standards on each tier of the TQRIS which at a minimum include licensing at the first level. Requiring licensing at the first tier ensures that all programs, public or private, fall under the TQRIS. The state has provided leadership in the development of policies, practices, and incentives to ensure movement to higher tiers in the TQRIS. Based on the descriptions provided and the intent to implement a TQRIS with all programs participating, the state is awarded full points.

**Priorities**

	Available	Yes/No
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry</b>	0 or 10	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p>		
<b>Comments on (P)(3)</b>		
The E-1 criterion has earned at least 70 percent of the maximum points available (20).		

**Absolute Priority**

	Met? Yes/No
<b>Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.</b>	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.</p>	
<b>Comments on Absolute Priority</b>	
<p>Comments on Absolute Priority North Carolina has proposed a sweeping reform that affects a high needs population in the Transformation Zone. The reforms made in the childcare policy and practice required by this grant will cover all children in the state when fully implemented. A good example of this is the development of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment based on the North Carolina Foundations. The proposed changes are based on the developmental and cognitive needs of children to ensure readiness for Kindergarten. Sweeping changes across the focused investment areas are achievable and ambitious, and provide incentives for change among programs. The Tiered Quality Rating System is applied across all of the domains. The state has created strong partnerships committed to this change efforts which will improve the readiness and the education of the workforce at all levels that will strengthen the outcomes for children, by providing teachers that are strong in the use of the state standards to provide instruction; assessing children and providing instruction based on the assessments. The state has proposed changes in the outcomes and process that will deliver the data collected to stakeholders and inform instruction through entry into a longitudinal system.</p>	





Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # NC-5027

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/17/2011 - 1:11 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	20
<p>The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--</p> <p>(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and</p> <p>(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality

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

The state has shown a solid financial investment from 2007 to the present in relation to the size of the State's population of children with high needs. This is evidenced by a combined sustained commitment of approximately \$268 million dollars per year for the State's Smart Start and Pre-K initiatives. This represents both cash and in-kind contributions. State funded preschool programs have been funded between \$128.5 to \$170.4 million since 2007. State contributions to IDEA Part C Programs have received cuts but ranged from \$34.7 to \$45.7 million. State contributions for special education for children with disabilities from age 3 through kindergarten have increased to over \$50 million from \$44.9 million in 2007. Also, total state contributions to CCDF programs have increased from \$65 million in 2007 to \$65.7 million in 2011. The state has increased the number of children with high needs participating in high quality programs. The state has a tiered reimbursement rate that is tied to the age of the child and star-level rating of the center. With an NC Star Rated License, programs can receive between one and five stars depending on the quality of the program and programs with higher ratings receive a higher reimbursement rate from the state. This program offers financial incentive for programs to provide the best possible care for young children. As a result of these efforts, the percentage of Children with High Needs participating in high-quality Early Learning and Development (ELD) Programs has increased from 41% to 61% between 2004 and 2011. The applicant demonstrates past commitment to early learning and development through the existence of legislation and practices. For example, both Smart Start and NC Pre-K were enacted in legislation passed by the state General Assembly. Also, the governor created an Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) that is housed in the Governor's Office. This council has oversight and responsibility for all aspects of the State's ELD programs. The ECAC will serve as the lead agency for the project. The state's current status in key areas build a foundation for high quality ELD Programs. Examples include: -Developing state standards called Foundations for children aged 3 to 5. In 2008 infant and toddler standards were added. These standards describe the skills, characteristics, and knowledge children should have. These standards are utilized in college courses and professional development opportunities for educators. -The state has identified a lack of a comprehensive assessment system as a weakness and has plans to strengthen this area. -The state has provided significant investment in creating a support system to help teachers achieve higher education levels. These efforts have

resulted in 50% of Early Childhood (EC) Educators with an AA Degree or higher and 25% having a Bachelor's Degree. -The state has identified family engagement as an area that needs attention and has plans to strengthen this area. -The state has made a commitment to the health needs of young children in the state. For example, basic health and safety standards were added to minimum child care licensing standards and have resulted in higher compliance with health and wellness requirements. Other local initiatives have improved health services to children as well. The implementation of Child Care Health Consultants has provided training and technical assistance to programs in the area of health services. -The state recognizes a need to strengthen effective data practices. For example, its data system is not as advanced as other aspects of its system, Foundation work has been completed that will result in the development of a comprehensive data system. The applicant provides a high-quality response to demonstrate its past commitment to and investment in accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs in many areas. For example, the state has consistently invested a significant amount of money in relation to the size of the state's population. The state has also increased the number of children participating in ELD Programs. Further, the state has existing legislation, policies, and practices that provide evidence of a commitment to Early Learning and Development. As a result, the state's overall score for this area was in the high quality range.

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

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

The state provides a rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals. The state has initiated the Governor's Career and College: Ready, Set, Go Educational Agenda. Part of this agenda builds on previous ELD improvement efforts. The applicant provides a plan that is ambitious yet achievable by focusing on three general goals. These goals include making improvements to the state's TQRIS system, improving teacher quality and increasing family support, and improving the infrastructure in ELD by focusing on "transformational zones" that contain pockets of rural, underserved children. The first goal includes making necessary changes to the State's TQRIS System. Simply having a TQRIS System tied to the Licensing System is not enough to ensure that it is effective. Therefore, the state intends to make improvements to the TQRIS System. In order to do this, the state will revise Early Learning Standards to be implemented across different types of programs. This revision will include a realignment with the Department of Public Instruction Standards for each age and grade level. The state also plans to strengthen its Early Childhood Assessment by creating a K-3 Assessment based on Foundations Standards developed previously. Finally, the state will improve the collection and utilization of data. The plan to improve data systems is key to the State's plan. The second goal for improving Kindergarten readiness is to improve relationships and knowledge. This goal includes increasing teacher skills and knowledge as well as strengthening family involvement. Finally, the state will focus on "Transformational Zones." These zones consist of geographical pockets of underserved children with high needs. Taken together, these goals constitute a clear plan. The state provides an ambitious and achievable path to meet its goals. Measurable outcomes with reasonable timelines ensure that the plan can be carried out during the project period. For example, the State Plan includes the establishment of meaningful, statewide assessment and data systems to measure progress and improve policy practice. This goal is supported by smaller steps, such as: -Developing and implementing a statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment. -Developing an integrated Early Learning Data System that connects with K-12 state longitudinal data systems. -Conducting annual workforce studies to measure progress in improving the education, compensation, and retention of early childhood educators. The State provides an overall summary that clearly articulates how each criteria, when taken together, constitute an effective reform agenda that establishes a clear path toward achieving these goals. The applicant provides a sound rationale that justifies the State's choice to address the selected criteria that will best achieve these goals. As a result, this response earned a score in the high range.

	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)(2)**

The applicant provides a high quality plan that outlines the organizational structure for the implementation of the plan. The applicant has implemented a state-wide Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) housed in the Governor's Office that informs, coordinates, and guides all the Early Childhood Activities in the state. The ECAC includes appointed members representing the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Public Instruction, Head Start Collaboration, Smart Start, University System, NC Partnership for Children, philanthropy, business, and the medical community. This ECAC will serve as the lead agency for the project and the infrastructure for collaboration among all relevant Early Childhood Education providers. The organizational chart provided shows that all relevant providers are linked for ease in collaboration. The ECAC developed a team to write the application and provided evidence of clear lines of communication and collaboration in the state. The application includes signed MOUs and letters of support that demonstrate a strong commitment to shared resources and commitment to the project. The MOUs include a scope of work that outlines the expectations and responsibilities of the lead agency as well as each Participating State Agency. Further, the applicant has planned to execute leadership retreats to provide guidance, information, and support to align partner resources. The state provides evidence of support from a broad group of stakeholders as evidenced by completed and signed MOUs for relevant community partners. Letters of support from relevant partners across the state are also provided. The state has clearly aligned and coordinated necessary partnerships across the state that will ensure the successful completion of the project. This area scored in the high quality range because of the quality of the response as well as the full implementation of each of the criterion areas. The state has fully implemented and provides plans to improve the alignment and coordination of early learning across the state. As a result, a score in the high range was given for planning and implementation.

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

The extent to which the State Plan--

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

**Comments on (A)(4)**

The applicant provides a high-quality budget that explains how the state will use existing funds in conjunction with grant funds to support the project. For example, the applicant demonstrates how it will use existing funds to support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources to help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan. The state is requesting \$69,991,121 in grant funds to be used in conjunction with other Federal, State, private, and local funds to achieve the plan outcomes. A table describing these various funding sources by grant year is included. The ECAC, the Office of Early Learning, and the Division of Public Health are utilizing a combined \$1,319,900 in other funds to support the goals of the project. The state's existing Early Childhood Advisory Council is responsible for oversight of all ELD Programs in the state and this project will allow the committee to truly align resources for maximum benefit. The budget includes an assignment of funds by grant goal. The ECAC will utilize approximately \$26 million for ELC Management, Integrated Data System, Professional Development, and Partnership Initiatives. The Division of Child Development and Early Education, and Department of Health and Human Services will utilize approximately \$26.5 million for TORIS, ELD Standards, Compensation and retention, and Professional Development. The Department of Public Instruction will utilize approximately \$12 million for K-3 Assessment and Family Engagement. Finally, the Division of Public Health will utilize approximately \$6 million for family strengthening. The allocation of funds to designated agencies is proportional to the complexity of the initiatives to be accomplished. An investigation and plan for sustainability beyond the project period has been added to the project objectives. The state has clearly considered the long-term sustainability of the project objectives. The applicant provides a two track sustainability strategy. The first track includes building public awareness about the importance of Early Childhood Education so the public will insist that the state will continue to invest in EC Education. This public awareness effort will also engage a public-private partnership that will result in an expansion of funding streams. The second track of the sustainability strategy involves ensuring that the number of children with high needs served in high-quality ELD Programs will be maintained or expanded. The state provides a high quality budget that allocates funds to state agencies with proportional amounts of funding to complete project objectives. The applicant has considered and planned for the sustainability of the project outcomes. As a result, the state scored high in this area.

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

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

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 has already developed and fully implemented a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that is aligned with program standards and is linked to the state licensing system. North Carolina is one of three states with a TQRIS built into the state's child care licensing system. In 1999, the state implemented a system of five star rating. The ratings are based on program standards and staff education and higher reimbursement rates are provided based on ratings for children with subsidized care. The applicant will use project funds to improve and revise the TQRIS system with a focus on infants and toddlers. The state's TQRIS has measurable levels of program quality that are linked to improved child outcomes. The applicant has implemented a state-wide TQRIS system that is tied to the State licensing system. The state recognizes that it has a significant start in having developed this program but revisions are necessary. The applicant provides a description of a TQRIS system that is fully implemented. The applicant further provides a high-quality plan to make improvements to the TQRIS System. For example, the state plans to expand program standards and raise the requirements for the highest quality tier in the TQRIS System. As a result, this area received a high score for planning quality and implementation.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	15	13

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(2)**

The state has a TQRIS System that has been fully implemented for all ELD Programs licensed or regulated by the state. The implementation of the TQRIS System for other ELD Providers has been partially implemented. For example, the state has current or planned policies that will increase the number of various other ELD Programs that participate in the TQRIS System. All state funded preschool programs are required to participate in the TQRIS System. Also, 90% of children in Head Start or Early Head Start Programs volunteer to participate. Additionally, all EHS/HS Programs receiving funds to serve NC Pre-K children will be required to participate by July 2012. Plans to increase the number of programs under IDEA Part B and Part C providers as well as Title 1 of ESEA programs are included in the plan but this has not been fully implemented. The state has planned, but not fully implemented, policies designed to help families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality care. For example, as of July 1, 2012, children receiving subsidized care will no longer be allowed to attend programs rated at fewer than 3 stars. The project funds will be utilized to increase the number of high quality programs available for all children but particularly those with high needs. The state does not address how it will take action to ensure affordable co-payments. The state sets ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of ELD programs that will participate in the TQRIS System by type. For example, public schools and religiously affiliated programs are not currently required to participate. The state aims to move from 75% participation by state-funded preschool to 100% by the end of the grant. This will be accomplished through a scale up plan. This scale up plan includes the addition of Technical Assistance Specialists who will identify and recruit public schools and religious programs to participate in the system. Mini-grants will also be made available to support their plans to meet TQRIS requirements. Further, the plan includes the development of a task force to consider the feasibility of expanding licensing to include programs that serve children for less than 4 hours per day. Currently, the state does not license these programs. Adding part-day programs to the licensing system would ensure that more children are being served in high-quality programs. The applicant provides a high-quality response that is ambitious and achievable. The state provides a high-quality plan for increasing ELD Program participation in the state TQRIS System. Some aspects of this plan are only partially implemented which resulted in a high score for plan quality and a medium high score for implementation.

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

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

The applicant utilizes a group of valid and reliable tools for monitoring ELD programs. These tools Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) are standard assessments used in the field and were developed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project rigorously trains assessors who utilize the assessments. Licensing Consultants are required to have a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education/development or a related field with at least three years experience in a child care or related setting. ELD program quality is publicly visible since programs are required to display licenses which state the star rating for the center. This way, parents can quickly determine the quality level of each program. North Carolina is in the process of leading a consortium of states to develop and pilot a program assessment tool designed specifically for use in the TQRIS System. The applicant provides a high-quality response in this area. The applicant has fully implemented an effective rating and monitoring system across different types of programs. Therefore, a high score was given for quality and implementation.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs</b>	20	18

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

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

transportation; meals; family support services); and

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

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

The state provides a high quality plan for promoting access to high-quality ELD Programs for children with High Needs. For example, the state has fully implemented a requirement that children in subsidized care must attend a program with at least three out of possible five stars to qualify for funding. The state has also fully implemented a tiered reimbursement rate for programs with higher ratings and programs that serve children with special needs. Although not fully implemented, the state provides a high-quality plan to improve services to children in Transformational Zones which include economically distressed areas of the state. Specifically, infants and toddlers in the Transformational Zones have not had access to programs rated at three stars and above. The applicant has set ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing the number of programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS and the percentage of children with high needs in programs that are rated in the top tiers. For example, there were 1788 centers with a three, four, and five star rating in 2000 and that number rose to 5532 centers in 2011. The state plans to increase the number of programs with a three, four, or five star rating by 1621 programs during the project period. This is certainly achievable based on previous progress in this area. The state also plans to increase the number and percentage of children who are enrolled in ELD programs that are in the top tiers of the TQRIS System. This objective involves the voluntary participation of programs that are not required to achieve state licensing. For example, state funded Pre-K Programs are not required to have state licensing but currently 75% of children served in these programs are in top tier quality programs (three stars or more). The goal is to increase that percentage to 100. The state provides an impressive, ambitious, and achievable plan for increasing access to high-quality ELD Programs for children with high needs. It has already fully implemented a system of support and incentives for program improvement. The development of the statewide TQRIS System has improved the state's ability to help families access high quality care. Although not fully implemented, the state provides a high-quality plan to address the needs of families in high needs areas. The state provides a high-quality plan for promoting access to high-quality ELD Programs for children with high needs resulting in a high score for plan quality. The state's lack of implementation of some of the components resulted in a medium-high implementation score.

