



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # VT-5034

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
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CORE AREAS (A) and (B)

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

A. Successful State Systems

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	10
<p>The extent to which the State has demonstrated past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning and Development Programs and services for Children with High Needs, as evidenced by the State's--</p> <p>(a) Financial investment, from January 2007 to the present, in Early Learning and Development Programs, including the amount of these investments in relation to the size of the State's population of Children with High Needs during this time period;</p> <p>(b) Increasing, from January 2007 to the present, the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs;</p> <p>(c) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices; and</p> <p>(d) Current status in key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system, including Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, health promotion practices, family engagement strategies, the development of Early Childhood Educators, Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and effective data practices.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(1)

(A)(1)(a and b) Vermont's allocation of funding for children with special needs represents a weakness and concern of this criterion. The State of Vermont has very modestly increased its spending on children with special needs between 2007 and 2011, while the enrollment of children with special needs has stayed the same (Head Start and Early Head Start) or increased by 18 percent. From 2010 until the present year, State spending on the Early Education Initiative (EEI) has actually decreased by over 13 million dollars. These declines in State spending for high needs children, given the flat or modest rise in number for preschool, Head Start, and Early Head Start, do not fulfill Criterion (a) and only partially fulfill criterion (b). (c-d) In spite of the evident challenges Vermont faces in increasing funding and enrollment for programs for at-risk children, Vermont does offer a number of programs for at-risk populations. These programs were established as a result of legislation favoring the support of young children, including some children at risk. For example, Vermont's State-funded preschool programs are open to children with high needs, as well as all children, statewide, in two-thirds Vermont's towns. The Early Education Initiative was established in 1987 for children at-risk, and allocates approximately one million dollars annually. The Essential Early Education (EEEE) is aimed at children, ages 3-5, who have disabilities. Vermont's State Advisory Council, Building Bright Futures, has adopted four commitments for young children; these commitments and priority areas, if realized, will have an important and positive impact upon at-risk youngsters. Despite recent challenges, Vermont's spending for preschool programs increased by 40 percent between 2007 and 2011, indicating a strong commitment to young children. However, specific increases on enrollment of children with special needs remains an unfulfilled goal, as was stated in (A) (1) (a), above. Pregnancy care and postpartum care in Vermont are priority areas in Vermont's Agency of Human Services. Children's Integrated Services (CIS) is a unique model for integrating early childhood health, mental health, early intervention services, and specialized child care services from birth through age 6. A division of CIS, Specialized Child Care Services (SCCS) now supports children with high needs in specialized development and learning programs. A home visiting system received federal support in 2010 and 2011, enabling the delivery of improved maternal and newborn care, improved health and safety practices, coordination and referrals, and self-sufficiency training. Vermont's Child Care financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) implements a tiered rate structure that

systematically rewards providers for maintaining high quality program and affordable enrollments. The Agency of Human Service (AHS) oversees six Health and Human Services Departments in Vermont. The Department for Children and Families (DCF) is Vermont's Lead Agency for the RTT-Early Learning Challenge (VT ELC). This Agency is responsible for child welfare and protection and a myriad of other programs for young children and families. Building Bright Futures(BBF) Councils governs Vermont's health, education, and early care systems. The BBF Council implements early learning and development standards and is accessible to all of the State's families and children. It is funded by private and public sectors. Vermont's Global Commitment to Health is a Medicaid waiver that enables Vermont to sustain its Medicaid program, thereby supporting the health of at-risk families and children. Vermont has seven federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs for families and children living in poverty. 15 Parent Child Care Centers are supported by legislative funds. The allocation provides money for pregnant and parenting teens enrolled in the Learning Together program. Community Child Care support agencies provide outreach and referral information, as well as professional development training and resources for child care providers. The Vermont Family Network (VFN) targets children and young adults with special needs. In summary, and in response to this criterion, Vermont offers many promising and wide-range programs to support children with special needs. Increased funding and expansion of these programs to serve all high needs children, is a weakness in terms of past commitment to early learning and development, especially for this high needs population. (d) Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System (VT STARS) is Vermont's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS). This VT STARS includes the required four components of the RTT-Early Learning Challenge application. The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) were developed in 2003 for children ages preschool through five years. The VELS have been incorporated into State policies, and are widely disseminated and used. Vermont exhibits a very strong commitment to health and mental health promotion, as evidenced in its many health related programs and expenditures, including WIC, Children's Upstream Services, Bright Futures, and Children's Health and Support Services (CHASS). A Comprehensive Assessment System is provided in Appendix U. The Appendix attempts to demonstrate how the key elements operate and collaborate in its assessment. However, this Appendix is very difficult to interpret, and lacks clarity in terms of the respective roles of the child, the family, the agency, the standards, and the State in this comprehensive assessment. Moreover, the related Table reveals that screening measures and measures of adult-child interactions are non-existent for IDEA-funded programs. Formative measures are non-existent for programs using Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF). Likewise, child care centers that are licensed by the State are not required to provide screening measures, formative measures, environmental quality measures, or adult-child quality measures. Therefore, the State Plan lacks a truly comprehensive assessment system at the present time. Table (A) (1)-7 delineates screening measures used for the Early Head Start and Head Start programs, as well as for the Children's Integrated Services (CIS) programs. The assessment tools that are selected are widely used and generally considered valid and reliable tools (Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Early Screening Inventory, DIAL, Ages and Stages Social/Emotional Questionnaire, Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment, Teaching Strategies GOLD, Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Infant and Toddlers Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS). However, because several different tools are used to measure the same qualities in different programs, comparisons of test score results and data analyses to inform future practice and cross-program collaborative efforts may present challenges. Family Engagement Strategies: Appendix G contains an Interagency Agreement among Education, Health, and Education Programs in Vermont. This agreement, which is signed by ten participants, including the Governor of the State, the Chair of the Vermont Head Start, and the Secretary of Education in Vermont, is intended to provide smooth coordination among health care providers, educators, and child care providers, statewide. Although this lengthy plan is wide in scope, it lacks details that are frequently included in a set of Family Engagement Standards. The State has not yet committed to a common set of Family Engagement Standards. This criterion is only partially fulfilled. K Entry: A Kindergarten Readiness Survey, which is appropriately aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS), is given by teachers of Kindergarten children each year. The 28 questions on the Survey are fairly thorough, spanning six domains. However, the Survey does not align physical well-being and motor development with the Vermont's Learning and Development Standards. Validity and reliability for this physical domain are not addressed in the Survey for children with disabilities or for all children. The Survey does not include child portfolio-type information, such as actual samples of children's work (written and verbal), and the ratings of this work using a checklist or a rubric. A broader, more accurate, and more detailed picture of the child's readiness is not included that could be shared among other teachers, the principal, and the families of the children. Effective Data Practices: A plan is in place that will help to validate the Kindergarten Readiness Survey. This validation is important, given the possibly subjective nature of some of the current Survey results, especially in the domain of physical well-being and motor development. Each data element on Table (A) (1) (13) will be included in the State's Comprehensive Data System for Building Bright Futures (BBF). However, the Department of Education Data Warehouse is not addressing or implementing the Data Elements of Unique Program Site Identifier, Demographic Information, or Data on Program Structure and Quality. The explanation for these gaps, found in the footnotes, lacks clarity. Table (A) (1)-7 also reveals that programs funded under IDEA Part B neither have a Screening Measure, nor do these programs enlist a measure of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions. In summary, the criterion for (A) (1) was only partially fulfilled and, therefore, was rated as a medium-low quality response.

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

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

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

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

credible path toward achieving these goals; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

(A) (2) (a) 13 Ambitious and yet achievable goals are included in this State Plan. For example, several of the goals are accompanied by appropriate and timely key activities, which are plans to enhance existing operations, data systems, and programs, or plans to implement new operations, data systems, and programs. Of particular interest to this RTT grant are the goals that address children with high needs, including goals 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9. For example Goal 5, that addresses high needs populations describes plans to provide 3-5 star center and home care to targeted children. Goal 9, that addresses providing families with culturally and linguistically appropriate information, will assist families in obtaining individualized services. However, additional clarity is needed regarding how and when these strategies and systems will be implemented. (b) An overly brief and very general summary is included that explains the importance of a formal government structure that is responsible for a reform agenda and the subsequent improved alignment of resources, policies, and programs. (p. 106) (c) No specific rationale was located for these investment areas. Full credit was not awarded because the responses for (A) (2) were minimally fulfilled or not included. However, points were earned for the State's improvement plans delineated in (a). In summary, this criterion ranks in the medium-low range.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	6
<p>The extent to which the State has established, or has a High-Quality Plan to establish, strong participation and commitment in the State Plan by Participating State Agencies and other early learning and development stakeholders by--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrating how the Participating State Agencies and other partners, if any, will identify a governance structure for working together that will facilitate interagency coordination, streamline decision making, effectively allocate resources, and create long-term sustainability and describing--</p> <p>(1) The organizational structure for managing the grant and how it builds upon existing interagency governance structures such as children's cabinets, councils, and commissions, if any already exist and are effective;</p> <p>(2) The governance-related roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council for part C of IDEA, and other partners, if any;</p> <p>(3) The method and process for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational) and resolving disputes; and</p> <p>(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out 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> <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</p> <p>(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and</p> <p>(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--</p> <p>(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and</p> <p>(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</p>		

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) (1) A solid government structure is indicated for the State Plan that involves several agencies, including the Department for Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Building Bright Futures Council (BBF), the State Interagency Coordinating Council (housed under IDEA), and the Agency of Human Services (AHS). Because these structures are already in existence, they are, therefore, in a favorable position to collaborate on the State Plan. (2) The roles and responsibilities of the lead agency (DCF) are clearly specified in the State Plan, as are the roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Council, each Participating State Agency, the State's Interagency Coordinating Council, and other partners. Aligning with each of the RTT criteria, the roles of the Health Department, the Education Department, and Building Bright Futures (BBF) are clearly and specifically delineated in the Appendix. (3) The State Plan Implementation Table lists Discussion and Planning as roles of several of the bodies that help to govern the State Plan; however, no explicit decision making or resolving of disputes is delineated in the Table. (4) No information was provided for this criterion regarding the involvement of Early Childhood Educators, participating Programs, or Parents and Families. (b) (1) The Interagency Agreement (page 281) reflects an active commitment by each participating State agency. However, budgetary provisions are not specified in this Agreement. (2) Scope of Work descriptions are contained in the Interagency Agreement; however, these descriptions describe the existing functions of the agencies and, except for the Building Bright Futures Council (BBF), do not present efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs or partners that join the Participating Programs in the State Plan. (3) A signature is included from an authorized representative from each of the ten agencies and the governor of Vermont. (c) (1) Several (18) letters of support are included in Appendix V. However, the large majority of these letters are identical. Had the letters been more unique, they would have been more persuasive. For example, the letters needed to delineate reasons for the agency's individual enthusiasm for the State Plan, beyond simply reiterating the six essential, but general, components of the Plan. All of the letters list the essential components as the following: Vermont STAR Program, Building Bright Futures, Integrated Services for Special Needs, strong Health Focus, commitment to State and local partnerships, and active engagement of private partners. In summary, the generic nature of the support letters is a weakness of this grant application. (2) Several letters of support are included from local community leaders and education association leaders. A few of these letters include those from the Commissioner of Labor, the Reach Out and Read Program, the Vermont Center for the Book, The Kids' Priority One Coalition, the Vermont Council for Exceptional Children, and the Vermont Business Roundtable. Although these letters express support, it is not clear how they will collaborate with other partners or address the six essential components of the State Plan since all of these letters are nearly identical. However, one support letter, the letter from the University of Vermont, does delineate specific components of the Plan in which it would like to be involved: (a) workforce; (b) outcomes; and (c) management of analyses and progress on Program goals. As was stated in (c) (1), above, the generic and uniform nature of the majority of the letters is a weakness of this application. In summary, the agencies and their respective and collaborative roles in this State Plan are positive aspects for this criterion. However, points were deducted for the inadequate information on the roles of early childhood educators, programs, and parents in implementing the State Plan as well as for the uniform and non-specific nature of the support letters. This criterion ranks in the medium quality-implementation range.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	8
<p>The extent to which the State Plan--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(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--</p> <p>(1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