	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)(5)**

The state has conducted research to validate the tiers of the TQRIS. For example, data from 84 centers was gathered and demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between star ratings and other indicators of quality including observed classroom quality, teacher education, teacher wages, and teacher turnover. Another validation study in 2010 showed that four- and five- star rated programs received significantly higher Classroom Assessment and Environmental Rating Scores. This evidence suggests that separate program quality measures validate the tiers of the rating system. Therefore, programs with higher ratings in the TQRIS System are providing a higher quality of educational experiences to young children. Further plans to conduct future research are included in the application. The state clearly considers the validity of assessment of program quality as an indication of quality of learning and services provided. The state plans to use validation information in the revision of TQRIS tiers. Further child outcome data will be utilized to make decisions regarding the rating system. The state provides a high quality plan to validate the effectiveness of the TQRIS System. As a result a high score was given for this criterion.

**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>The state has fully implemented standards for early learning from birth to age 5 which are aligned with state K-3 standards. Programs utilizing the state TQRIS system must incorporate developmental standards in program standards, curricula and activities, assessments, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities. Validation reports are provided and indicate that these standards are not culturally or linguistically sensitive and do not include a focus on play. They are, however, developmentally appropriate. Although the state includes a plan for revision of these standards, full credit for implementation cannot be given since the standards are not culturally sensitive. The state has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to ELD Standards. For example, resources and professional development to promote the use of standards across all programs in the state have been developed. These resources include a website and on-line training modules. Professional development initiatives have been provided across programs by the Department of Public Instruction. The state has fully implemented the use of statewide Early Learning and Development standards. A high-quality plan is provided to revise these standards with broad implementation. The score given reflects a high quality of planning with a medium high range of implementation.</p>

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--</p> <p>(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;</p> <p>(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive</p>		

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 provides a high-quality plan for a comprehensive Assessment System that has not yet been implemented. The state does not currently have a common comprehensive assessment system in place and decisions about assessment instruments are made at the program level. Therefore, the applicant plans to develop a statewide common assessment. The state admits that child assessments have not been consistently implemented in the state. Therefore, the applicant proposes to develop a cross-agency Task Force on Child Assessment to develop a single screening policy for all ELD programs in the state. The Task Force will also develop a comprehensive professional development plan to ensure that educators are well trained to conduct effective assessments. This is an ambitious yet achievable goal that will significantly improve developmental screening in the state resulting in children with special needs being identified as early as possible thereby improving long-term educational outcomes. The state further plans to guide instruction through the effective use of formative assessment. The Task Force on Child Development will focus efforts on professional development rather than assessment tools since most programs currently use assessments. The focus of the task force will be in providing consistent instruction to teachers on the purpose, administration, and use of assessment results in planning. One area of concern regarding this task force is that its membership, role, and authority are not clearly outlined. This lack of information resulted in the state not earning full points for planning. The state further proposes to convene a multi-state consortium to develop a new program assessment measure designed specifically for rating environmental quality in the TQRIS. The state provides a clear plan for the implementation of a comprehensive assessment system that is ambitious yet achievable and results in a high quality planning score. However, a lack of any level of implementation of a comprehensive assessment system resulted in a medium quality implementation score.

	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	13

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 partially implemented a progression of health and safety standards within the state licensing system. For example, the TQRIS and state Child Care Licensing System require a basic level of health, safety, and welfare compliance that includes supervision of children, condition of materials and equipment, discipline practices, staff ratios, sanitation and fire practices, and staff training on health and safety. However, the state plans to strengthen these standards in this project by requiring children in regulated programs to have annual health exams. The state has partially implemented a system to increase the number of teachers who are trained to meet health and safety standards. For example, teachers are currently required to receive 16 hours of pre-service training on health and safety topics. However, with a lack of a data system to track this information it is difficult to

ensure that all teachers actually receive the training. The applicant plans to improve health related services to children in the state through a two tiered plan. Tier one will focus on state level strategies that will increase the number of children who are screened, referred, and receive health care services. Tier two includes a focus on Transformational Zones that focus on pockets of rural, under-served children and families. The state proposes a Child Care Health Consultant strategy that focuses on coaching regional health care consultants who will then coach teachers on health care practices. The Transformational Zones will hire additional coaches to provide more intensive penetration of services in under-served areas. In addition, healthy eating habits and nutritional requirements in the licensing system will be expanded but have only been partially implemented. Rules requiring annual health assessments will also be added. A significant focus area in the state plan includes health services in the Transformational Zones. Traditionally, children in these zones have lacked appropriate health care. The plan is multi-faceted and includes several community partners. This focus is crucial to the health and wellness of children with high needs in the state and shows the state's commitment to the spirit of this project. The state has partially implemented a system called Assuring Better Health and Child Development (ABCD) model. This model was adapted to improve health and developmental screenings to make appropriate referrals for needed services. In 99% of programs participating in the ABCD model, children received recommended developmental screenings. However, this model has only been implemented in 16 counties across the state. Therefore, this area did not receive full implementation points. Although the state has not uniformly implemented a progression of health and safety standards in all programs in the state, the high-quality plan is provided. As a result, a high quality plan score and a partial implementation score was given.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	15	10

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 recognizes that Head Start Programs have long required family support as an integral program component. The state has not implemented family engagement strategies uniformly in all programs. Therefore, the state will utilize Head Start Programs as "hubs" of information, training, and support of effective family engagement practices. A new family engagement standard will be added to the revised TQRIS standards. However, the state does not provide evidence that the standards for family engagement will be culturally and linguistically appropriate. The Head Start programs will provide coaching and technical assistance that will be delivered in a variety of formats to partners. Although this plan certainly makes sense, the applicant does not describe how the 20 regional Head Start Programs will be chosen. Although family engagement is a program requirement in Head Start Programs, all programs do not do it equally well. If Head Start Programs will provide the model of appropriate family engagement, the state should first determine which programs are doing it most effectively. Although basic Head Start requirements across programs are the same, the spirit and implementation of family engagement varies considerably among programs. Also, the state does not provide evidence that family support and engagement will be promoted statewide through the leveraging of existing resources. The state provides an adequate plan for strengthening and engaging families but fails to consider some crucial aspects of implementation. Therefore, the score in this area is in the medium quality and partial implementation range.

**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)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	40	35



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

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

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

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

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (D)(2)**

The state has fully implemented a plan to provide access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. For example, the Framework is implemented in all state higher education programs. This alignment supports common workforce knowledge. The state has not implemented a plan for policies and incentives that improve career advancement for EC Educators. However, the state provides a high-quality plan to: -Develop educator efficacy endorsement and offer EC Certification at reduced cost -Support Community College NAEYC Accreditation -Funding to improve access to community colleges -Develop an online Master's Degree Program -Offer CEU courses on Coaching, Mentoring, and Technical Assistance -Increase cultural competence in the EC workforce through the development of curriculum, training, coaching, and assessment tools. -EC Director Leadership Institute to provide intensive training to directors. -Enhance Child Care Resource and Referral System. -Hire and train Healthy Social Behavior Specialists in Transformational Zones. -Convene NC Council on Early Childhood Professional Development to work on issues related to Professional Development. -Offer Child Care WAGES supplements for teachers with two and four year degrees in Transformational Zones. -Provide TEACH Scholarships for continuing education -Conduct Early Childhood Educator Statewide Workforce Study annually. The applicant did not provide a plan for the public reporting of EC Educator data. The state has fully implemented an alignment of college coursework with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. The state does set ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing the number of EC educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. For example, currently, 1,905 teachers in the state have a BA/BS in Child Development or ECE with Birth to Kindergarten Licensing. The state aims to improve that number to 2,500 by the end of the grant period. The current number of teachers with an AA in ECE is 4,568 with a goal of increasing that number to 6,250 by the end of the grant period. These targets are ambitious yet achievable. The state's support of improving the knowledge, skills, and abilities of EC Educators has several fully implemented strengths. For example the community college system has core competencies across the system. Also, EC coursework at the remedial level has embedded EC content. Community college coursework is available in English and Spanish. However, some areas have not been fully implemented. For example, the state does not have a clear career ladder for teachers that outlines levels other than degree attainment. And scholarships and salary supplements to provide incentives for Educators to advance their degrees have been planned but not fully implemented. As a result, this area scored in the high quality plan and partial implementation range.

**E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress**

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

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

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	15

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 implemented a Kindergarten through Second grade Assessment of literacy and mathematics. The state provides a high quality plan to revise the existing kindergarten to second grade (K-2) Assessment and develop a related Kindergarten Entrance Assessment. These assessments together will inform practice to close the achievement gap for children with high needs. The current KEA and K-2 assessments used in the state have serious weaknesses. For example, the current K-2 Assessment assesses the domains of literacy and math only. Therefore, the applicant will build on the strengths of the previous assessments and develop a new KEA in the context of a K-3 Assessment. The revised K-3 Assessment will address five essential domains of school readiness including: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development. It will also expand the assessment through third grade. The applicant recognizes that new assessments require professional development for effective implementation and have planned for it. This area was scored as a high quality plan with medium high quality implementation. The applicant plans to create a task force to consider the complex issues surrounding the development and implementation of a state-wide Kindergarten Entrance Assessment. The applicant has considered that this instrument must be valid and reliable and has planned to conduct these studies. Further, the applicant will determine the appropriateness of KEA use with Dual Language Learners, children with disabilities, and other special populations. A pilot test to determine issues of feasibility and implementation has been planned. The applicant includes a timeline to administer this assessment by 2014-2015. The state has not implemented a plan to report kindergarten assessment in the Statewide Longitudinal Data System. However, a comprehensive plan for effective data systems includes the addition of kindergarten assessment data to the Longitudinal Data system. The state has partially implemented and provides a high-quality plan for understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry. The state's plan to utilize RTT-ELC funding alone to develop a kindergarten entrance assessment is a concern. Since the Kindergarten Entrance Assessment will benefit the entire school system, funds other than those available under this grant should be utilized to meet this goal. However, the budget shows that this grant alone will support the development of this assessment. Therefore, planning and implementation scores were in the medium range for this criterion.

	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)**

The state has partially implemented a data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies but provides a high quality plan to accomplish this goal. Although separate programs in the state have effective data systems, the state does not have an integrated data system across programs. This will be accomplished by creating linkages across data systems. These linkages will connect Essential Data Elements: -A unique statewide child identifier. This statewide common child UID will allow for future linkages across programs. -A unique statewide Early Childhood Educator identifier -A unique program site identifier -Child and family demographic information. Currently, Part C providers collect demographic information about providers but the state system does not contain this demographic information. -Data on the program's structure, quality, and QRIS data. -Child-level program participation and attendance data. The already established ECAC has the authority to provide the system-wide collection and use of data. The data collection system outlined in the plan will allow for the exchange of data across programs in the state. The data collection efforts outlined in the plan will give the state timely, relevant information to use for continuous improvement and decision making. Since individual participating state agencies and programs utilize different data systems, medium to high quality implementation points were awarded. The high-quality plan that has been developed will likely result in improved instruction, practices, services, and policies. As a result, it was given a high quality plan/partial implementation score.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>248</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (P)(2)**

The applicant has fully implemented a tiered licensing system and 93% of the state's regulated programs are in tiers 1-5 of the TQRIS. The exceptions are public school programs, religiously-affiliated programs, and those with temporary licensure. The state plans to significantly increase voluntary involvement in the TQRIS system for all ELD programs with incentives and technical support. This high-quality plan is ambitious yet achievable. The state has further fully implemented a TQRIS System in which all licensed or State-regulated ELD Programs participate. As a result, the requirements for this priority were met.

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>Yes</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 plans to revise ELD standards with a larger goal of developing a K-3 Assessment that meets state standards. The state has developed Foundations standards and will revise them to align standards for birth to grade 12. The applicant further provides a high quality plan that meets the selection criteria for (E)(1). This priority was marked yes because the applicant earned a score of at least 70% on criterion (E)(1).

**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 meets this priority by providing a comprehensive and coherent plan to increase the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs in the state. For example, the state has developed an Early Childhood Advisory Council that is responsible for early learning activities in the state. This council will serve as the lead agency for this project. The state has fully implemented a statewide TQRIS System that is linked to Child Care Licensing. Further, the state provides a high-quality plan for increasing participation in the TQRIS System and increasing the number of children enrolled in programs rated in the top tiers. Also, the state has developed a plan and set goals to increase the number of children with high needs participating in programs rated in the higher tiers of the TQRIS. These plans use supports and incentives such as tiered reimbursement rates to improve the quality of ELD Programs. The state also provides a plan and targets for increasing the supply of high quality ELD Programs for children with high needs. The state addresses promoting ELD outcomes for children through the revision of standards to align with K-3 standards. The state also proposes a plan to develop a Comprehensive Assessment System to inform instruction. A common statewide EC Screening and Formative Assessment System will ensure that children with high needs are receiving the developmental services they need to improve school readiness. The state will improve family engagement and support by partnering with Head Start programs to provide a model for engaging families in the educational process. The state plans to provide a Great Early Childhood Education Workforce. For example, the state's community college system has aligned the core competencies for EC Teachers in all of the EC Education Programs in the state. The state offers a variety of incentives and supports to increase EC Educator degree attainment. The state has set reasonable targets for improving EC Educator qualifications. The state plans to develop a common kindergarten assessment that will inform instruction for ELD Programs. A comprehensive data system will provide the state with real time data to assess program quality and outcomes for children. The state meets the absolute priority because it provides a plan to promote school readiness for children with high needs.</p>	



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review

## Technical Review Form Page



Application # NC-5027

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]  
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]  
Support Monitor: [Redacted]  
Application Status: Reviewed  
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 3:13 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	20
<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: <b>Quality</b>		

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

The applicant has a large proportion, 49.4%, of children from birth to kindergarten entry living in low-income families. Approximately 9.6% are English language learners and 7.1% reside on "Indian Lands." Additionally, the state has 52,000 children who are members of active duty military families with an additional 5,100 children who are members of Guard and Reserve military families. The applicant has provided state-funded preschool (NC Pre-K), but allocations have declined in recent years due to budget constraints. The state has consistently met the state match for CCDF since 2007 (Table (A)(1)-4). The state's ongoing contributions to Early Learning and Development programs and initiatives support its commitment to high quality early learning and development of young children. The state has developed Early Learning and Development Standards that address all the essential domains of School Readiness for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The standards are currently being revised to align with the Common Core Standards for Kindergarten and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. The preschool standards were published in 2005 and the infant/toddler standards were published in 2008. The state has demonstrated its past commitment to and, investment in, Early Learning and Development programs, at appropriate funding levels in programs such as NC Pre-K, Smart Start (overseen by the NC Partnership for Children), the state's ability to match the CCDF funds, as well as other state contributions, such as dual subsidy expenditures, Developmental Day, Gov. Morehead School, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing contributions. TANF spending on Early Learning and Development Programs has consistently increased each year since 2007. Table (A)(1)-5 presents quantitative data to document a pattern of increased services available for Children with High Needs in Early Learning and Development programs. The Early Head Start and Head Start programs serve children of migrant/seasonal workers as well as tribal children. The number of children served by Part B and Part C shows trends of increased enrollment as well. The state's TQRIS is integrated into the state licensing system, and only programs that earn at least 3 of the 5 tiers are eligible to receive CCDF funds (Table (A)(1)-7). This requirement was recently passed in the 2011 legislative session. This demonstrates the state's commitment to link licensing standards and the TQRIS as it seeks to improve the quality of early education and development options for high-needs children in the state by requiring accomplishment of at least 3 of 5 tiers. The state's commitment and efforts are also supported by the fact that 68% of all young children from low-income

families attended high-quality (4 or 5 star) programs in 2011, up from only 10% of children in 2000. Approximately 61% of children birth to age 5 whose care is paid for using CCDF funds are in 4- or 5-star rated programs, reflecting a dramatic 20% increase since 2004. Smart Start is a systems-building initiative that supports the development of local nonprofit partnerships with a statewide coordinating structure. The applicant cites a number of public/private policies and practices, including TEACH Early Childhood, Child Care Health Consultants, Environmental Rating Scales, and the Natural Learning Initiative, to highlight its commitment to and investment in early learning and development programs and projects. Smart Start has established performance goals to increase the quality of early learning and development programs for subsidized children with special needs. Examples include the requirement that at least 60% of all children in every county receiving subsidy or other assistance are in 4- or 5-star rated programs and the performance goal that at least 75% of all subsidized children with special needs are in 4- or 5-star rated programs. North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) established measurable, statewide goals (the Performance Based Incentive System) in 2001 to increase the health, well-being and development of children from birth to age five throughout the state, resulting in positive outcomes for young children in every county of the state. A state report of the Performance-Based Incentive System and the data generated is provided by the applicant in Appendix 3. The state's commitment to Early Learning and Development Programs is evidenced by the creation of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) in 2010 to provide broad oversight of the state's system. This ECAC is housed in the Governor's Office. Existing legislation, policies and practices demonstrate the state's commitment to, and investment in, high-quality, accessible programs. The applicant is one of only three states with a TQRIS built into its State's licensing system. Currently, 78% of all Early Learning and Development programs participate in the state's TQRIS. Less than 1% of CCDF-purchased care is unregulated. The state has created tiered reimbursement rates related to the age of children and the star level to provide programs a financial incentive to provide higher quality care for poor children. Any state Pre-K program must maintain at least a 4-star license and must compensate a birth-Kindergarten licensed teacher at a level comparable to the salary of public school teachers. With regard to the criterion required in (A)(1)(d), the applicant clearly establishes that it has fully implemented Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth to age 5. Health promotion practices is another area where the applicant has significantly invested funds and resources with a number of initiatives such as Medical Homes for Children with High Needs through Community Care of North Carolina since 1991, support for 56 Child Care Health Consultants who serve 49 of the state's 100 counties, requirement of 75% compliance history for the rated licensing system, and Shape NC (funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC Foundation). Partial implementation is evidenced in the key areas of Comprehensive Assessment Systems, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices. The state acknowledges that some current initiatives, such as revision of the TQRIS, will strengthen these areas. Other areas, such as the need to integrate systems for data entry and analysis, are identified by the applicant. The applicant provides evidence that some strides have been made, particularly in course alignment for community colleges for Early Childhood Educators, but acknowledges the need for further expanded efforts, such as accreditation of community college programs by NAEYC. The applicant has implemented all elements of a comprehensive assessment system as listed in Table (A)(1)-7 for NC Pre-K and Early Head Start/Head Start, but the applicant identifies the Comprehensive Assessment System as an area where additional efforts would be focused if grant funds are secured since all elements are not currently tied to the TQRIS or state licensing requirements. The applicant has clearly articulated its past and present commitment to and investment in early learning development programs, practices, and initiatives. Full points were awarded for this section using the Quality Scoring Rubric. All required elements were thoroughly addressed.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>

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 clearly presents 10 goals expected to be accomplished by December 2015. Each of the stated goals is specific, observable and measurable and connects with the 3 overarching strategies proposed by the state. Accomplishment of the identified ambitious goals would improve program quality, improve outcomes for Children with High Needs statewide, and close the readiness gap for Children with High Needs, particularly in the Transformation Zone identified by the applicant. The goals are achievable given the state's key efforts that are identified, including revision of the Early Learning and Development Standards in the five domains of readiness, validation of the revised TQRIS, expansion of the ABCD strategy to improve children's access to health and developmental screenings and referrals statewide, and development and implementation of a statewide kindergarten Entry Assessment as well as an integrated early learning data system. A focus on early childhood educator quality is evident in the key statewide efforts, including the addition of a requirement of a 40-hour standardized online orientation training for all new center-based teachers in all levels of the state's tiered licensing

system, as well as provision of incentives and innovation funds for community colleges and development of a new online master's degree in Early Childhood Leadership and Management through the state's higher education system. The applicant proposes to focus efforts on improving outcomes for young children with the highest needs in 20 rural counties identified by the NC Department of Commerce as being most economically distressed, with 7 of the 20 counties currently participating in the K-12 Race to the Top District and School Transformation efforts. The applicant proposes coordination by the ECAC through the Governor's Office and supports by state-level staff (including a Transformation Liaison) and Transformation Coaches, to develop the supports, community infrastructure and capacity to provide supports to young Children with High Needs through a wide range of programs and services. This approach could then be replicated in other high needs area and, eventually, the entire state. The applicant has identified 20 potential counties to participate in the proposed Transformation Zone, but they have not yet indicated their willingness to participate. Further, the applicant indicates that the 20 identified counties "will be invited to learn more about this opportunity, discuss the idea with their community partners, and complete a single application process" that will result in site visits and awards to 5 to 10 counties to participate in the Transformation Zone. While the applicant has identified key goals, activities and scale up plans for the proposed Transformation Zone, it is not clear whether the ambitious goals are achievable since the participating counties are not yet even aware of the proposed ideas. Awareness of need for buy-in and engagement of local stakeholders is not evident or addressed by the applicant. The state proposes that local counties selected to participate will select from a menu of options or programs based on community need. The applicant proposes building local capacity, but does not indicate how this will be accomplished beyond hiring of 5 local Transformation/Implementation Coaches and hiring of a NC organization that is not identified that will have "extensive expertise in implementation science." The substantial funding for the Transformation Zone project (\$830,000 plus \$2.7 million) demands a more elaborate and fully developed plan for achieving the goals identified for the Transformation Zone as well as clear articulation of how the Transformation Zone efforts for 5 to 10 counties will result in improved school readiness for Children with High Needs statewide. Sustainability of the Transformation Zone efforts is a concern in that the applicant proposes that a sustainability plan will be developed by the ECAC in the Governor's Office but provides no suggestion of how the grant efforts would be sustained in terms of funding, staffing or leveraging of other resources. The applicant provides a rationale for its choice to address all four Focused Investment Areas in (C), one in (D), two in (E), as well as the competitive preference and two invitational priorities, Revision of standards, development of a comprehensive assessment system coordinated across programs, focus on expansion of services by Child Care Health Consultants, and the ABCD program, as well as delivery of programs focused on family strengthening are proposed. The state clearly presents a rationale for selection of Focused Investment Areas D.2 to continue its support of the education and professional development of the workforce already begun through T.E.A.C.H. and advances in educator credentials, degree options, online learning and professional development. The applicant proposes to address E.1 through creation of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment that will be entered in the state's longitudinal data system, the focus of E.2. The applicant addresses the two invitational priorities, but provides limited information regarding how each is addressed in the proposed projects. Full points were not awarded because the applicant provided limited information provided in some sections, particularly the invitational priorities, plans for sustainability and specificity regarding implementation of the proposed Transformation Zone and its goals and benchmarks.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--</p> <p>(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;</p> <p>(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;</p> <p>(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and</p> <p>(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;</p> <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> <p>(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;</p>		

(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 has a common vision and framework for action that guides efforts, as well as a rich history of two former governors whose leadership championed Early Learning and Development and improvement of outcomes for young children. The current governor has an established education agenda and also created the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to support and coordinate efforts on a statewide level, with particular focus on Children with High Needs. The ECAC, housed in the governor's office, advises and makes recommendations to the governor and all state government agencies about early childhood issues. The ECAC provides an existing organizational structure for coordinating efforts of the Division of Child Development and Early Education (star-rated licensing, CCDF funds, state-funded pre-K), Division of Public Health (maternal and child health, Part CE, home visitation), Office of Early Learning (preK-grade 3 learning, Part B, Title I, Head Start State Collaboration Office). The other statewide organization that exists is The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC), the statewide nonprofit that oversees Smart Start with authority from the state's General Assembly. The applicant proposes that the ECAC will serve as lead agency and formal policy-making body for the RTT-ELC grant. It is not clear how the work of the state agencies and NCPC are coordinated at the state level other than possibly through mechanisms established by the ECAC. There are both local Smart Start partnership boards and local NCPC boards which coordinate local community efforts through a Local Partnership Advisory Council, but it is not clear how a similar structure is provided at the state level. The applicant proposes that the RTT-ELC team, in collaboration with the ECAC, will be responsible for resolving disputes and operational decisions. The RTT-ELC team met regularly to develop the application and will continue to meet regularly to develop implementation and collaboration plans of the funded project. The MOU in Appendix 9 provides detailed procedures for resolution of disputes. The applicant proposes creation of a RTT-ELC Smart Start Leaders Collaborative for approximately 50 Smart Start local partnership Executive Directors who will work in cohorts of 12 to 15 members each year. The applicant does not clearly identify how this proposed group would interface with leadership in the Transformation Zone counties. This proposed activity would be developed and managed by a contracted organization and would allow participants to meet 12 days throughout a year. The information provided did not clearly delineate how this work would connect with broader state initiatives and key projects proposed. There was no explanation of how the Executive Directors chosen to participate would be identified nor if those in the Transformation Zone would have priority. This element seems to be more a part of the proposed plan rather than governance structure. It is not clear why only 5 Executive Directors will host local retreats each year and no criteria are provided concerning how these individuals would be selected. The incentive to participate in the Leading for Equity retreat for the local Executive Directors is not clear. The timeline presented by the applicant indicated development and delivery of online training and community tools in a three-month time span in each year of the grant. It is not clear how this would be accomplished and by whom. The audience for this project seems to be the Executive Directors selected to participate in the RTT-ELC Smart Start Leaders Collaborative, but this is inferred by the grant reader. The Leaders Collaborative requires substantial funding of over \$2 million with no sustainability plans presented. It is not clear how the Leaders Collaborative would focus specifically on the needs of Children with High Needs. The applicant provides MOUs and scopes of work in Appendix 9 for participating agencies to demonstrate that it can achieve the proposed goals. There are 133 letters of support, including all 77 local Smart Start partnerships and 44 letters from other state, regional and local stakeholders representing a broad base of support. Letters of support are provided from local school districts, higher education, private foundations, professional and private associations, and other entities. The applicant's overview of governance responsibilities provided in Table A.3-1 lists each participating state agency and other state entities and their roles and responsibilities related to the grant proposal. Full points were not awarded given the lack of specificity provided by the applicant concerning how a statewide effort would be coordinated with existing agencies and governance structures. A number of unanswered questions regarding the proposed RTT-ELC Smart Start Leaders Collaborative were cause for concern given the large amount of funding allocated and limited explanation of this initiative. It is unclear why an outside contract would be required to manage and coordinate this initiative.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	13



The extent to which the State Plan--

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used. **Quality**

**Comments on (A)(4)**

The applicant provides a narrative and data in Table (A)(4)-1 to demonstrate how existing funds will help achieve the proposed state plan. These include, but are not limited to, funds from CCDF, NC Pre-K, Head Start/Early Head Start, Title I of ESEA, Part B, Part C, Smart Start, and Maternal and Child Health Block Grant funds. The applicant proposes funding 18 projects with RTT-ELC funds, including the ECAC in the Governor's Office, the state's lead agency. The applicant proposes using a combined \$1.3 million in other funds for specific support of RTT-ELC projects. The applicant provides a historical context related to sustainability by citing the ongoing litigation in the Leandro case in the state's legal system, as well as the anticipated changes in funding streams. The state Supreme Court ruled in the Leandro case that the state must meet the needs of 'at-risk' students prior to their enrolling in the public schools, and this decision resulted in further expansion of the state's preK program. In 2011, after reduced funding for the state's pre-K, the plaintiffs returned to court. It is possible that court rulings may result in additional funding streams for Early Learning and Development that could support sustainability. The applicant proposes building broader public awareness and support for early childhood education investments and development of a sustainability planning strategy process 18 months into the grant funding cycle. The applicant does not demonstrate that the grant activities can be sustained after the grant period ends to maintain or expand services proposed, but relies on possible funding as a result of the Leandro case and reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Child Care Development Block Grant. The applicant's response was not awarded full points since a sustainability plan was not presented by the applicant for maintenance or expansion of proposed grant activities after funding ends. For some proposed activities, it was difficult to determine the appropriateness of the funding requested given limited information provided regarding individual project or initiatives.

**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>8</b>
<p>The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and adopted, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and adopt, a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that--</p> <p>(a) Is based on a statewide set of tiered Program Standards that include--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Early Learning and Development Standards;</li> <li>(2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;</li> <li>(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;</li> <li>(4) Family engagement strategies;</li> <li>(5) Health promotion practices; and</li> <li>(6) Effective data practices;</li> </ul>		

(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 has a five-star TQRIS that has been in place since legislated in 1997. The state acknowledges that its current TQRIS only addresses three of the six program standards identified in criterion (B)(1)(a) but reports that revisions have already begun to address the remaining standards. The current TQRIS does not include Program Standards that address Early Learning and Development Standards or Effective data practices. The current TQRIS only requires family engagement strategies at the higher star levels. The Environmental Rating Scales are required in the current TQRIS, but this alone does not constitute a Comprehensive Assessment System. The state clearly displays the number of stars on each Early Learning and Development program's license. The applicant reports that a 2010 validation study was conducted and results are presented in Appendices 13 and 14 that suggest the validity of higher star ratings being correlated with higher levels of quality care and education. The applicant presents this as evidence that the TQRIS currently in place does meaningfully differentiate program quality levels. The applicant states that the standards are "commensurate with nationally recognized standards," but no further explanation or information is given to identify which specific standards are aligned with the current TQRIS. While the TQRIS components are measurable, it is not clear how assessment and measurement relate to the current TQRIS since the current TQRIS does not include program standards for Early Learning and Development Standards. Without these, it is difficult to determine if the current TQRIS will lead to improved learning outcomes for children. North Carolina is one of only three states in the country that has a TQRIS built into its licensing system. The state requires that programs must at least meet the 1 star rating level to be licensed; however, 79% of licensed programs choose to meet higher levels of quality as denoted by 2, 3, 4, or 5 stars. The applicant proposes two key activities in its proposed plan, including revision of the current TQRIS and provision of incentives for programs that choose to meet some of the new TQRIS requirements before they are officially required. Of particular focus is the quality of care for infants and toddlers. The applicant proposes requiring all Early Learning and Development programs to use the Early Learning and Development standards as well as requiring all TQRIS programs serving preschoolers to use a curriculum aligned with the standards. It is not clear whether the Program Standards Committee will provide a list of "approved" curricula that align with the standards or if programs will be responsible for demonstrating the alignment between their selected curriculum and the standards. The applicant proposes adding the CLASS as a required assessment to the TQRIS along with a list of approved measures for instructional assessments. The applicant proposes a bonus program to reward child care centers and family child care providers that meet identified criteria, but only 4- and 5-star programs who have or are willing to serve children receiving child care subsidy, Head Start or NC Pre-K assistance will be eligible to participate on a first come first serve basis. No explanation is provided for this decision nor how the money will be evenly distributed throughout the state. With a goal of improving quality, it is not clear why the applicant proposes to focus on those programs already functioning at the highest levels of the TQRIS. The applicant proposes utilizing "an organization that coordinates and provides child care resource and referral" to develop and disseminate information on the second key activity that requires additional professional development and education at the cost of \$750,000, but this agency is not named and it is not clear why the DCDEE or NC Child Care Commission would not assume responsibility for this key activity proposed. Points were awarded for high quality response and significant levels of implementation. The state presents a strong plan, but all required elements are not currently implemented. The current TQRIS does not address Early Learning and Development Standards or Effective Data Practices. Assessments are also limited in scope. It is unclear why the applicant has elected to focus on programs at higher star levels nor why an outside organization will be used to implement and coordinate professional development efforts.