(A) (4) (a) A Table includes expenditures in Fiscal Years 2012 through 2015, and the expected expenditures in each year that will be used to support the State Plan. The Budget (pages 255-280) specifies that the State will continue to use existing funds for maintaining the Building Bright Stars program for the four years of the grant. However, since the narrative maintains that the State Plan intends to serve additional children over the next four years, it seems inconsistent that the state allocations remain the same for Fiscal Years 2012 until 2015. While RTT grant allocations will contribute to the State funding, it also seems reasonable to expect additional State funding, as well. Moreover, Childcare Licensing Review allocates no funding for the State Plan after the Fiscal Year 2012. No explanation was found regarding how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used. (b) (1) The funding allocations in the budget indicate that the large majority of the RTT funds will serve Early Learning Organizations, and Personnel. However, the total expenditures for the funds for the Learning Organizations, Participating Programs, and other partners are not provided, nor are total funds for Grantee Technical Assistance. It is not clear whether the RTT grant is responsible for these expenditures, since the four-year total is not included in the total column and not added into the Total Statewide Budget. An additional \$2,775,000 would be needed for the budget if the aforementioned areas and budget figures were added into the total budget. Questions arise, therefore, as to whether the projected funding will be adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan. (2) The delineated costs are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives and design and the number of children to be served. However, as was noted in (1), a concern exists regarding whether the budget is adequate to support the intended activities and programs. (3) Funding for Participating State Agencies is delineated by year, but not totaled for the participating agencies named in (b) (1). It appears that a significant amount of funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan, with Early Learning Organizations and Supplies receiving the majority of the funding for this Plan. DCF, the State's Lead Agency for Early Childhood, will receive nearly 60 percent of the grant funds, while VOE, VDH, and BBFC receive approximately 13 percent of the total grant fund allocations. These figures are appropriate and do meet the expectations of (A) (4). Funding for the local level is significantly higher than for the other grant levels, with Health Funding for children and children's programs and STARS also projecting significantly high levels of funding. This funding at the local level is appropriate, given the expectation in (3) of this criteria. (c) Given the flat rate of increase for revenues for existing funding (not linked to the RTT-Early Learning Challenge Grant) for BBF, Strengthening Child Centers, and Strengthening Families Grants, it is not likely that the number and percentage of Children with High Needs served in the State by the Early Learning and Development Programs will be sustained at the conclusion of the funding period. The number and percentage of Children with High Needs will increase due to RTT funding. However, maintaining these higher numbers and percentages of children served will present a challenge unless additional funding from private or State sources is received at the culmination of the grant. On the other hand, State funding for the Home Visitation Program (for mothers, infants, and young children) nearly doubles between fiscal year 2012 and 2013, and this funding is maintained through 2015. Therefore, the potential does exist for serving the needs of significantly more young children and infants through home visitations, even at the cessation of the RTT grant funding period. In summary, while home visitations will be increased and expanded, sustaining the budget for other populations, including high needs populations, is clearly a challenge in this State Plan. Therefore, this criterion was scored in the medium-low category.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

(B) (1) (a) (1) The Vermont State Plan satisfactorily fulfills this component of criterion B (1). In 2004, Vermont and its participating agencies developed a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System called Building Bright Stars. A Table is included that delineates implementation dates and when the TQRIS will address each of the six required components of RTT, above: Early Learning Standards; Comprehensive Assessment System, Early Childhood Educator Qualifications, and Family Engagement, Health Promotion, and Effective Data Practices. Several of the components are already in place, with plans to expand or further develop. For example, the health promotion practices are not yet in place. All of the components will be implemented prior to 2014. The Effective Data Practices component of TQRIS is included for Head Start programs, but not for the STARS program. (b) By the year 2013, the State Plan purports to have measurable standards that meaningfully differentiate program quality levels, reflect high expectations of excellence, and lead to improved learning outcomes. However, no information is provided in the narrative as to how the plan will meet the needs of children with High Needs in general and for particular populations. Therefore, this criterion is only partially fulfilled. (c) Plans for the State licensing system to link with Early Learning and Development Programs are indicated in the Table; however, no narrative information is provided for this criterion. Therefore, this criterion is only partially fulfilled. In summary, the tiered Program Standards are a strength of this response, but the lack of narrative information regarding children with high needs and plans for linking licensing with programs are weaknesses. Therefore, this criterion was scored as a 6 out of 10 points, and was rated as a medium quality-implementation response.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

(B) (2) (a) (1-5) Program participation in Vermont's TQRIS spans a wide array of groups. These groups and agencies include State-funded pre-K programs, Early Head Start, Head Start, and the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFA). While the State does not separately fund IDEA programs, encouragement is offered by Children's Integrated Family Services (CIF) to encourage families to enroll in programs that have earned the 4 or 5 star quality rating. Likewise, all regulated child care programs in Vermont may receive funds from the CCDF program which is linked to the STARS program. Thus, participation in the TQRIS is a promising priority area for this State Plan. (b) The Vermont State Plan includes a Table that illustrates Targets for effective policies and practices for the next two years. These policies and practices include providing additional high-quality child care for families and, especially families of children with high needs. Other key activities and incentives include an expansion of the STARS program, expanding public Pre-K to all towns, supporting transitions between pre-K and Kindergarten, and expanding funding for EHD/HS slots for children and families in poverty. Therefore, as a result of these policies and practices, more families may be able to afford high-quality child care within the next two-four years. This potential for expansion is a strength of this response to criterion (b). (c) While the percentages of increases in TQRIS program participation appear reasonable and yet ambitious for the State's preschools, Title One, IDEA, CCDF, and all Vermont Learning and Development Programs, a great deal of data are missing from the TQRIS Tables. In particular, numbers of participants in the various programs are not systematically provided, making program-to-program comparisons difficult and creating challenges in determining the accuracy of the attainable and yet ambitious goals. The corresponding footnote for this Table, explaining the rationale for the missing data, states that the Bright Futures Information Data System can provide these data; however, the use of this Data System appears unjustifiably limited for the purposes of this criterion. In summary, this criterion has earned a score of 9 out of 15 points, ranking in the medium quality-implementation response range.

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

15

5

The extent to which the State and its Participating State Agencies have developed and implemented, or have a High-Quality Plan to develop and implement, a system for 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) A new data system will bridge the gap that now exists between Vermont's highly rated child care regulatory system and its inspection system. The State Plan, however, maintains that the regulations are outdated, and plans to form a committee of parents, content area experts, licensing staff, and education providers, statewide, to revise these regulations. Also, because monitoring programs is, at present, both a challenge and a goal for Vermont, new data systems for BFIS and for VT STARS will provide careful monitoring of the regulatory arena. One tool used for this monitoring is the valid Environmental Ratings Scales (ERS); these Scales will be administered by trained monitors. The projected frequencies of monitoring the various programs is not provided, however. Without a knowledge of the frequency of program monitoring, it is difficult to assess the extent of their reliability and validity, or the scope of their coverage. Plans for increasing the reliability of the ERS are also limited in detail. On a positive note, the Vermont STARS Oversight Committee will maintain reliability for the VT STARS assessors who will be trained annually. This annual reliability training is important given the program and personnel implications and the impact of the STAR ratings. (b) The State Plan reiterates that a promising data regulatory system is underway. This data system will greatly enhance the State operations, record-keeping, and coordination among various groups and agencies. The proposed new data regulatory systems for BFIS and VT STARS will be available to parents with children enrolled in the programs, as well as to the general public. VT STARS ratings are already available; however, the quality and quantity of the information will be improved with the new data regulatory system. No further information was located for this criterion in the State Plan regarding the display of quality rating information at the site, licensing history, and violations of the pre-K program. In summary, this response was scored in the partially-implemented, low quality range.

	Available	Score
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20	13

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) (a) All of Vermont's early learning and development programs are subject to regulation and, as part of the regulation process, the programs are encouraged to participate in the Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (VT STARS) program. Support, compensation, and incentives for program improvement using the TQRIS were not located for this criterion, however. (b) Serving additional children with high needs in the State of Vermont is a partially fulfilled goal at the present time. Goal Five of the Vermont State Plan (5.2) addresses the need to expand the numbers of children with high needs who are enrolled in Head Start. Over half of the eligible children in Vermont are not enrolled in Head Start, currently, and 96% of eligible infants are not enrolled in Early Head Start. Plans are underway for increasing the numbers of Head Start and Early Head Start programs, thereby increasing availability. The plans for reaching these high needs families, however, are not specific. The State Plan mentions "working with communities to reach out to high need families not participating in Pre-K to identify and resolve barrier to their participation." The Plan also mentions "strengthening the collaboration with the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC) to conduct community needs assessments." It is not clear as to what is meant by these very general descriptions. Further information is needed regarding how these high needs children will be identified, and how they will enroll in pre-k programs. The State Plan asserts that transportation is a challenge in rural Vermont. However, the State Plan does not include or suggest a means by which high needs children can be transported to pre-k centers, how they might be provided with meals, family support services, and other types of outreach. (c) (1) The State of Vermont enacts a wide-spread use of TQRIS. This global coverage of the Rating System is admirable. In fact, 100% of the Licensed Center programs and Registered Home programs now participate in the TQRIS. The total number of programs that will increase to a 3 or higher rating is expected to rise by two percent annually. Currently 6.6 percent of the total programs have a rating of 3; by 2014, this percentage will increase to 14.6%. This projected increase appears realistic, but not especially ambitious in light of the fact that all licensed and programs are now familiar with, and participating in, the program. (2) Currently, 26 percent of programs have 3, 4, or 5 stars. By the year 2015, 50% of programs will have 3, 4 or 5 star ratings. Projecting a realistic annual goal of a 2 percent increase in numbers of programs at each star level per year, the program provides an attainable, but not overly ambitious, goal for the TQRIS given the fact that only 138 programs are involved and that all of these programs now have at least 2 stars. For children with high needs enrolled in high levels (3, 4, or 5 stars) of TQRIS, the levels will remain unchanged, except for IDEA-funded programs. These IDEA programs will rise from 42.9 percent to 70.9 percent by the year 2015, with an annual increase of 7 percent per year. This goal is ambitious and yet attainable. Serving children with high needs with the highest quality rated programs is a worthy goal that aligns well with the RTT priorities. In summary, this response was rated at the medium quality-implementation level.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

(B) (5) (a) The State Plan states an appropriate and important use of some of the funding from the RTT-Early Learning Challenge grant. The State of Vermont Plan explains that, if it receives RTT grant funding, it will use some of this funding to conduct a one-time validation study of the tiers in the State's TQRIS, STARS. The STARS program is clearly specified and described in the appendix. Following this validation, refinements will be made, as necessary. An outside expert in QRIS has expressed commitment in performing this validation. However, it is not clear as to the research methods or design that the expert will enlist as this validation is conducted. A helpful timeline is included that delineates the partners for this validation study and the sequence in which the various steps will occur. (b) Although the direct response to this criterion was not located, the STARS Oversight Committee will tentatively address the necessary changes in quality ratings and their relationship to children's learning, development, and school readiness at the conclusion of the validation study. However, this information is not explicitly stated and, therefore, does not adequately address this criterion. In summary, although the validation plans for the TQRIS are appropriate and important, full credit was not earned because of some incomplete and missing information on this criterion. Therefore, the response was scored at the medium-quality level, earning an 8 out of 15 possible points.