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (B)(2)**

The applicant requires all Early Learning and Development Programs that are licensed or regulated by DCDEE to participate in the TQRIS. Currently, 78% of all Early Learning and Development Programs participate in the TQRIS. By July 1, 2012, all Pre-K programs in public schools and community-based child care settings will be required to participate in the TQRIS. More than 90% of Early Head Start and Head Start programs voluntarily participate in the state's current TQRIS, and those that do not are in public schools but will be required to do so by July 1, 2012. North Carolina requires all ELD programs receiving CCDF funds to participate in the TQRIS. With the new requirements effective July 1, 2012, the state anticipates more programs will participate that serve children with Part B, Part C, and Title I services. The North Carolina Legislature passed a law that prohibits children on subsidy from being served in 1- and 2-star programs in the TQRIS effective July 1, 2012. This is a newly enacted policy that will increase the supply of high-quality slots for Children with High Needs. Additionally, local Smart Start partnerships may also further restrict the subsidy requirements for Children with High Needs in their particular geographic area. Programs receive higher subsidy payments if they have a higher star-rating in the TQRIS. The applicant proposes to increase the number of participating programs in the TQRIS by concentrating efforts on increasing the number of school-based and religiously-affiliated Early Learning and Development programs that voluntarily participate in the TQRIS even though they must only meet minimum licensing standards. The state proposes technical assistance for this project by an outside organization that is not named along with mini-grants to be awarded. The specifics of the task force on licensing/Activity 2 leave some questions unanswered. It is not clear who the technical assistance specialists would be or how they would be identified. The applicant does not specify if quality improvement plans would be submitted or approved by any particular agency or entity. The number of anticipated participants is not stated and the amount of the mini-grant is not specified. Specific plans for reaching out to these voluntary TQRIS participants are not provided, and this makes it impossible to determine if the budgeted amounts for the proposed activity is appropriate. The applicant does not indicate how it proposes to design a High Quality Plan that will help more families afford high-quality child care. The applicant provides current numbers and percentages of ELD programs participating in the TQRIS in Table (B)(2)(c) as well as targets for the end of each calendar year. A recently passed law will increase participation in the TQRIS. The targets can be considered achievable since the great majority of programs already participate in the TQRIS in this particular state since it is a requirement for licensed programs. It is difficult to assess the ambitious nature of the proposed targets given the widespread success and implementation to date. The state has proposed focusing on the two voluntary participant groups that would increase the overall percentages. The applicant did not provide information about how the state proposes to make high quality care more affordable for families or action steps it proposes to reach out to religious organizations or public schools who can voluntarily participate in the TQRIS.

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

North Carolina requires that programs seeking a 3-star license or higher participate in the Environment Rating Scales in one-third of the classrooms including at least one classroom from each age group of children served in the program. These scales are both valid and reliable and correlate closely with the CLASS and child outcomes. Trained assessors are hired to conduct the assessments after achieving inter-rater reliability and agreement. Continuous checks are made to be certain the reliability remains at 85% or higher. It should be noted, however, that only programs applying for 3-, 4- or 5-star licenses participate in the Environment Rating Scales assessment. After a star license is issued, programs have annual compliance visits and a full reassessment is conducted every three years. North Carolina is participating in a collaborative federal initiative entitled Learning Laboratories (L2) to investigate ways to align monitoring protocols across federal and state early childhood systems. The applicant provides information about the TQRIS to parents in multiple ways, including showing star-level on license which must be publicly displayed. The DCDEE has an informational website for parents regarding the TQRIS and quality child care, as well as a searchable database of all registered/licensed programs that can be searched by a variety of program features. This is available in both English and Spanish. Child care resource and referral agencies are

also supported to assist families. Public information is also provided upon request by DCDEE. The state proposes development of a new assessment instrument that is ambitious. Whether it is achievable is difficult to determine based on a pilot of an assessment scheduled for five months across multiple states followed by two months to analyze the data. Only allowing one to two months between analysis of data and implementation across multiple states seems quite ambitious. Additional information concerning implementation and key stakeholders is needed to determine if the proposed plan is feasible. Of concern is the fact that the Director of DCDEE would be charged with the responsibility for leading a large multi-state effort to develop and implement an assessment tool along with other responsibilities and functions. How the needs of children with disabilities or children who are English learners will be accomplished is not addressed. Full points were not awarded based on the partial implementation currently demonstrated and proposed for criterion (B)(3)(a). The Environmental Rating Scales are the only assessment currently used, though the applicant proposes use of the CLASS. Development of a new instrument, as proposed by the applicant, is ambitious, but it is not clear if it is achievable given some of the timelines presented and benchmarks, key roles and responsibilities that are not addressed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

#### Comments on (B)(4)

The state has demonstrated its ability to effectively increase the level of quality of Early Learning and Development programs since 2000 with implementation of the five-star rated license. North Carolina has provided tiered subsidy reimbursement rates to programs for over 20 years. An example of another state policy that provides support and incentives for continuous improvement is the requirement that state-funded Pre-K programs must earn a 4- or 5-star license. The state provides a number of supports to help working families who have Children with High Needs access high-quality programs, including priority access for children receiving funds for subsidized care, a tiered reimbursement rate structure, a requirement that only 3-, 4-, or 5-star programs may enroll children with subsidized care, blending of funding streams, Child Care Resource and Referral Staff (many of whom are bilingual), Smart Start funding allocation restrictions for only 4- or 5-star programs, and a state-funded Pre-K program. The state has already achieved great success with criteria (B)(4)(c)(1) and (B)(4)(c)(2) as evidenced by the data presented in the application. Performance Measure Table (B)(4)(c)(1) indicates ambitious targets of moving from 1,119 ELD programs in Tier 1 to only 410 programs in Tier 1 by 2015 as well as moving from 892 ELD programs in Tier 2 to only 220 programs in Tier 2 by 2015. Similarly, Performance Measure Table (B)(4)(c)(2) establishes ambitious and achievable targets for increasing the number and percentage of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs in the top tiers. The applicant proposes four key activities to promote access of Children with High Needs to high quality Early Learning and Development programs, including (1) working to raise 1- and 2-star programs to at least a 3-star license, (2) hiring of a full-time infant/toddler specialist for the northeastern portion of the state, (3) creation of 125 new slots for infants/toddlers with high needs in existing 4- and 5-star programs and enhanced subsidy rates, and (4) establishment of 110 part-day slots for infants/toddlers with high needs. Activities 2, 3, and 4 will be focused on work in the Transformation Zone. The DCDEE proposes contracting with an outside organization to coordinate and provide these services. The cost for the Infant/Toddler Specialist seems high (\$280,000), particularly for someone with a bachelor's degree serving in a Training and Technical Assistance role. The applicant specifically mentions the population of children of military families, but no specific strategy or initiatives are identified to respond to this need. While the state has demonstrated past successes with the required elements in this criterion, the proposed plan would allow further successes and the opportunity to build on these successes with new initiatives and incentives.

	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)**

Two separate validation studies have been completed on North Carolina's TQRIS, one by UNC-Chapel Hill in 2001 and another by UNC-Greensboro in 2010. Both indicated that higher-tiered programs received significantly higher scores on the Environmental Rating Scales and CLASS, but that there were no differences in preschool classroom quality between 4- and 5-star programs. Two additional studies assessed the relationship between star levels and children's learning, development and school readiness. One was conducted in 2003 by the Smart Start Evaluation team and another was conducted by UNC-Greensboro in 2010 for toddlers and preschoolers. The applicant clearly articulates past validation studies conducted as well as guiding research questions that would be posed for the outside contractor for the proposed evaluation component of the grant activities. Both required elements for this criterion were clearly addressed with thorough responses. The applicant proposes conducting validation studies to inform revision efforts for the TQRIS. Of particular concern for the applicant is addressing how to best revise the upper tiers of the TQRIS to meaningfully differentiate quality. The applicant would also like to include family child care in the proposed validation study as well as infants and toddlers. The design has not been determined since an outside evaluator has not been identified; however, a timeline with key milestones was presented by the applicant that would guide the validation study. DCDEE would secure an independent evaluator. Full points were awarded as the applicant clearly demonstrates past efforts as well as proposed validation measures to be further elaborated by the evaluator.

**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>12</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</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

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

The state has a comprehensive set of standards for children from birth to age 5 that are appropriate across the age groups and address all five of the Essential Domains of School Readiness. The standards are developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate. The preschool standards are aligned with the kindergarten state standards as well as the Common Core Kindergarten Standards. State Pre-K programs are required to demonstrate that the preschool standards and curricula must be aligned with the standards. The state provides professional development resources and educational opportunities related to the standards, including a website, online training module, delivery of a Train-the-Trainer model on the standards, and professional development seminars. The Early Learning and Development Standards are not required in the TQRIS and are not part of a comprehensive assessment system. The applicant reports that the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is working with a Standards Revision Committee to revise the standards for birth to age 5 to reflect recent improvements and new knowledge, better align with Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and kindergarten standards and review the appropriateness of the standards for children with disabilities and children with cultural and linguistic diversity. The applicant proposes use of grant funds to provide training to NC Pre-K teachers, TQRIS providers, and revision of the Competency Framework. Training and professional development resources would be developed for a two-day training on the revised standards, with a component focused on formative assessment. An online training module and brief promotional video would be produced to share with families. Higher education faculty would also be provided with 2-day training sessions. A timeline and milestones for all training and professional development activities was provided by the applicant. Points were awarded for partial implementation given the revision currently underway to address incorporation of the Early Learning and Development Standards within the TQRIS, their linkage with curriculum and activities, as well as a Comprehensive Assessment System. With the plan and strategies outlined, the state can move toward full implementation by building off the strides made already with partial implementation thus far.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</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 identifies the Comprehensive Assessment System as an area of intense focus and need for the proposed project. The state proposes creation of a cross-agency Task Force on Child Assessment to address issues related to assessments and professional development opportunities that are needed. The state proposes to participate in a multi-state consortium to develop, pilot and field test a new assessment. Areas of concern identified by the applicant include: the need to create a single screening policy for all Early Learning and Development programs, recommendations for approved formative assessments and consideration of policy change to require their use in the revised TQRIS, development of a new program assessment measure, and utilization of the CLASS in the revised TQRIS. These seem to be broad, general ideas, but very little information is provided concerning how each of these key projects would be planned, coordinated, managed and implemented by the ECAC or the proposed Task Force. No information is provided concerning the membership of the Task Force or how it would function. It is not clear if the Task Force would only recommend to the ECAC or from where it would get its authority to enact changes. The applicant indicates the NC Council on Early Childhood Professional Development would develop the professional development plan related to screening, formative assessments and the CLASS, but very little information is provided about how this would be accomplished. The state has proposed creation of a Task Force on Assessment, but a clearly articulated plan for the Task Force is not apparent for selecting and addressing the assessment concerns acknowledged as a major focus or activity by the applicant. It is not clear how professional development or educational opportunities would be provided for early childhood educators regarding the proposed Comprehensive Assessment. Approaches and strategies for coordinating data generated by assessments and sharing of those data is not fully addressed. The state's narrative demonstrates the state's commitment to, and plan for, addressing the gaps in the Comprehensive Assessment System. Only partial implementation points can be awarded since the applicant proposes that the majority of the work will be conducted by a cross-agency task force which has not yet been formed or operationalized. While training and

professional development of early childhood educators is mentioned, it is not clear what strategies would be used to accomplish this goal or how the Task Force would interface with and collaborate with the North Carolina Council on Early Childhood Professional Development to deliver training and education. The role of the community colleges and state colleges in informing the design or creation of training options is not addressed.

	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	12

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 proposes requiring that all children in regulated programs receive annual health assessments, but does not provide specific details about how this would be accomplished though there is mention of the ABCD model. The applicant does not address how health and safety standards would be progressively required across all the tiers of the TQRIS other than mandating that minimum safeguards be met. Minimum standards are required at the one-star level, but increasing standards for each star level are not apparent. The state does not propose any new initiatives that directly address support for early childhood educators related to health and safety standards, but rather proposes expansion of existing services only. The applicant proposes expansion of the Shape NC initiative into 15 additional counties in 2012, including at least one of the communities in the Transformation Zone, as well as establishing new nutrition rules for minimum licensing standards. The state proposes to increase the number of Children with High Needs who are screened, referred, and participating in services by expanding the ABCD model statewide with the additional of 7 new ABCD Coordinators. Within the Transformation Zone, the applicant proposes hiring two additional Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs) and leveraging existing funding to implement NorthEast Connects, a short-term, community-based nurse home visiting programs to assure that Children with High Needs are enrolled in the most appropriate services. Existing resources will be leveraged to create a model early learning center with a new outdoor learning environment to focus on the Shape NC initiative in a community in the Transformation Zone. It is not clear why this new center is needed to implement the Shape NC initiative. The state has existing standards that address health, behavioral and safety domains, but no requirement beyond the minimal levels required for licensing are identified in the TQRIS. The applicant does not provide adequate information concerning how it proposes to address criterion (C)(3)(b) to improve educators' knowledge of health standards. The applicant addresses (C)(3)(d) by focusing on statewide initiatives as well those targeted on the proposed Transformation Zone. The state proposes requiring that all children in regulated ELD programs receive annual health assessments and leveraging the existing resources in the Child Care Health Consultant Model by establishing a regional coaching model to build statewide capacity. Additionally, the state proposes expansion of the existing Assuring Better Health and Child Development (ABCD) model to the entire state by hiring seven additional coordinators to serve local partnerships currently not covered. While there are some existing initiatives focused on healthy eating, nutrition, and physical activity, many of the activities are proposed and dependent on securing grant funding before implementation occurs. Examples are the proposed new licensing standards regarding nutrition or expansion of the Shape Up program to additional counties. Another example of partial implementation is the ABCD coordinators and Child Care Health Consultants, both of which would be expanded if the proposal was funded.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	15	10

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 revision of the TQRIS will include stronger family engagement standards that draw heavily on Head Start Performance Standards. The applicant does not address how the progression will occur across the star levels of the revised TQRIS or how cultural and linguistic appropriateness will be assured. The applicant proposes that twenty Head Start grantees would be identified through a competitive selection process to provide coaching and technical assistance to programs regarding the revised TQRIS family engagement standards. No information is provided concerning frequency, duration, or details of this support. The applicant does not provide documentation that Head Start grantees will assume this responsibility in terms of people, resources, or time. This project would be directed by the Head Start Collaboration Office. This is a costly budget item at \$2 million with no sustainability plan identified. The Division of Public Health would provide Family Strengthening Programs in the Transformation Zone. Very little information is provided for this costly proposed activity budgeted at \$3.9 million. No sustainability plan is presented. The state does not specifically address how it would provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families in relation to criterion (C)(4)(a). Full points were not awarded given the lack of specificity provided regarding this criterion as well as concerns for how proposed trainings for early childhood educators would be systematically implemented and sustained. The applicant seems to rely heavily on the proposed RFP process for Head Start grantees to mentor and lead Family Engagement initiatives, without full implementation plans or timelines for accomplishment of this criterion.

**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)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>

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

- (a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;
- (b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;
- (c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and
- (d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--
  - (1) Increasing the number of postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and the number of Early Childhood Educators who receive credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and
  - (2) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.



Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (D)(2)**

The state proposes to provide mentors for all newly licensed birth-age 5 teachers employed in licensed, non-public school settings as they work to move from their initial license to full licensure. Mentors will assist newly licensed teachers with development of a professional development plan. The applicant proposes creation of an Educator Efficacy Endorsement for those who provide technical assistance, coaching and mentoring for teachers and administrators in early childhood settings. It is not clear why such an endorsement is needed in addition to the associate and bachelor's degrees already available or why someone would choose to pursue this endorsement if a degree had already been earned. The applicant proposes providing funds to assist community colleges in achieving NAEYC Accreditation as well as funds for which community colleges could compete to develop and implement strategies that expand access and improve student success for early childhood educators. The applicant proposes creation of a statewide online master's degree in Early Childhood Program Leadership and Management. The applicant proposes creation of two standardized Continuing Education Unit (CEU) courses, with one 2.0 CEU course focused on coaching/mentoring/technical assistance and a second .5 CEU course focused on curriculum and assessment. These two courses would be delivered by trained Child Care Resource & Referral staff statewide, but the intended market for these CEU courses is not identified. A Cultural Competence Educational Component is proposed, along with intensive training for 100 Early Childhood Directors in a year-long process. The state proposes providing TEACH scholarships and salary supplements of \$2,000 for associate degrees and \$4,000 for bachelor's degrees for teachers and family child care providers in the targeted counties in the Transformation Zone. The state proposes provision of stipends to a group of highly trained coaches to support SP2 Birth-Kindergarten teacher licensure for teachers working with Children with High Needs in non-NC Pre-K, an example of its commitment to setting ambitious targets that are achievable given the financial supports provided. Increasing the number of highly trained coaches should also propel the state toward its ambitious targets for increasing the knowledge and skills of its early childhood educators progressing to higher credentialing levels. Creation of the Early Educator Support, Teacher Licensure and Professional Development Unit in the DCDEE provides further evidence of the state's commitment to achieve its ambitious targets related to early childhood educators' knowledge and progression in credentialing. The ambitious target identified by the applicant is that 95% of teachers receiving mentoring support and working with children with high needs in non-public school, licensed classrooms will achieve their SP2 Birth-Kindergarten license by 2015. The applicant reports that it currently conducts periodic statewide workforce studies, but proposes the development of a workforce professional development portal to maintain data related to the education and professional development of the workforce. The applicant does not specify if the data will be available to the public or how the data will be utilized. The state does commit to future sustainability of the data system with pledged funding from DCDEE. The community college and four-year degree programs are aligned with the Competency Framework. The TEACH Scholarships and WAGES salary supplements provide a way for the state to increase the number of educators advancing their education and credentials while also encouraging retention. The state has articulated a clear plan for expanding access to professional development opportunities with the community college and university system, as well as implementing policies and incentives, such as the TEACH Scholarships and WAGES salary supplements. The state has a well-developed network of professional development agencies, as well as college or university settings to increase the number of educators progressing to higher levels of credentials aligned with the framework at levels prior to associate degree. Specific policies, such as the WAGES salary supplements and TEACH Scholarships, are already substantially implemented. The state has fully implemented the Early Educator Support, Teacher Licensure and Professional Development Unit in the DCDEE, to coordinate and lead a collaborative effort to improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of its early childhood educators. Alignment with the Framework and postsecondary institutions has already been accomplished. The state has already achieved substantial implementation in regard to this effort, and has proposed a High Quality Plan to further its efforts.

**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	16

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 state proposes creation of a K-3 assessment aligned with the state's Early Learning and Development Standards that assesses all five domains of school readiness that meets all requirements in criterion (E)(1)(b). The state also expresses its willingness to engage in a multi-state consortium to accomplish the task. The state demonstrates it has the experts and resources necessary to create a valid, reliable and appropriate assessment instrument and proposes implementing the first round of school districts in the 2014-15 school year, beginning in districts with a high proportion of children with high needs, with the kindergarten version scores entered in the statewide longitudinal data system. Sustainability of the assessment will be accomplished with existing Federal and State resources. A plan for key activities and milestones for the development of the proposed K-3 assessment is provided. Partial points were awarded simply because the proposed plan, although well-articulated, is not yet implemented. The state does not clearly articulate how the proposed assessment would be funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant. Because the proposed assessment is a K-3 assessment, it is not clear why K-12 dollars might not be allocated toward the project.

	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)**

The applicant proposes creation of an early childhood data system that interfaces with the existing CEDARS Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and the current NC Race to the Top Initiative. The proposed system would require creation of statewide common child unique identifiers via the fully implemented K-12 public school identifier technology. The state presents a table detailing its progression and efforts to date toward a comprehensive data system, and then details how all essential data elements required would be addressed and incorporated. Each required criterion is addressed in the narrative and a timeline and milestones for the creation of the data system is included. The proposed project leverages over \$9 million already invested in technology. The applicant does not explicitly identify how collected data will be used to inform continuous improvement and decision making.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	280	236

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

	Available	Score
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<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2: Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
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Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (P)(2)**

The applicant already requires that all regulated and licensed early learning and development programs participate in the TQRIS. The proposed plan works to increase the number of voluntary participants in religiously-affiliated settings and public schools. The state reports that 93% of programs are in Tiers 1-5 of its current TQRIS. Both required elements of this priority were met.

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>Yes</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 earned a score of at least 70 percent on selection criterion (E)(1).

Absolute Priority

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

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

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

**Comments on Absolute Priority**

The applicant addressed the required elements of the Absolute Priority in the key activities and goals presented in the narrative and focused investment areas. The state has clearly presented its past commitment to, and investment in, Early Learning and Development Programs. The state has identified specific initiatives and programs to increase the number of voluntary participants in the TQRIS and to implement a comprehensive assessment system for a revised TQRIS. The state proposes expansion of its ABCD model and health coaches to address health and nutrition issues. The state presents an elaborate plan for increasing the educational levels of early childhood educators and providers, as well as creating and implementing a statewide kindergarten entry assessment.



# Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



## Technical Review Form Page

Application # NC-5027

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

A 1 (a) The applicant, the state of North Carolina demonstrates both in their narrative and in the completed tables provided that the financial investment of North Carolina from January 2007 to the present has been significant in Early Learning and Development programs. The State has made a combined sustained commitment of approximately \$268 million per year in funding for Smart Start and Pre-K initiatives and leveraged millions for North Carolina's early childhood system in cash and in-kind contributions in the past five years. With budget constraints, the investments have declined somewhat during the last few years but remain substantial. Specific to their high needs preschoolers they provide evidence that even in tough economic times financial investment has continued for special education services in their 3 – 5 year old population and their contribution to Child Care Development Funds (CCDF). A decrease is noted in the state's contribution to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C. (b) The applicant demonstrates that they have successfully increased, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs. They provide evidence that they have increased both the number of high needs children served and the quality of regulated care as per their existing fully implemented tiered quality rating system (TQRIS). Within their provided table for example the number of Title 1 preschoolers served increased nearly 50% and appears to level off over the past year; Early Head Start and Head Start services have increased, and their state funded preschool saw its highest number of served children in 2010 but appears to have decreased in 2011. It is noted that funding for Dual subsidy children has consistently increased as a result of the efforts of Smart Start. Though the applicant identifies a unique high need population as those preschoolers in military families no statistics are provided to describe their services either in terms of the state's financial support or improvement in quality of care as measured by their TQRIS. (c) The applicant describes two aspects of their current early learning and development landscape that are foundational to their infrastructure. Smart Start, managed by the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC) is a statewide network that is a non profit with a legislatively appointed Board of Directors. Smart Start operates as an independent non profit with local partnerships in all of their counties and are ultimately answerable to the North Carolina General Assembly. The goal of Smart Start is to measurably increase the health and well being of young children birth to five by improving early care and

education programs so children are safe, healthy and ready to succeed in school. Additionally Smart Start provides parents with tools that support them in raising healthy, happy, and successful children. Smart Start is also charged with ensuring the state's youngest children have access to preventive health care. Using the Smart Start infrastructure NCPCC establishes goals for increasing the health, well being and development of all birth through age five children in the state. Early Learning and Development (ELD) programs in the state are guided by three core values – safe, healthy learning environments, a trained skilled workforce to serve them, and families should have access to high quality, affordable, accessible early learning programs for their children. It is upon these values that the state's early learning and development system is organized. The North Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council (NC ECAC) created in 2010 and housed in the Governor's Office provides broad oversight for their statewide system and serves as the designated lead for their RTT-ELC application. Governor Perdue created the North Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to add value to all existing early childhood efforts by creating and sustaining a shared vision for young children and a comprehensive, integrated system of high quality early care and education, family strengthening, and health services that support ready children, families, and communities. North Carolina's early learning and development system is well established in legislation and policy. Both Smart Start and North Carolina (NC) Pre-K were enacted in legislation and passed by the North Carolina General assembly. The applicant, in a convincing manner, describes Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) with Smart Start as the glue that binds their state early childhood system. Each complement and support a comprehensive array of early learning and development key components. The applicant states that Smart Start has driven much of this progress as they hold local partnerships accountable for ensuring high needs children are provided care in high quality programs. The result of this work to date is impressive. The applicant documents that 94% of subsidized children with identified special needs are in high quality programs. Another factor that supports this strong applicant is their provision for tiered reimbursement rates that is tied to the age of children and the star-level. This provides an economic incentive to provide better care for poor children. Further legislative actions are reflected in the 2011 legislative session. Legislation passed to allow only programs that have received 3 or more stars in their TQRIS will be eligible to receive CCDF funds. This change is in the process of being implemented. Additionally North Carolina's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) is integrated in to the state licensing system. (d) The applicant provides strong evidence of their current high 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. NC provides strong evidence and narrative confirmations of their impressive work to bring quality early childhood measures, practices, and assessments to the varied early learning and development programs in their state. Their work has resulted in a fully functioning TQRIS that is integral to licensing in the state, supported and integrated within Smart Start expectations. The applicant offers impressive data to support the full integration of this system. They also demonstrate by example their ability to use the results of their TQRIS data collection to inform their RTT-ELC application. For example the state now documents 68% of all young children from low-income families are in regulated programs of high quality as measured by their TQRIS (levels 4 & 5); 94% of special needs children are placed in high quality programs, and 61% of all children whose care is paid for using Child Care Development Fund dollars are in regulated programs in the upper tiers 4 and 5. Further data is offered to demonstrate this strength and this data is reflected in the tables they provide. Using systems and data the applicant clearly knows the current status of their systems. Existing health supports for young children are described as are their existing data practices. Family engagement and support for resources that are financial and educational are both system wide and statewide. As described health related resources are supported by statewide programs and widely accessible and used. These key elements are embedded within Smart Start or TQRIS. Additionally they are tracked and data is used to establish goals and measure success and needs. Specifically the applicant describes a need to develop a comprehensive assessment system. Though they note some pockets of assessment currently in Head Start and their state funded preschools they are aware that this is notably absent from their existing TQRIS. Review of this data show NC to be committed to good outcomes for all children and ensuring that all children start school ready to succeed. They demonstrate effectively their understanding that this requires a strong system across the early care and education, family strengthening, and health sectors. Impressively the applicant describes the process by which they have built their statewide system that is continuously striving for quality improvement. They describe a seven step process they actively use to ensure continuous improvement. They use this ongoing established process to set higher quality goals. Clearly this process was used to inform their proposal, North Carolina, in their presentation of data and narrative, and in a very compelling data rich way demonstrates a breadth and depth in their current statewide comprehensive vision of early learning and development and supports for this systemically and financially. By effectively using data from prior work the applicant is able to clearly identify where they want to go. They are interested in building upon their work to date and their existing solid infrastructure to eliminate the achievement gap already present at kindergarten entry. They have State data from the Department of Public Instruction that shows the significant disparities between Children with High Needs and their peers at the end of third grade.

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

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

A 2 North Carolina, the applicant, articulates a clear and comprehensive early learning and development reform agenda that is ambitious yet achievable. As noted in response to A 1 the state's progress to date is deemed highly likely to improve the school readiness for Children with High Needs. (a) The applicant has set 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. Using their infrastructure they describe 3 elements that will be key to their reform agenda. 1) Strengthening standards, assessments and capacity to collect and use data to drive quality and continuous improvement. 2) Investing in people and relationships to increase teacher and system effectiveness. 3) Target high intensity supports and community infrastructure building efforts to turn around poor outcomes for young children in highest need counties. Towards this end they propose the creation of Transformation Zones in rural distressed counties with high needs working collaboratively with their K – 12 Race to the Top Districts. Their stated goals include seven measurable increases in % of high needs children served in high quality early learning settings as measured by their (Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System) TQRIS. These include: increases in the number of early learning and development settings with high tier ratings based on their revised TQRIS ratings; increases in the number of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with high needs screenings, increased high needs preschoolers served by health consultants, increases in the number of high needs children participating in ongoing health care and well child visits. Three of their ambitious goals include establishing a valid and reliable kindergarten entry assessment, intervention strategies identified and used in Transformation Zones, use of statewide data to develop a long term strategic plan to impact quality in birth to five services, and to identify by December 2014 a plan for sustainability. Given the states prior efforts and successful and measurable track record these goals appear achievable with the noted exception of the development within the given time frame of a statewide valid Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA). This is quite an extensive undertaking and they propose to include additional states in this endeavor. This may indeed be achievable or at least portions of it will be. It is clear that their plan will lead them toward achieving an assessment though it may take longer or need to have several phases. (b) NC plans to: 1) Strengthen standards, assessments and their capacity to collect and use data. This will be done in large part by revising their current systems including their TQRIS and ramping up expectations and includes the validation of their TQRIS. 2) Invest in people and relationships to increase teacher and system effectiveness. This will be done by similarly ramping up expectations and building upon existing relationships with Institutes of Higher Learning and training networks and includes increasing capacity of both to serve their early childhood workforce. 3) Target high intensity supports and community infrastructure to turn around poor outcomes in highest need rural counties. Their targeted approach includes their coordination of Transformation Zones in their most needy rural areas with plans to use this model in similarly distressed areas throughout their state. (c) (d) (e) The applicant describes their rationale for addressing their selected focus investment areas effectively. Specifically they state they selected C 1 and C 2 – Standards and Assessment as they are essential to their efforts to strengthen school readiness skills. They further note that this will serve to align early childhood efforts with the K – 12 systems and support their collaborative vision of integrating birth to five with K – 12 to create a roadmap for this expanded education and development continuum. Their rationale for addressing C 3 – Addressing the health, behavioral and development needs of children with high needs is consistent with one of their core values and foundational belief that children must be healthy to succeed in school. They identify a large network of Child Care health consultants who are able to provide onsite technical assistance and help develop policy. Their state has a history of making significant investment through their Assuring Better Health and Child Development (ABCD) program to increase the screening and referral rates for all children. They feel, and it would seem justifiably so, that they can leverage this to successfully increase outreach to those with the highest needs. The applicant will address Focused Investment area D 2 – A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce as they are aware that improving program quality and outcomes for children depends on a strong and skilled workforce. They recognize that it is people who make programs high quality. This investment area most closely matches their state plan to support the continued education and professional development of the workforce. Further rationale is offered by their efforts to date and successful impact. Though significant, the applicant recognizes that needs are greater than their existing results and they wish to push the needle in this investment area. The applicant will address E 1 and E 2 and provide their reasons for doing so in the following manner. E1. Understanding the status of children's learning at kindergarten entry. The applicant knows that in order to close the achievement gap at the school entry door they need to gather data that is valid, reliable and can be used to illuminate where they are in their state and where they need to go. In addition establishing this metric will allow them to assess their impact and alter course if needed. As a state invested in early childhood learning and development they note that this is indeed an area they need to address and have developed a plan to do so. E 2 Building an early learning data system to improve instruction. Clearly the applicant appreciates and uses data to target identified goals, measure program impacts, and identify needs and gaps. With this high regard for data they provide their rationale in terms of knowing what data they need and their desire to ramp up their system so they can collect it. As a competitive preference priority they have addressed and included all early learning and development programs in their TQRIS. They note that a strong system is in existence that covers 93% of all regulated programs. Based on this strong success they desire to include even more programs into their rated license system. The applicant provides their reasons for addressing the following 2 invitational priorities. Invitational priority for public-private partnerships – The applicant has a noted strength in this area upon which they desire to build. Using their Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and North Carolina Partnership Council (NCPC) they address how they will further develop champions for children to diversify and bring additional various perspectives. Invitational priority for sustaining effects into the early elementary grades. Consistent with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) vision of early childhood as a birth to age eight endeavor the applicant addresses this priority in their effort towards a more seamless early childhood system and wish to address their important steps forward to result in integrating and coordinating efforts across various programs and sectors to do this. The applicant provides an exceptionally thorough research and data driven plan to meet their state's needs. Full points were not awarded because they do not currently have a school entry comprehensive assessment in place. Their plan to develop and implement one is