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

Each State must address in its application--

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

The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection

criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

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

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	15	10

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(1)

(C) (1) (a) The State Plan displays a high commitment to standards and to the improvement and integration of standards. For example, the Vermont Early Learning Standards are one of three sets of standards the State has created and implemented for Early Childhood. The other two sets of standards are: the Northern Light's Professional Standards: the Core Competencies, and the Vermont's Program Competencies: the STARS. In addition, the State has drafted, but not yet implemented, a promising set of Infant-Toddler Standards. The VLS includes the domains of approaches to learning, social-emotional, language/literacy/communication, mathematics, science, social studies, creative expression, and physical health/development. Their levels of appropriateness--developmentally, culturally, and linguistically--are not yet known, since research has not been conducted to determine their appropriateness. Also, given the fact that the VLS are only appropriate for children entering kindergarten, it is important and noteworthy that a set of standards for infants and toddlers, the First Steps Early Learning Standards, is being developed. However, it is not entirely clear how these infant and toddler standards will serve to bridge the divide that now exists with the VELs. Information found in the appendix has not been completed. (b) The State Plan addresses the need to align the Early Learning Standards with the K-3 standards, and includes a reasonable rationale. Vermont's Early Learning and Development Standards (VELS) do not currently align with the K-3 academic standards due to the recent implementation of the Common Competencies. The VELs are, therefore, in the process of revision. The State Plan aptly and clearly identifies the need for alignment and a common focus for the ELS, whereby the infant and toddler standards are aligned with all early childhood practitioners and parents. A chart is provided that displays the intended scope and sequence of these ELS alignment plans. Plans to create a working group to study the expanded VELs are delineated, and a group of K-3 practitioners is included in the projected working group for late 2012 and early 2013. This aspect of criterion (C) (1) is met. (c) Plans for the professional development and K-3 alignment aspects of the Early Learning Standards is not completed on this Table. Therefore, the full realization of Vermont State Plan's goal 6.2 is questionable at this time. Little information was located regarding the State's plan to incorporate the VELs in Program Standards, curricula and activities, and the Comprehensive Assessment System. However, the Table does include appropriate and timely plans to survey early childhood practitioners from various settings to determine their knowledge and use of the VLS. During the last two years of the RTT grant, the State plans to develop and publish a Families' Guide so that families are familiar with, and can begin to implement, the expanded and improved VELs. This involvement of children's families is a commendable aspect of the State Plan. (d) The State Plan has several promising supports in place. Projected supports include independent research regarding the effectiveness of the revised VELs, professional development activities, and a survey of early childhood practitioners' knowledge and use of the revised VELs. Head Start and Early Head Start programs will most likely welcome the improved VELs, as they will be more in line with the population of children that they serve and their needs. Train the Trainer sessions and workshops are planned for 2013 and beyond. The State Plan discusses the current use of the VELs for guiding the development of goals in the Individualized Education Program (IEP), informing early educators' core competencies and teacher preparation program approval, and guiding the use of statewide assessment; however, information about future understanding and commitment regarding the VELs among these parties is not provided. Therefore, the lack of providing the extents and types of

commitment of the various support systems is a weakness of this response. This criterion was scored in the medium quality-implementation range, with a score of 10 out of 15 points.

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

(C) (2) (a) The Vermont State Plan lists two high quality development and environment tools that it plans to adopt: CLASS and Teaching Strategies GOLD. Collectively these assessment tools are very comprehensive, and will measure adult-child interactions at the preschool and K-3 levels, child development from infancy through kindergarten, and English Language Learners. The DOE and DCF collaborated and supported the use of these tools, as did Head Start and Early Head Start Vermont programs. An Assessment ad hoc group comprised of child care providers, teachers in K-3 programs, and administrators carefully studied various tools, examined existing tools, and selected TS GOLD. Therefore, this sub-criterion was complete, and fully met. (b) A variety of workshops and training sessions for promoting understanding of the new assessment tools is delineated in a Table of Key Activities. These training and development activities include Train the Trainer, use of on-line documentation systems, and hiring of individuals with expertise. Many of the training sessions will occur in 2012, and most of the training will occur or continue in 2014-2105. Therefore, the training aspect of this response is complete and fully meets the criterion. (c) The State Plan specifies appropriate plans for improving coordination of services for children with high Needs. In 2014 and beyond, CLASS trainers will provide workshops that teach strategies for improving areas that receive low scores. The two selected assessments are in line with the Healthy Vermonters 2020, which projects that "95 percent of Vermont's children will receive appropriate developmental screening by age 20;" and "90 percent will have appropriate referral by age three." In Goals 7.3 and 7.4, Vermont's State Plan includes broad provisions for obtaining information on percentages of practitioners who have been trained in CLASS and GOLD; self-reports of satisfaction; child outcomes and subsequent assessments; and evidence from various sources that CLASS and GOLD are informing and improving practices. However, these very general goals regarding aligning and sharing assessment results do not include outcomes or a projected time line, such as the time line provided for Key Assessment Activities. Therefore, it is difficult to infer how, when, where, and with whom these goals may be implemented. Further, no information is provided regarding the coordination of services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple early childhood programs. (d) Training practitioners in the use of assessments, as well as assessment administration and interpretation of data, are all addressed thoroughly in the Key Activities Table. The sustained improvement of instruction, programs, and services is more likely because of the forthcoming train the trainer model. This response fully satisfies the criteria in (C) (2) (d). In summary, this response ranks as a high-quality response, earning 12 out of 15 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.	15	6

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) (a-c) The Fit and Healthy Vermonters Plan contains goals and strategies for ensuring children's health and safety. Given the documented research on the advantages of breast feeding, it is commendable that this mother-infant practice is promoted and supported in this Plan, as well. The STARS program plans to award incentives and points for health and nutrition promoting practices. The VELS contains a component addressing physical development and health. This component of the VLS contains domains, learning goals, definitions, and examples for children who are ready to enter kindergarten. However, a document containing a specific progression of health and safety standards was not located that is specific to children with high needs. The Well-Being Domain of the proposed Infant Standards does address this criterion in a very general sense, providing "what to look for" and "ideas to promote growth" narratives. (b) The State Plan provides adequate information and evidence for this sub-criterion addressing training and support of early childhood educators. Plans are provided in the Description of Key Activities to increase and strengthen requirements for child providers to achieve specialized Child Care status in 2013 Goal 8.1 describes how the plan goals will be monitored. (c) Please see (a), above. However, in referring to the Table under goal 8.2, no information is included regarding food security, good nutrition, and physical activity through early Learning and Development Programs for any of the four years of the State Plan. (d) The State Plan intends to "increase capacity" to provide evidence-informed CIS family support. Through increased staffing, more children who are at-risk and who have high needs will be served. Plans to strengthen the Special Accommodations grant program are delineated in the Description of Key Activities Table. These measures are very positive and, if and when enacted, will help to ensure the improved health and well being of infants and young children by providing evidence regarding strengths and weaknesses that will inform future practices. Information regarding screening, using results of screening and follow-up, and children's participation in ongoing health care was not located for criterion (C) (3) (d) (1-3). In summary, because of some incomplete response information, this criterion ranks in the low quality-implementation response category, and earns a score of 6 out of 15 points.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	15	9

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) Vermont does not have a set of Family Engagement Standards. Because the Vermont Early Learning Standards are in the process of revision, its family engagement standards are limited to Goal 5, Sense of Community and also limited to children who are entering kindergarten. The set of Infants Standards promotes family involvement at the earlier levels. Although the State has delineated plans for a single set of standards, these revised standards are not yet available. Therefore, this sub-criterion is partially satisfied. (b) The description of training and supporting Early Childhood Educators on Family Engagement practices in this State Plan is very limited. The Table of Key Activities (item 9.2) provides one line that notes that training will occur in Quarter 3 of 2013; however, no narrative description accompanies this table notation. Therefore, a concern arises as to how well Vermont's Early Childhood Educators will be involved in, support, and/or sustain the family engagement practices that are advocated. (c) The Interagency Agreement, found in Appendix G, serves as a useful guide for interagency coordination. It supports a number of agencies as, collectively, they work to serve families. Also, the Key Activities Table provides useful information regarding the scope and sequence of family involvement in Vermont's early care, health, and education systems and the respective roles of various State agencies. However, the concluding paragraph that discusses measures and milestones is overly vague and contains little

detail about community events and dialogues that are aimed at informing program, funding, and policy decisions affecting families. Further, this response provided insufficient detail regarding the Healthy Meals plan. A favorable and noteworthy aspect of this sub-criterion is the Family Surveys that will be distributed in order to collect data on program effectiveness and family satisfaction. This criterion is lacking some important information, and therefore has received a score of 9 out of a possible 15 points.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

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

	Available	Score
(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.	20	6

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)

(D) (1) (a) This response is not included. Therefore, the existence of a planned or implemented statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework cannot be determined for this Criterion. (b) The table lists several credentials that candidates may earn, ranging from Level I, Fundamentals to Level VI, Doctoral Degree in Early Childhood. Other credentials are also listed, such as Program Director Credential and Infant and Toddler Credential. For each credential, the Table provides the number of persons who have earned that level. However, since the existence of a statewide Knowledge and Competency Framework was not ascertained, it is difficult to determine the alignment of the progression of standards with this Framework. (c) The table that accompanies this sub-criterion contains a scope and sequence of work that will be accomplished by post-secondary institutions and other professional development providers in regards to professional development. The funding of tuition free courses to Early Childhood Educators is a positive feature of this plan. Universities and agencies that offer credentials are plentiful, and listed in the table. However, again, the specific alignment of the professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework is not clear. The requests of this criterion are either missing or not specifically enough addressed; therefore, the response is rated as a low quality-implementation response.

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	20	17

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

- (a) Providing and expanding access to effective professional development opportunities that are aligned with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework;
- (b) Implementing policies and incentives (e.g., scholarships, compensation and wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, other financial incentives, management opportunities) that promote professional improvement and career advancement along an articulated career pathway that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and that are designed to increase retention;
- (c) Publicly reporting aggregated data on Early Childhood Educator development, advancement, and retention; and
- (d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

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

that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

(D) (2) (a) The State Plan provides alternate, statewide incentives for earning and rewarding credentials and degrees, including career advising, rewards and recognition, a Higher Education Consortium/Strategic Plan, and Scholarships through Northern Lights Career Development Center. Additionally, another motivating incentive lies in the Vermont Child Care Apprenticeship Program that offers college course work in which participants earn the CDA credential. (b) The Career Ladder (Table A 1-10) provides clear information about the proposed alignment of the planned Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework with the levels on the Career Pathway. Northern Lights provides recognition and awards for early childhood professionals as they complete various levels of the career ladder. A new Recognition System, developed in 2009, recognizes achievements of individuals, reflects appropriate degrees, and also requires experience and an approved professional development plan. However, this Recognition System is not clearly or specifically enough described in terms of achievement levels and related incentives. (c) Vermont's Data Tracking System is not yet in place and, therefore, this sub-criterion cannot be fully addressed. However, the Plan explains that the Bright Futures Information System and the Vermont Department of Education capture workforce data on school employees will each provide information on Early Childhood Education Development. Details on educator development, advancement, and retention are not provided; therefore, the helpfulness of the two combined tracking systems for data gathering is rather limited in these areas. (d) (1) Given the rural nature of Vermont and its relatively small size, the fact that it has 12 higher education institutions that provide early childhood credentials is commendable. While the number of "aligned" institutions is not predicted to increase between 2012 and 2015, the numbers of educators who receive credentials from these institutions is projected to rise by approximately 2 percent each year, and by 5 percent by the culmination of the RTT grant. These numbers seem realistic when the total numbers of educators, and the size and rural nature of the state are taken into account, (d) (2) Predictions for increasing numbers of highly qualified Early Childhood Educators in Vermont are optimistic and promising. A Table delineates the number of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials in alignment with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. Those who will progress to Level I by 2015 doubled, while those who will progress to Level II by 2015 nearly tripled in number. A more challenging aspect of these predictions lies in the fact that Vermont does not have a complete workforce registry. Therefore, no percentages are provided for the year-by-year credential predictions. In summary, this criterion was scored in the high range, with a score of 17 out of 20 points.