outstanding.

	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 3 (a) The state has identified a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability. They describe their organizational structure as one that has been historically supported by two former Governors as well as their current Governor Perdue whose larger Career and College Ready, Set, Go! Education agenda and establishment of the ECAC includes leaders of all of NC's state and local agencies, organizations, nonprofits and other entities that are stakeholders in their early learning and development system. In recognition that the work needs to go beyond the strength of a sole leader they have created a wide and deep network of leadership. Their organizational structure and governance is shared and includes decision making, shared resources, shared accountability and shared outcomes. At the state level governance is shared through the Department of Health and Human Services where the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) is housed and the Division of Public Health (DPH), The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) which houses the Office of Early Learning shares in the governance process. All work is coordinated through the ECAC which advises and makes recommendations to Governor Perdue and all state government agencies about early childhood issues. NC ECAC coordinates all existing early childhood efforts consistently through a shared vision for comprehensive early



childhood services. Appointed members of the ECAC include state agency and division heads from DHHS, DPI along with the NCPD, the University System, the Community College System, Head Start Collaboration, and local Smart Start partnerships, philanthropically through the business partnerships and the medical community. This council is housed in the Office of Governor Perdue. DCDEE is responsible for the TQRIS license and its regulatory oversight, subsidy administration, oversight of CCDF quality dollars, child care workforce standards and NC's public Pre-K program. Further governance that is integral to the state's early learning systems is the NC PC nonprofit that oversees Smart Start. This system as described brings local input into the statewide structure and is governed by its own Board of Directors who represent the government and private sector leaders, service providers, and parents within communities. Though this is not a complete list, it is representative of the broad base of governance that supports the applicants work and demonstrates their strength in building upon existing interagency governance structures. (2) The applicant describes the roles and responsibilities they will use to build on existing governance structures through the ECAC within the Office of the Governor serving as the lead agency for RTT-ELC. The ECAC has been instrumental in the process of forming this proposal and will continue to meet quarterly to integrate RTT - ELC goals, progress and informative feedback into the broader ECAC work. They propose work to be done by a workgroup to serve as the implementation team for their proposed Transformation Zone work. Other specific initiatives will be managed by the ECAC as described in their application. For further evidence of governance responsibilities the applicant offers a Table to describe specific governance responsibilities. (3) The ECAC as the formal policy making body will task appropriate lead state agencies or contract agencies with specific decision making authority and some initiatives will be managed jointly. Disputes will be solved at the RTT Coordinating Council level with ultimate mediation responsibilities and with final decision making resting upon the ECAC. The process for resolving disputes is stated within MOUs found within the applicant's appendix. (4) With local Smart Start systems existing at the community level that are well established, they bring with them representatives and partnerships with early educators, families, and representatives from local school districts, departments of social services, and health department, Child Care Resource and Referrals, business leaders and other stakeholders. This model will serve to inform the applicant's Transformation Zones. (b) 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 as demonstrated by the applicants inclusion of an MOU between the State and each Participating State Agency that specifies the: (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) The applicant provides descriptions for the "Scope-of-work" that will be the responsibility of each Participating State Agency to accomplish their State Plan in two areas of their application. These are found in their detailed MOUs and more narratively in their response to this criterion. All initiatives specific to their State Work Plan are linked with a specific partner or in some cases multiple partners who will be tasked with specified elements of the initiative. (3) The applicant includes a signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency within their application package. Further the applicant meets these criteria by including all relevant MOUs that are explicit with regard to responsibilities and scope of work. (c) There is a 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 that is demonstrated by: (1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from their designated partners are provided. These partners reflect State Departments and divisions, Institutes of Higher Education, Technical Assistance providers, multiple local entities, and faith based representatives. It is notable that frequently these letters attest to past positive experiences with partners proposed in this application and their confidence in the ability of those dedicated to the proposed RTT-ELC project. (2) Letters of support are provided by a broad representation of stakeholders. These letters represent strong capacity for supportive and collaborative work and serve as a testament to the applicants historically strong and impressive early childhood quality development work. The applicant provides a strong and convincing response to their approach to coordinate and align systems that serve preschool age children and their families across the state, across statewide systems, and that promote high quality services and standards. As a result, this response was scored as high quality and substantially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</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 4 (a) North Carolina demonstrates how they will effectively use existing funds to support early learning and development. Their listing of funding sources include those from federal, state, private, and local sources and include Title 1, IDEA, their state funded preschool, Head Start Collaboration Office and their state advisory council that serves as the lead applicant. Additionally health care and services including public and private funders are included in their list of funding sources that will be used to provide for the comprehensive services they plan to include within the early learning and development plan to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan. Included in this are their plans to use set-asides in CCDF to support five major quality projects. 1) Child Care resource and referral; 2) Improving the compensation for their early childhood workforce; 3) Support for their rating license assessment project; 4) Their health and safety resource center; and 5) Center on social and emotional foundations for early learning (CSEFEL). Each alone offers quality enhancements, combined they offer a significant contribution to this project and demonstrate the states effective use of the set aside quality funds. (b) The applicant describes their plan to use grant funds to achieve the stated outcomes of their state plan. Their plans include the funding of the lead applicant ECAC as grants manager, funding for evaluation, technical assistance specific to Transformation Zones targeting their most high need children. (1) Given their extensive and detailed list of existing financial resources, use of grant funds when paired with their informed State Plan the applicant clearly shows they are able to effectively project costs and plan their resources accordingly. (2) The costs presented by the applicant in their line item budget and their budget narrative are deemed reasonable and appropriate. This is further supported by their prior work and understanding of what it costs to deliver quality. Costs are deemed both reasonable and necessary to achieve their objectives and their reform initiatives. (3) The applicant offers specific details regarding the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, and other referenced partners, and the specific activities they will be tasked with. Via their strong implementation of Smart Start, and their planned implementation of Transformation Zones that are localized, the applicant demonstrates that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan. (c) The applicant demonstrates a plan for sustainability beyond the grant period with a focus on maintaining the gains they will make and expanding and scaling up their successful efforts. As part of their sustainability plan they will clarify their vision so that it can be succinctly conveyed. The applicant notes that the research supports this as a key element of sustainability. They note an ongoing legal case that may feed into their sustainability potential and they hope that their efforts to inform the public of the essential importance of investing in early childhood and development will pay off through public insistence on strong state support for their initiatives. They have plans to strategically begin a planning process for sustainability 18 months into the implementation of this grant. The applicant offers an exceptionally strong response to this criteria. It is high quality and therefore all points are awarded.

**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>10</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)**

B 1 North Carolina has developed and adopted a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) that is part of their statewide regulating system of licensing that has been fully implemented and served as a national model. In this capacity the state has informed national practice. As early as 1995 the state used data collected to inform their need for higher quality care as they identified that only 10% of their child care programs offered developmentally appropriate care. This served as a catalyst to the state to re-examine their licensing system. As a result their 5 star rated license was established in 1997 and implemented in 1999. This system was revised in 2005. A further strength is noted in that NC has conducted two separate validation studies that document that the tiers in the TQRIS meaningfully differentiate increasing levels of quality. (a) NC has a TQRIS that covers three of the six program standards that are specified in the RTT – ELC and the applicant states that revisions are already underway to address the remaining standards. They further state that this revision process as described in their application expands the program standards for the highest quality tiers. (b) The applicant offers clear standards that communicate quality to the public through their graphic depiction of stars to indicate levels of quality. The applicant describes their system as one that parents were quick to understand and now defines their ELD landscape with a wide degree of understanding and acceptance. The applicant describes their standards as meaningful as evidenced through their validation studies and that their highest tiers reflect the high expectations of excellence as viewed nationally among recognized standards. Two prior independent validation studies indicate that the tiers effectively differentiate levels of quality and that there are respectively significant quality differences represented in programs at lower tiers as compared to those at higher levels. (c) North Carolina states they are only one of 3 states that have built a TQRIS that is part of their licensing system putting them in an elite group with reference to TQRIS as an integral part of their licensing system. This link applies across context of child care providers. North Carolina has led the field of TQRIS to promote, monitor and reward quality improvements in early learning and development programs. Their past track record and proposed plans to move forward have the potential to impact not only their state's preschool and school readiness landscape but the nation's as well. The applicant has a highly effective process in place which they propose to update, revise, and further their states objectives in meeting the needs of all children to advance school readiness and later academic achievement. Their plan is research and data driven, targeted to all children with specific enhancements for their high need populations. The applicant's strong evidence of prior success and their informed plan to build upon it led to awarding of all points possible for this criterion.

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

B 2 (a) The applicant has to date in an exceptional way maximized program participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. With a high rate of current participation with their licensed providers they provide plans for outreach to their licensing exempt preschool programs, many of whom already voluntarily participate. The applicant describes their TQRIS as being embedded within their licensing regulatory process. As such all licensed centers and family child care homes including their State-funded preschool programs; preschools funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA; preschool programs funded under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); and those receiving funds from the State's CCDF program; are participants in the state's TQRIS. Their high rate of participation has been achieved due to their intentional planning to do so. NC built their TQRIS into the state's licensing system to maximize participation of various early learning and development (ELD) programs, and have strategically offered financial incentives and supports to encourage license-exempt programs, like Head Start and public preschool programs, to voluntarily participate in the TQRIS. They will use a similar strategy to increase preschool programs exempt from licensing into the TQRIS system. (b) The applicant has designed and implemented effective policies and practices 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. Strategies they document that have been effective include: paying a higher subsidy reimbursement rate to programs at the higher quality tiers. This subsidy policy has effectively supported quality improvement in ELD programs and encouraged high-quality ELD programs to participate in the subsidy system—all of which results in Children with High Needs being served in the highest quality programs that support their learning and development in the five essential school readiness domains. Currently, 61% of the children in the state subsidy system are served in 4- and 5-star programs. An additional noted strength described by the applicant in their subsidy policies is their inclusion of children who are in foster care or in placements designed to maintain the family unit and prevent foster care (CPS) or child welfare services (CWS) processes. North Carolina has also revised its list of priority children for subsidy to include a specific category for “homeless” children. The applicant determined their need to develop this category as they were concerned that some of these children were not captured under the categories of CPS or CWS and were slipping through the cracks in their child care subsidy system. These examples illustrate a strong track record of adjusting policies to ensure that Children with High Needs participate in high quality ELD programs which speaks to their ability to achieve this important objective of the RTT-ELC. The applicant demonstrates significant strength and insights in this particular criterion. (c) NC set ambitious goals several years ago to maximize participation in a TQRIS—and it has met them. Seventy-eight percent of all ELD programs (including those receiving CCDF funds, Early Head Start, Head Start, and NC Pre-K) currently participate in the TQRIS. Their performance measures delineate targets in those areas where there is room for growth. Their plan includes strategies that have proved successful within their state and include incentives and supports to encourage voluntary participation (rather than mandates). They describe in their plan how they will focus on offering supports and incentives for public-school programs and religiously-affiliated programs that are exempt from licensing (referred to in NC as GS110 exempt programs) interested in voluntarily participating in the TQRIS. Some of the programs that will be impacted by this target are their preschool programs in public schools that are currently not required to participate in the TQRIS, religiously-affiliated ELD programs who currently are required to only meet minimum licensing standards for health, safety, supervision, environments, staff/child ratios and group sizes but they do not have to participate in the TQRIS. The applicant believes that these programs would choose to be licensed but cannot afford to make the changes in their programs that would be required. They state that they have previously been successful in increasing TQRIS participation to public school preschool programs by offering incentives, small grants, and technical assistance and will utilize these same strategies to encourage public school ELD programs and religiously-affiliated ELD programs to voluntarily participate in the TQRIS. The applicant provides relevant data to meet this goal. They state that there are 388 religiously-affiliated ELD programs that currently do not participate in the TQRIS and around 167 public schools with preschool classrooms that currently do not participate in the TQRIS. It is their intent over the next 4 years to significantly reduce the number of programs outside the TQRIS. Additional plans are described whereby they will provide technical assistance with a quality improvement plan designed to meet the 3 star-standards at a minimum for those of lower quality rating serving subsidized children (high needs). Once the plan is in place, they state that the technical assistance staff may apply to the resource and referral organization for mini-grants to support their plan. Funds for this project will be fairly distributed across the state. Another asset that will support their efforts is their ability to leverage the locally based Smart Start partners to reach out to religious affiliates. North Carolina does not license or regulate part-day ELD programs that serve children for less than 4 hours per day or family child care providers that care for less than three children unrelated to them. As part of this project, they will convene a task force to consider the appropriateness and feasibility of expanding licensing or regulations for these ELD programs. The applicant provides a doable timeline for tasks related to both activities described. They include a specific and detailed task list with responsibilities and allocations of financial resources included that are clearly linked with their performance measures. In this way ambitious yet achievable goals are set by the applicant. Performance measures are established to increase the number of high quality programs as measured by their TQRIS and the increased placement of High Needs Children in ELD programs demonstrating higher TQRIS ratings (4 and 5 stars). Given both the plan to do this and the realistic measures provided these goals are deemed both ambitious and achievable. Participation in the state's TQRIS has been a high priority for the applicant from its very beginning in 1999. Continuing in this tradition the applicant now proposes to capture those programs currently exempt from licensing. Their plans are well developed and data driven and are likely to be successful in reaching more providers of early learning and development programs. This response is comprehensive and complete with innovative and aggressive strategies to increase TQRIS participation within a state that has a very high rate currently.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

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

B 3 (a) As described by the applicant monitoring and rating is done by existing licensing consultants with a background in EC who have ongoing professional development and are supported through their supervisors. There is an explicit process defined by which programs may apply for an assessment to acquire upper tier status. Use of the NC Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP) is noted as is The Environmental Rating Scales (ECRS, IT ECRS and FCCRS). The applicant notes that use of the appropriate ECRS according to program context (i.e. center based, infant toddler, or family child care) makes this tool the tool of choice by their state as well as many others across the nation. This could be an asset in collecting national data. They identify a process by which training and inter rater reliability is both established and maintained by NCRLAP. Both frequency of monitoring and capacity by NCRLAP are specified by their current process with human resource capacity matching needs. (b) North Carolina publicly reports information on ELD program quality in several ways that are easy for families to understand and use. First, North Carolina's TQRIS clearly communicates quality to the public by showing on the program's license the number of stars out of five that the program has met. The license must legally be posted in a place that is visible to families and other visitors. In addition the DCDEE website includes a page for parents with information about the star rated license, a checklist to use when considering a program or provider, and frequently asked questions about choosing child care that further defines commonly used terms with respect to quality. It is noted that the NC DCDEE website includes a searchable database of all licensed/registered facilities in the state and this database is available in both English and Spanish. Families can search by a range of program features such as star rating, ages served, location, or participation in the child care subsidy system. Further evidence of meeting this criterion is shown by the DCDEE support of child care resource and referral agencies in all communities to help families find child care. Agencies are required to provide the star rating for each program and to explain the star rated license system to parents. DCDEE provides to families (and anyone requesting it) publicly available information from licensed/registered facilities. This includes documentation of licensing violations, star rating assessment points for Program and Education Standards, as well as complaints or substantiated instances of abuse or neglect. This criterion as well as many others is a testament to the length of time and financial commitment this state has invested in their existing TQRIS. Supports for optimal functioning have been well established, shored up, and clearly effective. As part of their proposal NC has identified specific enhancements to their system that are deemed exceptional with national quality implications. If awarded funding they plan to lead a consortium of states to develop and pilot-test a new program quality assessment tool designed specifically for use in a TQRIS. As with their other key activities they have identified a specific timeline to accomplish this with noted benchmarks and milestones (c), roles and responsibilities assigned with specified partners, and measurable ambitious yet achievable goals. Their success in this laudable endeavor has the potential for national impact and truly pushing the needle forward in the quality of state systems for improving in a comprehensive manner the quality of early care and development programs birth through age five as well as increasing the accessibility to high quality programs for all children including those with high needs not just in their state but across the country.

	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>18</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)**

(B)(4) In addressing the criterion the applicant describes their planned and informed approach to impact the number of programs in the state with upper tier TQRIS status and a plan to increase the number and percentage of Children with High Needs enrolled in ELD programs with upper tier status. To accomplish this the applicant has identified 4 key activities. They include: 1) Support 1 and 2 Star ELD programs to attain a 3 star or higher rating. 2) Infant Toddler Specialists for ELD programs in Transformation Zones 3) Create more slots to serve infants and toddlers (a noted deficit nationally as well as in their state) in programs with measured high quality as per TQRIS in their Transformation Zone, 4) Creation of new part day slots in programs of high quality in ELD in the Transformation Zone. The applicant convincingly describes how these 4 key activities will help them to increase both the number of ELD programs and their quality. It is important to note that they are targeting increased support specific to infants and toddler. This demonstrates both an understanding of the important connection between the significant importance of this development stage and later academic success while acknowledging the existing lack of high quality programs to serve this high need population. Their approach reflects a thoughtful plan. A timeline with assigned roles and responsibilities has been developed to implement and complete each

identified activity and specific measurable and ambitious goals are defined. Financial resources and their sources are identified to implement each activity. Given the quality of the planning and committed partners who will carry out their assigned tasks these goals appear achievable. Though the applicant notes a relatively high level of military child care needs in their prior identification of preschool age children, these needs do not appear to be addressed as part of this criterion. Additionally the specific needs of addressing the needs of working families of high needs children was not addressed beyond their proposed Transformation Zone model which will be limited geographically. This noted absence brings the total score for this criterion from a 20 to an 18. The applicant has a substantially implemented and high quality plan to meet this criteria.

	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)(5)

B 5 (a) North Carolina has conducted two separate validation studies of its Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) that demonstrate that the tiers reflect meaningful differences in quality. The applicant describes their prior validation studies and present an informed plan for conducting additional validation studies to ensure that the tiers in the revised TQRIS meaningfully differentiate quality, particularly in the upper tiers, and that there is a significant association between higher quality tiers and greater progress in children's school readiness skills. Prior validation studies are described with detail. The Smart Start Evaluation Team at the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), independently gathered data from 84 child care centers to validate the new five star rated license. Results of this initial validation study demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between star ratings and other indicators of quality such as: observed classroom quality, teacher education, teacher wages, and teacher turnover. In 2010, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G) conducted another validation study of the TQRIS. The applicant generalizes results and states that across toddler and preschool classrooms, four- and five-star programs received significantly higher quality scores on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Environment Rating Scales (ECRS) than classrooms in one through three-star programs. Additional data were collected for preschool classrooms on measures that are only available for preschool-age classrooms. Centers with a four-star or five-star rating also had significantly higher ratings of quality on the Early Childhood Environmental measure on the Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS) compared to classrooms in centers with one- through three-stars. They note that there were no differences in preschool classroom quality between four- and five-star programs. These findings provide evidence that North Carolina's star ratings meaningfully differentiate between some levels of quality. Further analysis by the applicant suggests that revisions of the TQRIS should include efforts to differentiate quality more between each tier, especially in the higher tiers. This analysis has served to inform the current revision process of its TQRIS to address this issue. (b) Two NC studies have provided evidence of the relationship between quality ratings and children's learning. These findings suggest the value of conducting validation studies of the revised TQRIS that focus on a broader range of children's skills. Examining progress over time and further differentiating children's development, learning, and readiness for school at each star level are important next steps for North Carolina. These plans include conducting validation studies to provide critical information regarding how best to revise the TQRIS so they propose a Validation Study of the Upper Tiers of the TQRIS. The validation study will be conducted over four years to a) determine if differences in quality ratings are associated with differences in children's progress, b) document program features most closely associated with differences in child outcomes among Children with High Needs, and c) identify quality features that distinguish between programs at the upper ranges of quality. The study will include a sample of programs with comparable representation of child care centers, family child care homes, and programs with NC Pre-K classrooms. Program-level data will be gathered across classrooms serving children of different ages (infant/toddler, preschool, school age). Child measures will address the five school readiness domains (recognizing limitations in measurement for the approaches toward learning domain). Although details of the validation study will be developed with the "to be-hired" independent evaluator, the applicant states their expectation that the study will be conducted in phases. They suggest that possible phases may follow this path. All aspects definitive of a High Quality Plan are provided by the applicant including a timeline, roles responsibilities, financial resource allocations and specific performance measures are provided and include how they will meet varied contexts and serve specifically children with high needs. The applicant has provided an exceptionally strong plan for effective and informative validation study of their TQRIS. Their process evolves from prior validation study of their TQRIS and builds upon it to gather additional and important information to link quality early learning and development programs to greater 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>15</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>C 1 (a) The applicant includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) 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; North Carolina has a comprehensive set of ELDS that address all areas of children's development from birth through age five. The ELDS, known as Foundations, were published in 2004 for preschool-age children and in 2008 for infants and toddlers. These are provided in the attached appendices. They state and upon review it is confirmed that Foundations meet the selection criteria for ELDS as they address all five of the Essential Domains of School Readiness and are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group. The applicant provides the results of research validation studies that have been completed on both the infant-toddler and the preschool Foundations in which it was demonstrated that North Carolina's ELDS are developmentally appropriate as content has been validated with child development and early education research. (b) K - 3 state standards were used as a basis for Foundations development. They provide an alignment chart to demonstrate how this has been effectively done. Noting that NC has adopted the Common Core they note that an alignment study has been completed with results that show adequate alignment in mathematics and good alignment in English Language Arts (c) (d) The applicant effectively conveys how they have incorporated Foundations across multiple programs and embedded them within their Program Standards, in curricula and educational assessments, in their Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and in professional development. As evidence they provide the following compelling information: all NC Pre-K programs are required to use the preschool Foundations to guide instructional planning; curricula must be aligned with Foundations to be approved for use in the NC Pre-K program and for use in child care programs that earn a quality point for curricula in the TQRIS and as previously noted through their specific alignment with the state's kindergarten. Foundations has been fully integrated into the applicants Core Knowledge and Competencies Framework for the work force. The community college curriculum and core competencies for students, shared across all community colleges and are fully aligned with the ELDS in Foundations. As a next step they have identified a desire to incorporate additional requirements related to Foundations into the TQRIS. This has been built into their revision process. North Carolina has developed resources and provided extensive professional development to promote the use of both the infant-toddler and preschool Foundations across all programs in the state. Preschool Foundations is available via an accessible website that contains a tool box that includes activity ideas, print resources, videos, and web resources to make these standards come alive in the center, an on-line training module is featured to</p>

support easy access to professional development. Additional professional development initiatives have been provided across program sectors by the Department of Public Instruction and the state's Child Care Resource and Referral System. The state has used a Train-the-Trainer model to train over 200 trainers to build capacity. This has been effective as they state that over 8,300 teachers and administrators from public school, Head Start, and child care programs have participated in a Foundations professional development. An exceptional attribute that the applicant describes is their development of additional training to help providers "go deeper" in their knowledge of how to use Foundations. Continuing Education Credits are offered for participants in this advanced training. The applicant states that in a somewhat unique and supportive way Foundations documents are used as text books in many community colleges. The applicant leaves no doubt that they not only have early learning program standards but they are widely known, referenced, and used. These appear to be exceptionally relevant and present in their early education systems across the state. The applicant proposes specific revision work to build upon their strong foundation of Foundations. With the guidance of the ECAC the applicant plans a thorough revision process of the ELDS to reflect newer knowledge and practice in early learning and development. As part of this process they will align with the newly revised Head Start child outcomes framework and new kindergarten standards, improve cultural relevancy, and improve specific guidance for how ELDS are used with children with disabilities. Upon revisions; they plan to implement policy changes to ensure full alignment and they are widely understood with supporting professional development opportunities available to all those using them. The applicant provides strong and compelling evidence of their ELDS and their relevancy to their state's early learning and development programs. These standards are clearly used across early childhood contexts and are significantly supported systemically by training. The applicant has developed an informed and comprehensive set of birth to five state standards and guidelines that exceptionally anchors all their work with young children in the state. They demonstrate a plan to build upon their strong existing system to further embed skill specific and evidence based practices into their system, train their workforce in using newer information, and strengthen statewide connections to these standards that are already deemed strong to expand relevancy and use. The strength of their plan and approach are the basis for awarding all available points in this area.

	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)**

C 2 (a) Though the applicant has a historical use of child assessment for screenings and referral they have a plan to more effectively grow this area of their system. They plan to do so through the use of CLASS as an interaction measure and to develop a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA). (b) As a key strategy the state proposes to create a cross agency Task Force on child assessment that will review policies and develop plans to coordinate screening of young children. The task force will select several screenings to be approved for use across various program types. They state that these will meet rigorous criteria for reliability and validity, assess multiple domains of development and learning and offer evidence they are appropriate for children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The process will include the medical community for input and use. The task force will develop a complimentary comprehensive professional development plan ensuring all those screening children understand the appropriate administration and interpretation. Once programs and early childhood educators have a better understanding of and supports for the use of screenings, new requirements for screening young children will be incorporated into the TQRIS. In a similar fashion, beginning with an investigative task force the state intends to identify formative assessments. As an example of their holistic approach when The Core Knowledge and Workforce Competencies are revised they will include competencies related to conducting and using child assessments, and early childhood Associate's degree and Bachelor's degree programs will address formative assessment in their coursework. Making policy changes coupled with professional development, will significantly improve the early childhood workforce's ability to conduct and utilize assessments to guide their instruction and meet individualized needs of all children. The Task Force on Child Assessment will work with representatives from ELD Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for North Carolina's population of children, particularly Children with High Needs, by ensuring that all instruments (screening and formative assessments) selected for the state meet the highest requirements for reliability, validity and use with children from diverse backgrounds. The applicant's plan provides an informed and a thorough process for assessment identification, thorough workforce development on administration, use, and analysis of results used to improve child supports, and finally identification of policy changes that can be brought about to ensure wide use of assessments. In a thorough and comprehensive manner the applicant addresses how they will explicitly (c) Articulate an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results and (d) provide



specific training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services. The applicant provides a very high quality plan to develop a Kindergarten Entry Assessment System. It is currently not implemented and there is heavy reliance upon RTT-ELC funding for developing the K - 3 assessment left a question regarding the leveraging of other state and federal funding such as RTT and ERSEA lowered this score. This criteria was scored as a high quality plan with no current implementation.