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

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

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

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.	20	14
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to implement, independently or as part of a cross-State consortium, a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that--</p> <p>(a) Is aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;</p> <p>(b) Is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used, including for English learners and children with disabilities;</p> <p>(c) Is administered beginning no later than the start of school year 2014-2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten; States may propose a phased implementation plan that forms the basis for broader statewide implementation;</p> <p>(d) Is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the early learning data system, if it is separate from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, as permitted under and consistent with the requirements of Federal, State, and local privacy laws; and</p> <p>(e) Is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant, (e.g., with funds available under section 6111 or 6112 of the ESEA).</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)

(E) (1) (a) The Vermont Ready Kindergartners Survey (VRKS) is currently used to address essential domains of school readiness; however, it is not yet aligned with the VELs, nor is it valid and reliable. (b) The State Plan provides a table of Key Activities for the Kindergartners Survey that includes establishing reliability and validity and aligning it with the VELs. However, no concise information is included that discusses the usefulness of this tool with English learners and children with disabilities, beyond the brief mention of "all groups of children" in the Milestones and Measures section. (c) A pilot study of the revised Vermont Ready Kindergartners Survey is planned for 2013. The valid, reliable and VELs-aligned Survey will be fully implemented in 2014. These dates are reasonable, and in line with the expectations of the related RTT grant criterion. (d) The statewide longitudinal Data System will be implemented in 2012. The Data System will provide a secure and private reporting location for the Vermont Ready Kindergarten data over the next four years. (e) The State Plan is requesting approximately \$356,000, total, for the further alignment with the VELs and the development, training, and implementation of the Vermont Ready Kindergartners Survey (VRKS). No additional private or State funding for the VRKS was directly specified in the budget for VRKS Survey funding. In summary, the plans for the development, piloting, testing, and implementation of the Survey are detailed and logical. However, because the revised Survey is not yet valid, reliable, or aligned with the VELs, and because there is no state funding clearly evidenced for this Survey, this response was scored as a 14 out of 20 possible points. It was ranked in the medium-quality response category.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	15

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) (a) Through the Department of Education, Vermont plans to enhance its Statewide Longitudinal Data System. This system appears to be high-quality since it integrates early learning and development data, and it aligns the information that is now stored on the current data system. (b) Uniform data collection and easy entry of essential data by State agencies and participating programs is a goal for 2012. Therefore, this uniformity of data collection is deemed an urgent and paramount goal in the State Plan. (c) Participation by several State agencies, that are partners in this RTT State Plan, is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2012. (d) The data that will be collected include essential elements of successful early childhood programs, including health, development and learning data. The ease of accessibility of these data is addressed in the Table, stating that a dashboard-style, user-friendly approach that will be accessible to multiple users, will be implemented in 2012. It is commendable that the State Plan recognized weaknesses in the previous data collection system and that it has generated a revised and state-of-the-art approach to data collection. (e) The statement on the table states that the new Data System will protect the privacy of the data received for the VRKS. Information is provided regarding the Data System Oversight Requirements and how this new Data system will be overseen by the Early Childhood Governance Council. In summary, this response indicates that the revised Data System, while promising, is not yet implemented. The promising aspects of the response lie in the collaboration of many key agencies that play a role in the State Plan. Therefore, this response partially meets the criterion and ranks in the partially implemented response category, scoring 15 points out of a total of 20 points.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	162

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p>		
Comments on (P)(3)		
<p>The State Plan meets selection criterion (E) (1) (b) because it has earned a score of 14/20, which fulfills the required 70 percent. Although the Vermont Survey is, at present, only observational, the State Plan specifies solid plans for revision and a commitment to improving its validity, reliability, applicability to all populations of children, and alignment with the Vermont Early Learning Standards.</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	No
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.</p>	
Comments on Absolute Priority	
<p>Vermont's application does not 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. Many of the foundational elements of this application are not yet clearly defined or established. For example, while the State's TQRIS system holds potential for better serving the needs of all of Vermont's children, this System is not yet aligned with the new standards nor is it fully implemented. Moreover, a specific method of promoting participation in the TQRIS is not discussed in this State Plan, and a validation study of the effectiveness of the TQRIS has not yet been conducted. Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs is another area of weakness in this State Plan, since no information is included regarding food security, good nutrition, and physical activity through Early Learning and Development Programs for any of the four years of the State Plan. A concern also arises as to how well the State's Early Childhood Educators will be involved in, support, and/or sustain the family engagement practices that are advocated in this State Plan. Specifics regarding the development of a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials are extremely limited aspects of this application. Because the existence of a statewide Knowledge and Competency Framework was not ascertained, it is not possible to determine the alignment of the progression of standards. The State Plan proposes a Ready Kindergarten Survey that will align with the Vermont's Early Learning Standards. However, while the State Plan recognizes its areas of weakness and candidly addresses each area related to surveying pre-kindergarten children to ensure school readiness, this revised and updated Ready Kindergarten Survey has not yet implemented. Moreover, the manner in which English Language Learners and children with disabilities will be surveyed, and the results of Surveys used to improve servicing to these specific populations, are not clearly explained in the State Plan. The projected Data Analysis System that plans to efficiently track data from several agencies across programs, families, and children, thus better serving the needs of all, is not yet in place. In summary, while many aspects of the Vermont State Plan, once finalized and implemented, hold potential for improving program quality for Children with High Needs, the application lacks comprehensive and cohesive coverage in many of its responses to the RTT-Early Learning Challenge Grant criteria. Therefore, the minimum requirements are not fulfilled in this application.</p>	



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # VT-5034

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: **Reviewed**
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 8:05 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
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	16
<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)

Vermont (VT) has demonstrated their past commitment to and investment in high-quality, accessible Early Learning Development Programs (ELDPs) for Children with High Needs (CHNs), as evidenced by: (A) Financial Investment: State investments in early learning and development increased almost 40% between 2007 and 2011. Additional funding (not counted in that estimation) was provided for home visiting, Parent Child Centers, and other programming that benefits the state's young children. This substantial investment is noteworthy when many states are experiencing dramatic cuts due to limited/decreased funding. Supporting data in Table (A)(1)-4 indicate that most of the increase was attributable to the state-funded preschool and the state contributions to Children's Integrated Services (CIS), which includes Early Intervention, Part C of IDEA, Individual program funding has greatly varied. For example, VT does not supplement its Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) funding, and total contributions to Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) have been very uneven (e.g. \$6.3 million in 2010 to \$11.1 million in 2009). (B) Increasing the number of CHNs participating in ELDPs: While it appears that CHNs have been participating in ELDPs, the data are incomplete and/or missing (see Table (A)(1)-5)). No data appears to track the progress of increasing the number of CHNs participating in their ELDPs. Other evidence suggests some progress. The VT legislature revised the fee scale under CCDF, which resulted in increased access for families to infant and toddler programs. The legislation was tied to the tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS), called, "Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (VT STARS)", offering more support for programs deemed the highest quality (4-5 stars). Over the past year, CHNs were enrolling in 3-5 star programs faster than overall enrollment. (Note that there was a discrepancy through out the application about whether 3-5 stars or 4-5 stars constituted a "high" quality plan.) The numbers of CHNs receiving services through state-funded preschool, programs funded under Title 1 of ESEA, and CCDF have increased notably over the past 4-5 years. For example, approximately 5,528 CHNs are participating in programs that receive CCDF funds, which is about 90% of the highest estimate of CHNs in the state. Quantifying the increase in CHNs participating in ELDPs will be made difficult by the approximations used to determine the overall number of CHNs, which ranges from 2,166 to 6,151. The authors state this approximation is attributed to not knowing which CHNs are listed in multiple high-need categories. In Table (A)(1)-2, data are not available for migrant children. A comprehensive data system with unique identifiers

would begin to address this issue to clarify the "universe" of CHNs. (C) Existing early learning and development legislation, policies, or practices: The state has several important policies in place that support ELDPs, and that demonstrate their strong commitment to building child-oriented legislation, policies, and practices. VT passed Act 62, which fosters the development of free pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs to all three-to-five-year-olds. Currently 90% of the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) offer pre-K, yet expansion is needed to make it "universal." VT's Building Bright Futures (BBF) Council is focused on developing policies to support VT's young children, and the governor's Strategic Plan reinvests savings from recent reforms into early learning and development, which they plan to use as continued support for the Vermont Early Learning Challenge (VT ELC). (D) Current status in key areas: VT has made substantial progress in some key areas, including almost-universal pre-K, the "Ready Kindergartners Survey" to assess kindergartners at school entry, widespread health promotion practices required and implemented, and the state's workforce knowledge and competency framework. However less progress is evident in services for infants and toddlers, Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) for infants and toddlers, the state Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS), the state family engagement support, the early learning workforce credentialing and the early learning and development data systems. Free pre-K programs are widely available for CHNs, although not quite universal—complicated by its being voluntary. VT has conducted its Ready Kindergartners Survey annually since 2001. These are promising steps for building children's school readiness, although the data system is not yet in place. Full implementation of the data system is essential for understanding how the state is progressing in getting CHNs ready for school. The data available on the workforce has improved recently, with tracking done on many of the credentials awarded over the past two years. Unfortunately the universe of credentials held by, or awarded to, the workforce is not known, which renders the credential status of the workforce unclear. The state's workforce knowledge and competency framework (WKCF) is aligned to credentials, which adds coherence to the system. Moreover, local colleges and teaching institutions have aligned their programs to the WKCF as well, which is a strong foundation for building or strengthening a high-quality early childhood workforce. Except for Early Head Start, which offers services to 191 infants and 331 toddlers, and CCDF, which provides services to 1,136 infants and 1,647 toddlers, many fewer programs are available for infants and toddlers. Current efforts are underway to refocus money from pre-K to infants and toddler programs. In terms of the ELDS, their standards for infants and toddlers are still in draft form. Their CAS in state-funded preschool does not include measures of the quality of adult-child interactions, which are widely believed to be a key factor in determining overall quality. In addition, CHNs receiving special education services under IDEA Part B do not appear to have any CAS except for formative assessments and environmental quality (no screening measures nor measures of the quality of adult-child interactions). State-licensing requirements do not appear to include CAS. The state health promotion practices are in place, with the exception of health literacy practices, which are often missing from the state's programs. Family engagement strategies are required in the state preschool, although appear perfunctory (e.g. meeting with parents twice/year and must provide opportunities for parents to get involved in their child's learning and development without specifying how). Family engagement does appear to be linked to the TQRIS, which is promising.

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

The overarching goal of the VT ELC is to integrate systems of care across disciplines and improve the quality and consistency of early learning and development programs and services in order to promote the health and optimal development across all domains and prepare young Vermonters for school success. Their approach appears to be broad and comprehensive. Many requisite parts are already in place, and quality improvement and expansion are the next logical steps. VT's plan seems ambitious: it is aiming to improve everything, taking on all Focused Investment Areas. Other than comprehensive reform, the argument for including all criteria was not explicitly made. Similarly, the rationale for taking particular approaches was not made clear. Yet, with the scope of the state—its small size and small population—tackling all investment areas seems appropriate. The plan constitutes an effective reform agenda in its comprehensive approach. While the steps for reaching each goal is clear, the specification of how these improvements will reduce the gap between children (instead of maintaining it by improving everyone's outcomes) is not. The proposal is strong in its focus on building a strong governance structure and attempting to integrate the system through partnerships and create a sustainable program. It was not clear how the VT STARS system will be used to improve programs. Many of the structures appear to be in place and require adjustment or expansion to meet state goals. For example, the CIS is VT's approach to integrating services; however, it was not clear whether or not that integration has worked, and simply needs to be deepened or expanded, or if qualitative changes are needed. The approach to supporting the workforce and building their skills and quality seems like an effective way to address developing high quality ELDPs. The

application addresses meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of families (Goal 9), yet no case was made for the range of cultural and linguistic diversity in Vermont. (1) Goal 1, related to strengthening the Building Bright Futures governance structure, seems important and essential for creating an effective state system. (2) Goal 2, related to integrating/implementing a statewide system of local partnerships focused on children's school readiness, is an ambitious yet effective approach for providing integrated services, being more effective, and saving money. (3) Goal 3, related to sustaining VT ECL achievements beyond 2015, is essential to the application and appears achievable, given the small scale of this program. (4) Goal 4, related to VT STARS serving to maintain accountability for high standards improves clarity on quality of ELDPs, but it was not clear how it actually improves the programs. (5) Goal 5, related to CHNs having access to high-quality, developmentally beneficial ELDPs, seems overly ambitious with the state's access issues and the goal that their programs have 3 stars or more, given the lack of rationale in the application to support its achievement. (6) Goal 6, related to developing a fully aligned ELDS, is appropriate since VT has started the process and having a fully aligned ELDS is essential to defining high quality and moving ELDPs toward it. (7) Goal 7, related to developing a CAS, is achievable, given that VT has many of the necessary parts in place, and essential for understanding whether or not ELDPs are meeting goals for high-quality teaching and children's school readiness. (8) Goal 8, addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children from pregnancy to 6, is very ambitious although potentially achievable through CIS. The documentation, however, did not provide clarity on how effective the system is currently. (9) Goal 9, related to providing culturally/linguistically appropriate support to families, did not contain sufficient background evidence and rationale. (10) Goal 10, related to supporting early childhood educators in getting credentials and licensure, did not contain adequate background data. The key elements were specified, but this is difficult in a rural setting. The "universe" of early educators and credentials and licenses currently held were not clear. (11) Goal 11, related to investing in relationship-based professional development strategies that support early childhood educators, building on the VT Apprenticeship Program, appeared effective and cost-efficient. (12) Goal 12, related to validating the Ready Kindergartners Survey, is an important part of understanding whether or not VT ELC efforts are actually increasing children's readiness for school. (13) Goal 13, related to enhancing early childhood data capacity, is key to meeting proposal goals, and achievable given the current data that are collected.

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

VT has substantially implemented the alignment and coordination of early learning and development across the state. They provided a high-quality response to the criterion, as detailed below: (A) VT has effectively aligned and coordinated early learning across the state, and plan to manage the Plan through their existing governance structure in Building Bright Futures and the 12 BBF Regional Councils. In this way, they plan build upon these existing interagency governance structures, which provide a strong foundation for their Plan. Their role and responsibilities are described. The method and process for decision-making is consensus, yet inadequate details are provided about how disputes will be resolved. The VT Early Learning Council (ELC) involves representatives from Participating Programs, parents and families, and other stakeholders in the process and governance through the BBF Leadership Institute, which seems like an effective way of building infrastructure. (B) The members of the collaboration, including the Lead Agency, the State Advisory Council, and participating state agencies endorse this collaboration, and have a history of working together through the CIS and the Act 62/State pre-K, which will facilitate the work in the Plan. Terms and conditions reflecting their commitments to VT's Plan were provided in MOUs. Comprehensive scopes of work were detailed, with needed signatures from authorized representatives. (C) A broad group of stakeholders, including Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, state and local community leaders, health providers, adult education leaders and parent councils, provided letters of commitment delineating their support for the Plan. While these letters of support were provided, they have the same bullets and appear to be cut and pasted from some standard form instead of reflecting individual contributions and detailed connections between entities. This made their support for the Plan less persuasive.

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

(A) VT provides substantial data regarding the support for general program activities through existing funding in Table (A)(4)-1. It appears that no state agencies offered to match any of the application funds for expansion or improvement of these activities. With the applied for funds, VT appears to have budgeted the money across Participating State Agencies, with a significant amount of the funding devoted to the local implementation of their plan. However, the overall statewide budget was difficult to read because of problems with error messages in cells (#REF!) detailing funds set aside for technical assistance (much needed in such a complex program), and totals for Years 2-4. (B) In terms of funds adequately supporting the Plan activities, the spread of the Department of Children and Families' technical assistance (TA) resources evenly across agencies across years seems strange given the unequal distribution of project-related activities. The costs seem high given the small number of children to be served—or the estimates of children to be served (the "universe" of CHNs is not yet known). The funds

provided to Participating State Agencies, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, and other partners seems adequately targeted for local implementation. (C) Other than the license plate funding (\$20K/annually), it was not clear how these new activities, which cost \$48M over the life of the project will be funded following 2015. It was not clear that the funding for all aspects of the State Plan can be sustained after the grant period ends, except for the expansion of pre-K which will be paid for by the state when it is rolled into the school system, which currently pays for the pre-K programs.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

(A) VT has a TQRIS, called STARS, in place (developed 7 years ago) that is based on VT's ELDS for preschool children (infants and toddler standards require further development), CASs, Early Childhood Educator qualifications, Family engagement strategies, Health promotion practices, and Effective data practices. Given the specifications in the Plan, the VT STARS is not fully implemented, as shown in their lack of health and safety standards. (B) VT STARS has standards that are measurable, meaningfully differentiate program levels, and reflect their expectation for program excellence. More than half of all licensed programs (56%) participates, as do 14% of family child-care homes, which illustrates widespread buy-in from the Early Childhood Educators. One emphasis in this project would be to increase participation in VT STARS, particularly among family child-care providers. In addition, the Plan aims to increase the number of parents who—as consumers—use it when they choose care settings for their children. This reflects an appropriate integration of their TQRIS and a key aspect of improving quality of ELDPs for VT's children. While the VT STARS is partially implemented, to fully implement this Plan, VT STARS must be fully aligned with their program assessment tools, such as the CLASS, family engagement strategies, health promotion practices, effective data practices, and linked to measurable program quality levels supporting valuation. (C) The TQRIS, VT STARS, is linked to the state licensing system in an appropriate way.

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

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

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

- (1) State-funded preschool programs;
- (2) Early Head Start and Head Start programs;
- (3) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA;

- (4) Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and
 - (5) Early Learning and Development Programs receiving funds from the State's CCDF program;
- (b) Implementing effective policies and practices designed to help more families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of Children with High Needs (e.g., maintaining or increasing subsidy reimbursement rates, taking actions to ensure affordable co-payments, providing incentives to high-quality providers to participate in the subsidy program); and
- (c) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for the numbers and percentages of Early Learning and Development Programs that will participate in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System by type of Early Learning and Development Program (as listed in (B)(2)(a)(1) through (5) above).

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)
<p>(A) VT has had a TQRIS, called VT STARS, since 2004, yet it is not fully implemented. Currently all state preschool programs and programs funded by IDEA, Part B, and nearly all Head Start programs use VT STARS. However the minority of CCDF programs and licensed ELDPs do, which is a primary focus of VT's Plan. Because VT has almost universal pre-K, many CHNs already participate, and using the strategies delineated in the Plan, VT will boost the quality of those programs with their VT STARS. Substantial project resources would be focused on reaching the children who are not currently enrolled in a high-quality ELDP, with the assumption that many of those children are CHNs. This seems like an achievable goal, and it may be ambitious given that many of the CHNs likely have access issues, in this rural state, characterized by families living spread out in small, dispersed communities on the rugged countryside. The application notes that there may not be "areas with high concentrations of CHNs" given VT's rural environment. (B) The linkage between STARS reimbursement rates supports an increase in the number of parents who seek out higher quality (higher rated) programs for their CHNs. In addition, there are rewards and incentives for centers and family child care homes to participate in VT STARS, which would likely facilitate an increase in the supply of high quality ELDPs for CHNs. The Plan illustrates VT's ability to maintain the supply of high-quality child care for CHNs by explaining that these supports are funded in part by private funders, and the expansion of the ELDPs would be funded through the school system after the project period. Sections of text appear to be missing. For example, under the heading, "How plan meets the needs of CHNs in general and for particular populations," there is simply the notation, "[insert here]." (C) While the increased participation goal is estimated to be 7-10% in program years—a seemingly achievable although not ambitious increase—it is not clear how these estimates were derived.</p>

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)		
<p>VT has a partially implemented plan for rating and monitoring their ELDPs, and provides a medium-quality response, detailed below: (A) VT has been recognized previously for the strength of their child-care regulations and—as stated in their application—their difficulty in monitoring them adequately. They have designed a plan, beginning in January, 2012, to bring experts and stakeholders together to review the current regulations and update, clarify, and streamline the regulations into the state's ELDPs. Part of these efforts will be to examine the validity and inter-rater reliability of the VT STARS. Insufficient detail is provided for this process—reliability testing requires comprehensive evaluation of such a tool, and these procedures are not discussed. The Plan aims to increase their monitoring of programs and bring on new staff, trained to administer program assessments for VT STARS, their TQRIS. In this way, VT has planned to increase the quantity and quality of monitoring, which is in-line with developing a High Quality Plan. Moreover, this offers an opportunity to bring more programs into the TQRIS, which seems likely to increase the quality of participating programs. (B) Through the overhaul of VT STARS, VT will have up-to-date and relevant quality ratings for families to inform their child-care choices. The plan, as currently laid out, does not provide details about how VT will engage parents about the rating system, and/or facilitate their use of the VT STARS.</p>		
	Available	Score

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)

VT has a partially implemented plan for promoting access to their high-quality ELDPs, and provides a medium-quality response, detailed below: (A) It is not clear how VT will specifically provide support and incentives for ELDPs to continuously improve, nor did they provide details about how they will facilitate the participation of hard-to-reach CHNs through "outreach." It is not clear that the narrative corresponds closely to tables (B)(4)(c)(1) or (B)(4)(c)(2), rendering it unclear as to how ELDPs are going to increase their VT STAR ratings. (B) The VT ELC will be used to expand ELDPs under Act 62 to make the pre-K program truly universal so it reaches all CHNs who want such a program. This is an important strength. It is not clear how supports will be provided to families to access these programs, however. (C) The goals for increasing ELDP participation in VT STARS did not appear to be ambitious (2% across the board). VT plans to use the infrastructure and financing provided by their VT Community Preschool Collaborative to expand their pre-K programs, and support those that offer high-quality (Rated 3-5) programs, as a way to support the number of ELDPs in the top tiers; details of how this will be done is not specified. Currently, 100% of the state-funded preschool, EHS/HS, and ELDPs funded by IDEA Part B and by Title 1 are top tier. Thus, their targets of 7% annual increases pertain to ELDPs funded by IDEA part C and CCDF only. These targets for increasing the number of CHNs who are enrolled are achievable but not ambitious. Moreover, it is imperative that VT ascertains how many CHNs they have so they will know when they have reached their milestone/measure of success.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	9

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)

(VT provides a medium/high-quality response for validating the effectiveness of their TQRIS, called VT STARS, as detailed below: (A) The VT ELC has set up a plan to evaluate their VT STAR system once, by a TQRIS expert with the RTT funding. Their TQRIS is "mature" and has been used for 7 years, warranting evaluation to insure its efficaciousness. Their use of an outside expert is a strength of their Plan, and will provide research evidence about the tiers and their effectiveness to reflect different levels of quality that correspond to tracking progress. Given that this evaluation is to be conducted once, the Plan may lack the flexibility to adapt to needed programmatic changes and progress, and to improve. (B) Insufficient detail was provided about their research questions and design, and how the validation would occur other than using an outside expert. The initial consult with the expert is reported as indicating that VT has data currently that could be used to answer questions about how the VT STARS is impacting CHNs and their families, and the average point increase by area in the TQRIS. Without additional

information provided on their research plan and design, it is difficult to ascertain how progress in children's learning, development, and school readiness will be assessed.