	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	14

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

#### Comments on (C)(3)

C 3 North Carolina is a national leader in implementing effective models to promote the health and development, including the behavioral health, of young children. They describe a plan to build upon existing standards and evidence-based practices to reach more Children with High Needs. This plan shows they will leverage current and future state and private investments to achieve goals. As evidence the applicant states that the state Child Care Commission recently adopted recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics for physical activity standards, breast feeding, limited screen time, and outdoor time. As part of their plan they plan to strengthen current health and safety standards by requiring all children in regulated ELD programs to receive annual health assessments. (b) Currently, all early educators are required to have 16 hours of on-site pre-service training and orientation on the following topics: first aid and CPR, child abuse and neglect, infant safe sleep practices, and playground safety. The workforce data system that will be developed will provide the applicant with the ability to track the number of educators that receive training, as well as the number of teachers that receive training in a given topic in the state each year. In addition, facilities at the 2-5 star level have an option to receive an extra point if they have enhanced policies in place that include the following topics: emergency evacuation plan, field trip policy, staff development plan, medication administration, enhanced discipline policy, and additional health-related rules. (c) As explained by the applicant, current training support in health related issues are provided through several providers. Additionally the applicant has built a network of Child Care Health Consultant's (CCHCs) to provide ongoing education and technical assistance to ELD programs. Resulting increases in children with medical homes, up to date immunization and use of preventive care are provided as evidence to support this strategy scale up. Smart Start supports 56 CCHCs to serve 49 of NCs 100 counties. The applicant plans to expand this cadre and provide specific intensive CCHC support to their proposed Transformation Zone districts. The applicant describes several existing investments in initiatives to increase the number of children with high needs who are screened, referred for services and receive follow up training. The applicant offers several well established screeners and systems including the highly effective ABCD initiative. To demonstrate how effective this is they describe a 99% rate of children who receive recommendations upon screenings where ABCD is currently implemented. They plan to expand this effective approach by increasing the number of ABCD Coordinators and linking more regions of the Community Care Network (CCNC). This plan impressively uses Medicaid to provide incentives to improve health status and is based on the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures National Standards. As described the applicant will use a two pronged approach to improve their health related expectations and services across the state. 1) They will increase consultive support for ELD programs specifically in their rural high need Transformation Zone; and 2) They will expand all health services via screening to all children in their ECD programs. This plan is strengthened by specific timelines, roles and responsibilities, financial allocations and measures of success. This is a very high quality plan however it is only partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</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)**

(C)(4) (a) The applicant proposes a two tiered approach to engaging and supporting families. Tier one focuses on statewide strategies including use of Head Start grantees as hubs for supporting the workforce and tier two on Transformation Zones where they will package evidence based family strengthening services and use home visiting, screening and referral program for families of children with high needs. These efforts and an expectation that they will be implemented will be reflected in their TQRIS revisions. It is noted that integration of Head Start's strong family engagement demonstrates the applicant's ability to leverage effective systems rather than duplicate them. (b) Increased services will occur by serving all 100 counties in NC. Using Head Start grantees who currently operate within all counties will enable this to happen as they will be utilized as "hubs" for coaching and technical assistance on new TQRIS family engagement standards for ELD programs in their service areas. Head Start Family and Community Partnerships managers and staff will provide guidance, share information, and demonstrate best practice for supporting children's school readiness based on the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PCFE). As noted this is an exceptional plan to strengthen statewide family engagement by leveraging a strong existing one. Early childhood partners will be supported in their endeavor to comply with new TQRIS family engagement policies that will strengthen service delivery and lead to positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and deeper family connections to communities. Additionally the Head Start hubs will foster stronger relationships among the various ELD programs in a region, which will impact the ELD landscape far after this grant has ended. (c) The coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance provided by the Head Start hub sites will be based on the unique brand of comprehensive services that are required by the Head Start Performance Standards and that are tailored to meet the needs of children and families at considerable risk of school failure and unhealthy development. Head Start programs are legislatively required to serve children and families of greatest need, including children and families in the Migrant/Seasonal system as well as those who reside on Indian lands. The pool of Head Start hub sites assembled to deliver family/community engagement coaching and technical assistance will be drawn from Head Start grantees with special skills and experience with delivering such services to Children with High Needs, including those of special populations. Their second outreach proposed in their Transformation Zones similarly demonstrates a strong approach in targeting high needs. Each of the family strengthening options in the Transformation Zone project is based on a fundamental understanding that each family that enrolls in the program comes with a unique set of needs. Families with Children with High Needs, including those in special populations, will participate in a strengths-based assessment process as part of any of the family strengthening programs offered so that their unique needs are addressed and they can enjoy the benefits of these effective programs. The applicant provides an exceptional well conceived plan to develop and expand their family engagement strategies. Building upon the newly developed and highly informed Head Start Family and Community Engagement Framework their plan offers expanded family engagement as well as exemplifies joining forces with Head Start to create integrated and more seamless supports for families and the early childhood workforce. This response is deemed strong and the only reason for not receiving all points available is that it is only partially implemented at this time.

**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)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>

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

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

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

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

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (D)(2)**

(D)(2) The applicant effectively describes efforts both existing and planned that embed training and support for those doing the work to ensure their knowledge and competency. This is a noted strength within all aspects of their proposed work. To accomplish this they propose 14 Key activities they will engage in towards this overall objective. Since 1999 NC has tracked the educational status of their early childhood workforce. Data collection shows that from 1999 to present the teacher and administrative education beyond high school went from 33% to 50 with some advanced degrees. Use of scholarships and salary incentives drove this change. NC identifies their broadly based and locally accessible community colleges as a strong asset throughout the state. Common course catalogs used between community colleges supports the common expected outcomes that were adopted by the state as the first part of Core Knowledge and Competencies. This common core also allows for portability across the state. Most recently all of these early childhood programs completed a curriculum improvement process in Early Childhood Education. With regards to 4 year degrees, in 1992 the State Board of Education adopted the Birth -Kdg (B-K) teaching license. Standards were adopted and serve as the second half of the states core competencies, to frame what NC wants and can expect for their Early Childhood (EC) workforce. To meet high needs the applicant builds inclusion of all into their entire process as well as offering specific coursework in high needs populations describing both the complexity and strategy for the work. (a) Their plans to expand access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework reflect existing training networks and identified needs. Building on their historical progression the state plans to use what has worked and the state has identified 14 key activities to expand. These make the most of their existing networks and proven system. For example, To improve and implement they will use coaching, mentoring and technical assistance within their CCR& R and Smart Start systems. Both are locally based and widely accessible. These systems will provide the established networks and vehicles to accomplish their tasks. Another noted example of this is their proposed use of highly specialized Coaches to meet workforce needs to better serve their high needs populations. Described as Culture Competence Coaches the applicant describes a thoughtful process by which they will develop a strong technical support network throughout the state to serve the early childhood workforce to specifically address this significant improvement effort. Notably trainings attach CEUs when aligned to specified competencies. The applicant offers many examples of their ability to apply informed knowledge of their early childhood workforce, current supports, and available resources to move the field forward and to use research and evidence to improve opportunities and get results. Their key activities are exemplary, innovative, and leave no doubt they will achieve the results they propose. (b) The applicant provides many ways they use policies and incentives to promote improvements. For example The Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) will provide stipends to a group of highly trained coaches to support B-K teacher licensure for teachers working with Children with High Needs in non-NC Pre-K classrooms. Both TEACH scholarships and WAGES - national supports are integrated into their plans. TQRIS is consistently an incentive for this as well. (c) To publicly report their aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention, the applicant describes their existing reports on the findings from the annual workforce studies that are available on multiple websites within North Carolina each year. They further describe that they use and will use their more extensive system to track North Carolina's progress in achieving its goals for the education and retention of the workforce. Such anticipated reports will include the education, compensation and retention outcomes of investments in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood and Child Care WAGES projects and will be available on public websites annually. It is a noted addition to the quality of their proposed plan that they have described specifically and planned for their outreach to family child care providers (FCC). FCC are integrated into their proposed system both by opportunity to increase their knowledge and competency using their exemplary framework model and aligned supports as well as their provision for financial rewards and incentives for them. The applicant notes that they have learned from their analysis of prior WAGES implementation that money does matter and that their current and proposed supplements based on concrete and aligned professional development, training and degree advancement does indeed lessen the turnover rate. It is upon this analysis that their proposal for financial incentives is built and expanded within their plan. (d) The applicant establishes ambitious yet achievable targets in all areas. They clearly demonstrate this by comprehensively mapping out how each target will be achieved. The applicant proposes targets that are ambitious and achievable. They clearly state their expected outcomes for increasing the number of EC with BK licensure progressing to a higher level aligned

with workforce competencies significantly and increase in total the educational achievements of their workforce on a percentage basis. These plans are embedded within postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned currently and will remain committed to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. This is further confirmed by their response to E 1. The applicant provides a thorough, data driven, and comprehensive approach to increase the knowledge, competencies, and credentials of their early childhood workforce. Due to the very well defined and informed plan this criteria is evaluated as exceptionally high quality plan that is partially implemented.

### E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

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

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--</p> <p>(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p> <p>(d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and</p> <p>(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant. (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)
<p>E 1 In response to this section the applicant first describes their existing work in the area of better understanding the skills and abilities of their children upon kindergarten entry. They describe their current process by which they use a common assessment for kindergarten, grades 1 and 2 to both track progress and inform instruction. Their experience with this statewide effort has informed them regarding what is missing and what is needed to better inform them in their quest to prepare all state children to succeed from their entry point in their public k – 12 system. They note that not tending to more consistent professional development for teachers in understanding this process has been a short coming they will address in their proposed plan. (a) Using their state's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) will be essential to the process. As noted these standards are currently in the revision process to be aligned with the state adopted common core standards. Therefore the finalized KEA content will be contingent upon the ELDS revision process is complete. The applicant proposes that some members of the state team charged with the ELDS revisions will also be members of the KEA development team as a cross check and assurance that alignment occurs. Other key members of the team charged with KEA development will include UNC – G leadership on both projects, leaders from the Office of Early Learning (OEL) and Department of Instruction (DPI) content specialists. These departmental and content leaders will ensure alignment and consistency across systems. (b) The applicant does not feel there exists a current measure that meets the criteria of being valid, reliable, and appropriate for their target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities. They effectively propose a plan to leverage statewide and national expertise to create a K – 3 measure to meet their needs. Given the magnitude of this particular endeavor they are proposing to lead a multi state consortium to collectively design a single assessment tool and approach to meet these specific criteria. They propose to use their \$400,000 required set-aside and that of other RTT-ELC winners for this purpose. As part of their plan they will conduct the appropriate systematic studies to assess the validity and inter-rater reliability consistency required for this level and magnitude of assessment. They anticipate that this process will help to ascertain the appropriateness for use with dual-language learners, children with disabilities and other high needs populations. To do this rigorous and intense process the applicant identifies their wealth of state institutional resources. They offer a member of the National Research Council's Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children, the National Implementation Network, and the Center for Early Care and Education Research – Dual Language Learners which is currently focusing on assessments. It is assumed that these forces would be used to move the</p>

KEA development process. The applicant provides evidence that their own established criteria for K – 3 assessments is in sync with the National Research Council's 2009 Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How report. (c) Through the presentation of their timeline for progress and implementation the applicant describes the steps to be taken, by whom, and when to ensure that their first round of assessment will occur in the fall of the 2014-2015 school year. The first year of administration will occur in districts with proportionally high needs populations. To facilitate the process of professional development for teachers to appropriately administer and interpret this assessment they have proposed using a substantial amount of RTT-ELC funds to do this. This plan is comprehensive including development, implementation and capacity building for administration and interpretation to inform instruction and includes targeting highest need populations first including their Transformation Zones. (d) North Carolina states their plan to include the first data entry point of the kindergarten version of the K- 3 assessment in their statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) in accordance with all data system oversight requirements and privacy laws. Integrating their early learning data system into the SLDS is another aspect of this applicant's proposal and fully described in their response to E 2. Given the scope of this work, multiple partners and the extensive process involved with validity this ambitious goal may not be achievable within their specified timeframe, though clearly it will move the early childhood field forward in this important area. (e) By using shared funding sources the applicant intends to develop a K – 3 Assessment tool, validate and pilot test it and roll out professional development for those using it. Specific federal and state funds are not identified to do this other than RTT-ELC though the applicant states federal and state funds will be used to continue and support the ongoing use of the tool and professional development. The applicant is requesting \$8,769,801 of RTT-ELC funds for this major undertaking. More information regarding perhaps why some funding from the state's RTT initiative would have been helpful. The applicant describes in quite a compelling way the potential use of the collected data to better inform preschool programs. They describe the potential to target specific domains for further professional development or curriculum development based on statewide indicators that may be revealed through the use of this assessment. The applicant proposes an informed and ambitious plan that reflects their understanding of the importance of data and its use to monitor and inform project planning and development. The applicant demonstrates their ability to plan and implement a very high quality plan and one that has noted multi state implications. Due to the fact that it is partially implemented but of high quality it is awarded slightly more than the maximum for a high quality plan that is partially implemented.

	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)**

E 2 The applicant describes a process and plan by which they will use existing data systems and collection points to create a more seamless early learning data system that is integrated and interoperable with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System in which the state has a significant investment. Through their narrative they present a clear understanding of how this will lead to a more effective system to support ongoing quality improvement that embraces a birth through 12th grade approach. (a) The applicant describes in detail how all of the essential data elements will be included as part of their data integration process. These elements include a unique child identifier though how this will be done in all contexts, for example FCC, is not fully described. Other elements include unique early educator identifier, unique program/site identifier. Additionally demographics on child, educator, and site will be captured. In their description of these key elements the applicant makes clear how these elements are the precursor to enabling them to attach indicators of quality – for example KEA scores, or TQRIS status of preschool programs to ultimately impact better outcomes for all children. They clearly place an emphasis on the fact that for the most part this is not new data collection but rather the shift to systems that are interoperable and this is what will allow for meaningful data review and use. (b) (c) (d) The applicant demonstrates through their narrative that the key to success in the integration of these systems is that they allow for ease and common entry points that are interoperable regardless of program contexts. They describe and plan for professional development across programs to generate ease and comfort with their system. This intentional professional development and technical support will support data 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. (e) The applicant describes that their early childhood data system meets the oversight requirements and complies with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws. They demonstrate further evidence that they have established a high level governance structure known as the Early Childhood Data

System Governance Structure in conjunction with their ECAC. They state that this body has representation and authority to develop all data governance policy that is in compliance will all requirements and ensure effective system wide use. To further support this they propose a data enterprise director and staff with additional dedicated personnel in participating agencies to coordinate and ensure specific work is done. This is a significant attribute to their proposal as frequently systems are in place but the support and oversight to manage and adjust its use is not accounted for and thus frustration and lack of use occurs. The applicant effectively describes how other development funding has been leveraged from which the integration of the early learning data system will benefit. This is certainly an asset and will support the success of this aspect of their proposed work. The applicant describes an outstanding plan of early learning data integration that will build upon their existing strong systems to effectively inform their planning, monitoring and continuous improvement. Their plan is one that represents high quality but currently is only partially implemented.

	Available	Score
<b>Total Points Available for Selection Criteria</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>252</b>

**Priorities**

Competitive Preference Priorities

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

**Comments on (P)(2)**

P 2 Both historically and throughout their application North Carolina demonstrates in a convincing and compelling way their commitment to the use of a tiered quality rating system that reflects specific and research driven elements that indicate quality care and education for preschool age children birth through age five. The applicant consistently reflects in their approach a commitment to a holistic view of supporting young children and their families. This is reflected in their existing TQRIS which has notably been used nationwide as a prototype and exemplary model, as well as their proposed new and improved TQRIS. The applicant has in place a licensing and inspection system, their TQRIS ,that they plan to extend to include some formerly exempt programs specifically Head Start and faith based programs.They effectively describe incentives for families and programs to entice exempt programs into their licensing TQRIS. All licensed and regulated state programs are participants in their TQRIS as it is mandatory. This is scored as high quality and substantially implemented.

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>Yes</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)**

P 3 Though the applicant does not currently implement a statewide kindergarten entry assessment they have effectively proposed the development of a valid, reliable, and culturally relevant plan to implement this in the 2014 - 2015 school year. By doing so they met the selection criterion (b) as they earned a score of at least 70% of the points available for (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>AP The applicant offers a comprehensive, research driven, and experience informed approach to ensure that throughout their state preschool age children will enter school more ready to succeed than many do today. The applicant offers much historical evidence to support their capacity to do this work. They have in a very exceptional manner addressed meeting the professional needs of early educators across multiple contexts to effectively do the work young children need - especially those with high needs. They clearly understand the need for effective data systems to assure continuous improvement. They impressively work with all stakeholders to engage them in the process as well as the work. It is clear by their approach that this work is a shared vision and not one that evolved in governmental or bureaucratic isolation. This proposal is innovative, aggressive, and grounded in research and evidence based theory and practice.</p>	