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

Each State must address in its application--

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

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

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

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

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	15	13
<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> <p>Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation</p> <p>Comments on (C)(1)</p> <p>((A) While VT has ELDS called the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS), they propose to revise them onto a continuum from birth to school entry and align them with the standards of K-3, Common Core, and HS. Currently, the VELS does not include infants and toddlers (this is in draft form only), so revising the standards onto a continuum will address concerns about their being developmentally appropriate. Revisions aim to insure that the VELS address all Essential Domains of School Readiness (EDSR); however, the PLAN does not provide sufficient detail to insure that the VELS meets EDSR. The working group charged with making these revisions also will determine whether or not they are culturally or linguistically appropriate, and revise them as needed. (B) Evidence was not provided to insure that the ELDS are currently aligned with VT's K-3 standards. As noted above, the Plan states that VT proposes to revise the ELDS so that they are aligned. (C) VT's ELDS are incorporated into their program standards, and will be incorporated into their CAS and their Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and professional development activities. This highlights one of VT's strengths, which is reflected in their Plan: plans to conduct system streamlining and integration of programs and systems to better meet the needs of CHNs. (D) The planned revisions are a positive step toward streamlining standards and—with implementation—preparing VT's young children for school success and supporting transitions. The team has experience in rolling out ELDS and has detailed a comprehensive plan for rolling them out, and engaging parents and professionals on the changes. In addition, they have built in an evaluation of the process so that they can determine their effectiveness in implementing the new standards and ascertain the approach that has worked best.</p>		
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	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)

VT has a substantially implemented plan for supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems (CAS), and provides a high-quality response, detailed below: (A) VT has a High-Quality Plan in place to implement the Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD), which will be administered in all ACT 62 pre-K and EHS/HS classrooms. The measure has been field-tested and validated for use, although it is not clear whether or not this has been done with a population similar to the target children in Vermont. (B) Technical assistance, in the form of on-site coaching, will be made available to facilitate effective implementation and insure that Early Childhood Educators understand the purpose and uses of the CAS. This is a valuable approach. (C) It is not clear how VT will align or integrate assessments, specifically how they will use the data for instruction, program, and service improvement, other than those data generated by the CLASS, which is part of the CAS. (D) The CLASS tool will be folded into VT's CAS, and a cadre of trainers will be trained on the administration of the CAS (train-the-trainer model). This is a strong approach.

	Available	Score
(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.	15	10

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(3)

VT has a substantially implemented plan for identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of CHNs, and provides a medium-quality response, detailed below: (A) Insufficient evidence is provided to insure that VT has a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety, and ensuring that health, behavioral screening and follow-up occur. They have stated their goals without detailing how the standards are met. (B) The Plan improves VT's use of trained educators and medical personnel—a strength—as explained by their additional Maternal and Child Health nurses and CIS coordinator. However, it is not clear whether or not the program would actually increase the number of educators who are trained and supported in meeting the health standards. (C) VT's plan aims to promote healthy eating habits or good nutrition without specifying how. The

expansion of physical activity will be conducted through the ELDPs and the "I am Fit, I am Moving" program, although not enough detail was provided about this plan. Insufficient information is provided about how they will promote healthy nutrition. (D) VT attempts to address children's health, behavioral, and developmental needs with an integrated system (CIS), allowing children to get services from one access point. This facilitates CHNs getting their needs met efficiently and effectively. While they await implementation of the referral system to determine how the program is working and whether the number of CHNs who get services is growing, the structure appears to be well-thought-out and ready to follow-up with children who need additional treatment. In this way, VT ELC leverages existing resources to meet their goal of inclusion among VT's children in screening, referral, and well-child care services. The goals stated for increasing the numbers of CHNs who receive screening and services do not seem very ambitious (1-10 percentage points annually), although with potential access issues for VT's CHNs who live in rural areas, these goals will likely be achievable.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	15	9

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)

(VT has a substantially implemented plan for engaging and supporting families, and provides a medium-quality response, detailed below: (A) VT ELC aims to identify a single set of standards for family engagement. Previously they have used a variety of different approaches in their myriad programs, and aim to ascertain the most effective. They state that they will systemically integrate these guidelines for standards, and specify key activities to facilitate their establishment statewide. Not enough details were provided to understand how they will establish a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards. (B) Once their standards are established, early childhood educators will be trained—without sufficient details specifying how—on the related Standards, and families will be regularly surveyed in a pre- and post- design to evaluate the efficacy of the approach. Flexibility is built into the model so that different standards may be used for different populations and they will leverage other resources and programs to implement this family engagement program effectively. This is a strength. However, the approach delineated is disorganized with strong elements, but different aspects of it mentioned under different headers without a linear progression of program development. (C) The VT plan illustrates their skills at leveraging their existing resources and integrating services to maximize benefits to CHNs, however more details are needed. The narrative is missing for some of the tables.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

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

	Available	Score
(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.	20	4

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)

No narrative or tables were provided to answer this Focused Investment Area (D)(1)—it is blank. This criterion is partially implemented (as the information was found in other sections), but this response is inadequate and low-quality. (A) The plan's approach to developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework (WKCF) is missing. (B) The state's WKCF is aligned to credentials, building coherence into the system. The timeline is missing. (C) Local colleges and teaching institutions have aligned their programs to the frameworks as well, which is a strong foundation for building or strengthening a high-quality early childhood workforce. Insufficient detail is provided by the VT's plan to understand how they will fully address this Focused Investment Area.

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	20	18

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)

VT has a substantially implemented plan for supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and provides a high-quality response, detailed below. Note: Goals and text are missing for this Focused Investment Area (D)(2). (A) VT is teaming up with the VT Northern Lights Career Development Center (VNLCD) to provide and expand access to professional development opportunities that are aligned with VT's WKCF. This is an effective approach to improving the knowledge, skills, and abilities of their Early Childhood Educators. (B) VT will offer a variety of services including career advising, recognition, stipends, and scholarships to encourage the pursuit of coursework, as well as greater alignment with the VNLCD to link institutions to the early childhood workforce career ladder. Experts and leaders at local colleges were engaged to create or specify models of higher education for the child-care workforce. Through this plan, movement up the career ladder is articulated and supported through financial incentives and personal prestige. In addition, they have developed the VT Child Care Apprenticeship Program to provide any needed training and support to complete the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. VT also has the MATCH program, which connects teachers with experts from the field to provide the teacher guidance and coaching. VT ELC will conduct substantial outreach to educate people in the field about the opportunities that are becoming available. These services and supports are key strengths in facilitating an increase in quality of their ECE workforce. (C) The lacking "universe" data makes it difficult to track participants' progress in these professional development opportunities. However, through their collaborations with VT Northern Lights Career Development Center, they may be able to track some participants' progress. Not enough detail is specified to ascertain their capacity to achieve this goal. (D) Through their collaboration with the VT Northern Lights Career Development Center, sufficient opportunities will be provided to Early Childhood Educators. This relationship exists, and given the size of the state, it seems appropriate as their primary target for professional development opportunities. Lack of data about the universe, it is difficult to judge the plan's ambitiousness regarding the percentage of Early Childhood Educators progression to higher levels of credentials that align with the WKCF.

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	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)

VT has a substantially implemented plan for understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry, and provides a medium-quality response, detailed below. (A) VT plans to revise their “Ready Kindergartners Survey,” based on expert feedback and focus group data, re-align it with VT ELDS, develop a new (web-based) data collection approach, and then validate it for use with VT kindergarten children. Once revised, it will address all Essential Domains of School Readiness (EDSR). To insure the effective use of “Ready Kindergartners Survey” in the classroom, professional development activities will be created for teachers linked to the data it generates on student success in the classroom. While little to none of this plan for the revised instrument has been implemented, VT’s experience using the earlier version of this instrument and their clear plan for revising it, suggest a promising approach. The survey was not found in the Appendix; a notation in the text suggests it was forgotten. (B) Revisions aim to address the validity, reliability, and appropriate use of their survey instrument. While they aim to make it linguistically and culturally appropriate for all VT CHNs, they do not state how they will achieve this. Children with disabilities were not specifically addressed, nor were English-language learners. If the experts ascertain the survey’s validity and reliability, it would likely serve as an important part of understanding whether or not general ELDP efforts are actually increasing children’s readiness for school. (C) Given the current version of the survey is administered at the beginning of the school year as part of their state education plan, it appears that it will continue, and meet the Plan requirement. (D) They currently use the survey in their data system, and plan to be able to use it in the new Longitudinal Data System for tracking progress more effectively. Their plan to shift to the new tracking system and report data as required appears appropriate. (E) The survey is currently funded through Federal and State resources other than those available through this grant, and is budgeted to continue.

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

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

- (a) Has all of the Essential Data Elements;
- (b) Enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the Essential Data Elements by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs;

(c) Facilitates the exchange of data among Participating State Agencies by using standard data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data;

(d) Generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy for Early Learning and Development Programs and Early Childhood Educators to use for continuous improvement and decision making; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(2)

(A) Although VT does not appear to include all Essential Data Elements in their current data system, they aim to revise the system and include all of them. (B) The early learning data system will be user-friendly, web-based, and longitudinal, so that children and families can be easily tracked over time by Participating State Agencies and Participating Programs. Earlier versions of a Building Bright Futures (BBF) data system have been implemented (early childhood data system in 2000; BBF information system in 2005) which include unique identifiers for each participating child, family and work place). (C) VT ELC funds will be used for revamping the Data System so that it meets current data needs for tracking, evaluating program progress, and reporting, and make it longitudinal. It appears ideal as a tool for exchanging data for program evaluation and broad state comparisons. The data system will provide a reporting infrastructure for the Participating State Agencies (D) The data system will generate information that is timely, relevant for tracking CHNs and Participating Programs, to insure program and system improvement. (E) The VT ELC plan will incorporate protections to assure Federal, State, and local privacy laws, including HIPPA compliance.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	194

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

Priorities

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

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

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

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

Comments on (P)(3)

The VT ELC met the priority for competitive preference 3 based on their score for (E)(1), Understanding the Status for Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry. This was largely based on their ongoing commitment to assessing children as they start school with their measure, "Ready Kindergartners Survey." While the survey needs to be revised and validated, VT has administered it since 2000, and actively uses it to assess their students and conduct planning. With the new funding, they will use it as a tracking tool, and use it as a tool for continuous program improvement.

Absolute Priority

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

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

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

Comments on Absolute Priority

VT achieves the absolute priority. While many of their supports and services for young children require revision, refinement, and validation, VT has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to developing and integrating services designed to improve the school readiness, health, and well-being of their youngest citizens. They also have undertaken noteworthy efforts to integrate their services and achieve efficiency from a programmatic standpoint, as well as simplicity of access for CHN and their families. The priorities put forth in this ELC appear to complement VT's efforts to nurture and support their children, extending their efforts comprehensively to meet the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable—CHNs. By expanding use of their TQRIS, the VT STARS, they aim to insure that CHNs and their families can choose top-tier, high-quality programs. They undertook all of the focused investment areas, including developing and using statewide, high-quality ELDS, the use of a CAS, identifying and addressing the needs of their CHNs to improve school readiness, and family engagement. In a similar spirit, they expanded their definition of CHNs to include those with incarcerated parents, those who are at-risk for or who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, victims of trauma, refugee children, etc., indicating their commitment to meeting the needs of a wide range of children. VT has sought out the development of a supporting infrastructure for their CHNs, including the development of a strong early education workforce, and efforts to measure and track students progress with assessment and the data system. While much of their plan requires further development and implementation, VT has a promising start.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # VT-5034

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 9:46 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
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	16
<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)

Vermont has demonstrated a strong commitment to financial investment in Early Learning and Development programs over time. Investments have come from state legislation and associated funding and from private organizations and groups. Investments in early learning and development increased almost 40% between 2007 and 2010. Consistent financial investment is a strength of this application (A1a). The state has maintained or increased the number of Children with High Needs participating in Early Learning and Development Programs from 2007 – 2011 (A1b). For example, the number of children served in state-funded preschool increased from 2923 in 2007 to 3476 in 2011 and the number of Children with High Needs served in programs funded by ESEA increased from 1516 in 2007 to 2016 in 2010. More than 80% of preschool-aged children with disabilities are served in Early Learning and Development Programs with typically developing peers. The state provides a broad focus on care for Children with High Needs and their families beginning with prenatal care and continuing at the birth to five age levels. The state has demonstrated commitment to Children with High Needs and their families through many strong initiatives to support Early Learning and Development including Early Education Initiative, Essential Early Education, Children's Integrated Service (CIS), Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home visiting, and Global Commitment to Health. Vermont has demonstrated high levels of collaboration among state and local agencies on developing and implementing initiatives for young Children with High Needs and their families including legislation, policies, and practice (A1c). Examples of this include Act 62 (Pre-Kindergarten programs including children with disabilities funded by Part B 619) which is jointly administered by the Department of Education and Department of Children and Families, the CIS which integrates several previously separate programs to provide services to pregnant women and children through age six, partnerships with community partners including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, Parent Child Centers, Community Child Care Support Agencies, and the Vermont Family Network, and the Governor designated Building Bright Futures Councils that are charged with assuring a comprehensive system of high quality early childhood services that are aligned with Early Learning and Development Standards and that are accessible to all families and young children. The current status of key areas that form the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system (A1d) indicates areas of strength and areas of need that will be strengthened through the RTT-ELC State Plan. One area of strength is

the five level TQRIS that is in place for all regulated Early Learning and Development Programs and after school programs. Vermont also has developed early learning standards for preschool aged children. The state has drafted standards for infants and toddlers but these are not presently employed and will be addressed through the RTT-ELC plan. There are no Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interaction within the state funded and Title 1 funded preschools, for children funded through IDEA Part B, section 619, and programs receiving CCDF funds, and it is not included in state licensing requirements. Additional elements of a Comprehensive Assessment System also are not part of the state licensing requirements (Screening Measures, Formative Assessment, and Measures of Environmental Quality). The state has expanded its Medicaid program through a managed care model and has established the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program (which are strengths of this plan) but health literacy is not addressed in several programs (Table (A) (1)-8. Preschool programs currently use one of two assessments that are not aligned (Creative Curriculum and Work Sampling). Plans are to adopt a single assessment system using the GOLD. The state uses a Kindergarten Entry Assessment or Survey (KEA) that is aligned with Vermont Early Learning and Development Standards. The Kindergarten readiness survey (the KEA) was previously validated but the validity study is dated and was not conducted on all parts of the survey that currently are being used limiting the technical adequacy of the KEA. This assessment has not been validated for children who are English Language Learners and only parts have been validated for children with disabilities. This also limits the technical adequacy of the assessment. The outcomes are not included in a statewide longitudinal data system. Vermont does not yet have a common set of family engagement standards but it does have several positive strategies and practices that are employed in various programs to promote family engagement such as the Strengthening Families Framework, Community Needs Assessment, the Head Start Parent and Family Engagement Framework, and family centered approaches through Part C IDEA programs. Family engagement strategies also are included within the TQRIS. The state has an early childhood data system in place but it is not sufficiently comprehensive and does not provide longitudinal data. In addition, many teachers are not providing data on the kindergarten survey outcomes. The state has developed a statewide career development center and career ladder-framework and is beginning to collect workforce data but the state was not able to report the percent of early childhood educators by types of credentials.

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

The State Plan clearly builds on current programs and initiatives within the state and is designed to be comprehensive and integrated (A2a). The state has established ambitious yet achievable goals for improving program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. For example, the state will develop regional councils and coordinators to provide oversight of the TQRIS activities in all regions of the state. The state proposes that 100% of the Children with High Needs subsidized by the CC FAP will be enrolled in centers and homes rated as 3 STARS (levels) or higher within the TQRIS. It further proposes that all preschool-aged children will have access to publically funded pre-K programs and that all preschool Children with High Needs will participate at least part time in high quality programs. Vermont also will develop, evaluate, and implement a common and aligned continuum of Early Learning and Development Standards from birth – 8 and a comprehensive assessment system for birth – 6. These will be incorporated within the TQRIS. The application proposes 13 interconnected goals and provides information regarding the current status of work towards each goal and it outlines clear key activities to address each of the identified goals. These goals are tied to narratives and information provided in the remaining sections of the application. The rationale for areas addressed within C, D, and E is provided for most of these areas and is tied to specific activities and goals for most of these areas. Each of the areas addresses an area of need within the state leading to increased quality of programs and access to programs for children and families. Vermont addresses each selection criteria in focused investment area C. The state currently has a set of early learning standards for kindergarten entry and a draft set for infants and toddlers. The current early learning standards are aligned with the K – 3 standards. There is no evidence of cultural/linguistic diversity and the standards do not address the early preschool ages. The state plans to establish a common and fully aligned continuum of Early Learning and Development Standards from birth - 8. The application identifies key activities likely to result in achieving this goal such as expanding the Early Learning and Development Standards to include birth – age 3. Validating the full set of standards (birth – 8) and assuring that they cover Essential Domains of School Readiness (C1). To address C2 (Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems), the application proposes to develop a Comprehensive Assessment System for birth – 6 years of age. Key activities will include examining current policy and practice, integrating and aligning assessments across disciplines, expanding the use of the GOLD formative assessment throughout all regulated centers and family child care homes and infants/toddler and preschool settings and adoption of the CLASS assessment of the quality of adult-child

interaction, and expanding screening so that all children are screened by one year and referred by three years of age if concerns are identified. One problem with the screening goal is the gap between screening and referral. Children should be referred to determine eligibility for services as soon as they fail a screening. The goal for C3 is to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children from the prenatal period through age six. The Child Information System (CIS) is a high quality system that integrates several services and provides a systems point of contact for families and a system of assessment and services to address health, behavioral, and developmental needs. The CIS currently does not impact all children, families, and programs. The state will expand the CIS by funding additional coordinator positions in order to increase capacity to reach additional children and families and to expand programs that are already in place such as home visiting services for Children with High Needs, the I'm moving, I'm learning program, and the Nurse Family Partnership model. The state also will address C4 Engaging and supporting families by developing a set of family engagement standards and using information obtained from focus groups with families to develop more responsive and supportive family engagement practices and services that meet their needs. The application indicates that the state will address D1, Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and progression of credentials. The state outlines key activities to address this area but D1 is not explicitly addressed in the application. That application indicates that the state will expand the early childhood apprenticeship program which provides mentoring, coaching, and consultation as a means of supporting Early Childhood Educators (D2) to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The state also addressed focused investment areas E1 understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry and E2 building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies. The current Kindergarten Readiness Survey does not have validity regarding its use with English Learners, some domains have not been aligned with state standards, and outcomes are not included in a statewide longitudinal data system. The state will revise the existing assessment, align it with standards, and evaluate validity for different groups of Children with High Needs as well as provide professional development training in using the assessment. It also will develop an Early Childhood Data Governance Council to guide the enhancement and integration of data into a common and comprehensive reporting system.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10	9
<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> <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</p> <p>(3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and</p> <p>(c) Demonstrating commitment to the State Plan from a broad group of stakeholders that will assist the State in reaching the ambitious yet achievable goals outlined in response to selection criterion (A)(2)(a), including by obtaining--</p> <p>(1) Detailed and persuasive letters of intent or support from Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and, if applicable, local early learning councils; and</p> <p>(2) Letters of intent or support from such other stakeholders as Early Childhood Educators or their</p>		

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)

Vermont has identified the Department for Children and Families within the Agency of Human Services as the Lead Agency and provided a master agreement between the Lead Agency and participating state agencies: Department of Health, Department of Education, and the Building Bright Futures Council. These agencies and the programs they represent have agreed to assist the Lead Agency in implementing the tasks and activities described in the RTT-ELC application and to complete the scope of work and responsibilities identified for each agency. They also have agreed to use statewide Early Learning and Development Standards, statewide Early Learning and Development Programs, a statewide TQRIS, and a Workforce Knowledge and Development Framework and progression of credentials. The state has designated the (already existing) Building Bright Futures Council and regional councils as the governance structures for implementing the proposed RTT-ELC program within the Lead Agency. The application provides clearly articulated goals and timelines for aligning and coordinating agencies, programs, councils across the state and proposed activities (A3a). The application identifies a consensus model for decision making which increases collaboration and communication among partners. One innovative approach identified in the application is the proposed Leadership Institute that will support interagency collaboration and decision making among stakeholders. The application provided an organizational chart, the governance-related roles and responsibilities (scope of work) table and MOUs and strong letters of support from intermediary organizations and local early learning councils (A3b). The scope of work descriptions are linked to the RTT-ELC selection criteria and clearly address the goals of the proposed State Plan. Representatives from early childhood programs, Early Childhood Educators, and Parent Child Centers are included in the Regional Councils however parents and families are not specifically included as members of the Building Bright Futures Council, the RTT-ELC Implementation Team, or Regional Councils which limits the representation of families in planning and implementation activities (A-3a3). The State Plan includes a broad group of stakeholders as evidenced in letters of support from stakeholders such as Head Start, Vermont Academy of Pediatricians, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children, Vermont Division for Early Childhood, Vermont Philanthropic Group, Vermont Family Network, and the Department of Labor/Vermont Child Care Industry Careers Council (A3c).

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

The extent to which the State Plan--

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

The proposed State Plan will partially build on and leverage existing investments and resources from current programs and initiatives that have been started or are already established in the state such as Building Bright Futures Direct Services, CCDF dollars to support the state TQRIS (STARS), and the MIECH Home Visiting and CIS programs, and the Parent Child Centers State General Fund. However, all of the state partner agencies declined to set aside or contribute additional resources to achieve the proposed plan and the amount of funding identified in Table A41 does not increase over the four years of the project. This limits the state's ability to leverage (A4a). The Governor of Vermont has identified a future priority to reinvest savings from reforms into early learning and development initiatives and programs. This funding, if appropriated, will be used to sustain projects after the grant has ended. In addition, the state plans to repurpose current investments to support successful programs and strategies from the RTT-ELC grant. The state currently receives funding for early childhood projects from private and local resources. To sustain and increase funding from these resources, Vermont intends to increase current public information campaigns and to highlight the need to support the goals and projects of the RTT-ELC grant. The State Advisory Council has formed a Communications and Marketing Committee to develop a plan for statewide outreach campaigns to increase public awareness of the importance of support growth and development during the early childhood years and the benefits from high quality child care programs that are associated with the TQRIS (A4c). The application identifies the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, and Participating Programs and partners and links funding to specific activities and initiatives, that are consistent with the State Plan (A4b). The detailed budget does demonstrate current support, continued support of other existing funds at current levels, and intends to increase support from the private sector and changes in legislation and repurposing of state funds. Together, these are appropriate to conducting the proposed projects (in combination with the requested RTT-ELC funding) and would be likely to sustain programs after the grant has ended.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

Vermont has a TQRIS (Vermont STARS) that was developed in 2004 following collaborative efforts of providers, private funding and national experts (B1a). The TQRIS is based on a statewide set of Program Standards (B1a) that include five of the six elements of Program Standards: Early Learning and Development Standards, Comprehensive Assessment System, qualified workforce, family engagement, and Health Promotion Standards. The current TQRIS does not include effective data practices and the Comprehensive Assessment System does not include Screening Measures and only minimally addresses the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions through environmental rating scales (see Table (A) (1)-7). Health promotion and nutrition practices and policies are built into the STARS system as is evaluation of the quality of the program environment. The TQRIS is aligned with the Vermont Early Learning and Development Standards and the NLCDC teacher standards and the state has established articulations between STARS and national organizations such as NAEYC, NAFCC, NAA, and Head Start which each also have Program Standards. Currently, Vermont has programs that have achieved each of the five levels of quality and the application states that this demonstrates that the tiers within STARS are able to differentiate quality between programs (B1b). Examination of the written descriptions of requirements between tiers or levels does indicate differences in requirements across tiers. However, the state has not conducted research to confirm the ability to differentiate quality between tiers. The application indicates that the state will contract with a third party evaluator who will conduct a comprehensive study of the TQRIS. All public preschool programs and school-based programs providing Pre-K services must be part of the STARS-TQRIS. Head Start programs have the option to participate in the TQRIS as do licensed programs. A little over half (56%) of the licensed programs participate in STARS but only 14% of family child care homes currently participate in STARS. The state proposes to increase the low participation of family child care homes and to increase the participation of

licensed programs. The STARS-TQRIS is linked to the state licensing system through differential reimbursements for programs that are part of the TQRIS and within the TQRIS, differential payments based on level of quality achieved, however, not all programs participate in the Vermont TQRIS (B1c). The state has established a STARS Oversight Committee with multi-program representation that provides advice on how to improve and support the TQRIS program. Plans are to improve the TQRIS by evaluating and updating the health and nutrition policies and to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the TQRIS system as well as increasing the frequency of licensing visits. Currently licensing requirements only address minimal elements of Program Standards, a qualified workforce and health promotion practices. Increasing minimal elements of licensing standards will be addressed as part of the plan to improve the TQRIS.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

Currently all public pre-K programs and programs serving children eligible for pre-K services must participate in the TQRIS-STARS and attain high levels of quality (top 2-3 tiers). All Head Start programs also participate in the TQRIS. Programs that receive funds from the CCDF program also have the options to participate in the TQRIS (B2a). The state currently provides differential payments to programs based on the quality level achieved within the TQRIS with higher quality levels resulting in higher rates of reimbursement. This can result in families paying lower fees as the programs receive additional dollars from the state and provides incentives for programs to participate in the TQRIS and to move to higher levels of quality. Vermont intends to expand incentives and rewards as a means of increasing participation in the TQRIS and to sustain this model through dedicated state funds after the grant has ended (B2b). In addition, the state will expand the number of public pre-K and Head Start programs and the number of funded slots for children living in poverty in order to provide greater access to high quality programs Children with High Needs and their families. Vermont also will conduct a Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) policy analysis to identify ways to improve economic security and stability for children with High Needs and their families. Specific strategies to help more families afford high quality child care are not provided in the application and will depend on the outcomes of the CCFA policy analysis. Suggestions of possible outcomes or strategies to support families should have been included. Section B4 discusses plans to promote and support the development of additional programs that participate in the TQRIS-STARS and funding for families. The state also intends to propose legislation to develop a dedicated quality fund that is supported by state funds as well as private sector matching funds. Table (B)(2)(c) provides baseline and targeted outcomes for increasing the number of programs participating in the TQRIS for each grant funded year. The yearly targets are achievable but are somewhat low (e.g., by 2015 the target is 65% of programs receiving CCDF funds) and do not lead to all programs participating in TQRIS by the end of the grant period (B2c). The application also does not include targets for increasing the number of Family Child Care Homes and yet they report that only 14% currently participate in TQRIS.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	4

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 application indicates that the state currently does not monitor programs with appropriate frequency. The state intends to increase the frequency of monitoring using grant funds to hire and train additional program monitors. Other than frequency, little information is provided regarding the current monitoring processes and procedures employed by the state and little information about the plan for monitoring is provided. The application identifies activities (Goal 4.4 and 4.5) that indicate the state will determine the frequency of on-site monitoring, systems for training monitors, minimal standards for reliability in conducting the environmental rating scales (ERS) and assessing programs participating in the TQRIS-STARs, and annual training. Little additional information is provided to indicate the state's plan for achieving these goals. For example, the application does not provide information about how licensing field specialists will be trained to administer and use the various scales, what level of administration and scoring reliability is required, how frequently reliability will be assessed (B3a). Vermont will revise child care regulatory standards and processes. This applies to all licensed programs that may or may not participate in the TQRIS. Note, that funds are not requested for this activity. The state currently maintains the Bright Futures Information System and STARs website which provide information about the TQRIS and levels of quality and information on regulatory compliance and the historical and current reports on compliance and rating of quality levels within the TQRIS. This information can be accessed by families and providers (B3b). The STARs also provides a brochure that includes information for families about the TQRIS. These resources provide quality rating and licensing information to parents. However, the application identifies a goal to provide more in depth information to families for families regarding the STARs ratings for providers but it does not discuss methods for doing this and does not discuss providing additional information to parents such as displaying quality information on site.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

Vermont requires all programs that provide pre-K services to have attained a quality rating level of 3 or higher. However, not all child care programs/LEAs (local education agencies) provide pre-K services. The state intends to increase the number of community based and Head Start programs providing pre-K services (and Early Head Start programs for infants and toddlers) as a means of increasing options for families to access high quality programs. Vermont provides differential payments to all enrolled programs based on the quality level achieved within the TQRIS-STARs with programs with higher levels receiving higher rates of reimbursement. The differential reimbursement is one strategy for supporting programs to continuously improve (B4a). Additional strategies are not discussed resulting in minimal policies and practices to provide support and incentives for Early

Learning and Development Programs to continuously improve. Vermont will conduct a policy and fiscal analysis regarding Vermont's Child Care financial Assistance Program to create additional and sustained funding to support families in accessing high quality early learning and development programs. This is likely to provide information that the state can use to develop supports to help families access high quality programs. The timeline for conducting the policy and fiscal analysis and then implementing changes is not ambitious and does result in timely implementation of the plan. The state intends to spend the first year framing the question, reviewing research, and establishing a research team. The second year will be spent conducting research and analyzing data. In year three, the team will make policy recommendations that if passed can be included in the 2015 budget. The application details plans to increase the number of pre-K programs (Vermont does not currently have universal access to Pre-K programs) and to sustain those programs over time as a means of increasing access to high quality programs for Children with High Needs. The development of these programs includes participation by organizations in the private sector. The state also intends to expand the number of Head Start and Early Head Start programs and partnerships between Head Start and community programs (B4b). It does not discuss increasing the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that will provide services to Children with High Needs at the infants and toddlers ages. Table (B)(4)(c)(1) identifies targets for the number of programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS. The targeted goals are achievable but are not sufficiently ambitious (B4c). The targets per year only increase 2% for programs to receive ratings of 3, 4, and 5. Likewise, Table (B)(4)(c)(2) increases the percent of children enrolled in Early Learning and Development Programs that are in the top tiers by only 7% (CCDF and Part C funded programs). The table also does not identify the number of children with disabilities in the state that are served by programs that receive IDEA Part B 619 funding.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

The current program has not been formally assessed. This section does not outline a plan to validate the effectiveness of the TQRIS. It describes that a previous consultation from a national expert helped them identify questions to be addressed in an evaluation. It then states that Vermont will hire an independent evaluator to conduct an evaluation but little other information is provided regarding the questions to be evaluated, research-based measures to be used, research designs, and measures of progress (B5a and b).

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

Each State must address in its application--

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

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

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(1)

The state has a set of early learning standards for kindergarten entry and a draft set for infants and toddlers. The current early learning standards are aligned with the K – 3 standards and are included within the TQRIS. There is no evidence of cultural/linguistic diversity and the standards do not address the early preschool ages but users are encouraged to make adaptations as necessary for individual children. Vermont plans to develop a new comprehensive set of standards that address the birth – kindergarten age levels and to incorporate these within the TQRIS (B5c). The state has outlined a previously effective process for developing the standards which includes multidisciplinary and multi-agency input. This process will be carried out by a subcommittee that includes agency staff, practitioners, consultants, and researchers. The subcommittee will review, discuss, and come to consensus concerning revisions to the draft infant toddler standards and the current kindergarten entry standards. Part of the review process will focus on the cultural, linguistic, and developmental appropriateness of the standards. The subcommittee then will align the comprehensive 0-5 standards with the K – 3 academic standards (C1a, b). The state plans to provide professional development training to providers using a train the trainers model. They also will evaluate provider knowledge and use of the revised standards and develop a family guide related to the revised standards. As with the current standards, the revised standards will be incorporated into the Program Standards of the TQRIS, curricular and assessment activities, and Comprehensive Assessment Plan (C1c, d).

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

The narrative and key activities for Goal 7.1 are missing. This goal addresses the assessment of the current assessment system, integrating and aligning assessments across disciplines and promoting implementation and coordination at the local level (C2a, c, d). As a result, it is not clear what developmental screening tool is being used and how it fits within the comprehensive assessment system. The Early Learning and Development Program previously used two different formative assessment tools (i.e., not a universal formative assessment system) and the degree to which teachers use assessment outcomes to inform practice varies. An Ad Hoc group adopted the research-based GOLD in 2010 for pre-K programs and the state plans to expand the use of this assessment to programs that provide services to infants and toddlers (C2a, b, d). The state will provide training and on-site coaching in administering, interpreting, and using assessment outcomes for Early Childhood Educators. The application also proposes to adopt the CLASS assessment as a Measure of the Quality of Adult-Child Interaction for all programs and to train staff to complete this assessment. These assessments will be included in the TQRIS. The timeframe for the goals of having 95% of children screened by age two and 90% referred for services by age

three was insufficient. More ambitious goals would be to have children screened by age one and to refer for services following screening. It is not clear why there would be a latency between screening and referral. In addition, the alignment between screening, formative assessment, and referral is not described as would be required in a Comprehensive Assessment System (C2c)

	Available	Score
(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.	15	9
<p>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--</p> <p>(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;</p> <p>(b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;</p> <p>(c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and</p> <p>(d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--</p> <p>(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);</p> <p>(2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and</p> <p>(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.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(3)		
<p>The CIS is a high quality system integrating several services and providing a systems point of contact for families and that provides a system of assessment and services to address health, behavioral, and developmental needs. It provides a common set of outcomes and performance measures for each organization/program. The section does not discuss establishing a progression of standards related to health and safety, behavioral screening and follow-up, and physical, social, and emotional development (C3a). The state will expand the CIS by funding additional coordinator positions in order to increase capacity to reach additional children and families and to expand programs that are already in place such as the I'm Moving, I'm Learning Program and the Nurse Family Partnership model which promote healthy eating habits, nutrition, and physical activity (C3c). The state will provide training to all family child care homes and licensed programs on the I'm Moving, I'm Learning Program. The state plans to hire and train additional regional coordinators to provide support and technical assistance to programs and additional CIS Nursing staff to provide support to families and home health agencies (C3b, c). The state leverages current resources using the primary Service Coordinator and Consultation Team in which one member works with families rather than multiple team members providing direct services (C3d). Children will be screened using screening measures (Ages and Stages) that are aligned with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) and well child care screening measures (C3d1 and 3) but alignment and integration of the EPSDT and well child care screening and referral systems to other referral agencies or programs (e.g., early intervention Part C and preschool special education Part B of IDEA) is not described (C3d2). The targets identified in Table (C) (3) (d) are low. The state reports that 89.5% of children currently participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well child care but they only increase the targets by 1 – 2% per year so that by the end of the project 95% participate. Likewise, the number of children with high needs that currently are screened ranges from 24-33.6%. The targets increase 10% per year resulting in only 64-73% of children being screened by 2015.</p>		

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	15	12
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--</p> <p>(a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;</p> <p>(b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going</p>		

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 state does not have a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement (C4a) but it does have several practices in place to support family engagement and family engagement is built into the TQRIS levels (outlined in Table A1-9) (C4c). The state intends to develop and evaluate a statewide framework for family engagement and a universal set of family engagement standards that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Vermont will conduct focus group dialogues with families who access informal child care services or who do not access eligible services to identify their needs. This information will be helpful as the state designs services and standards that are responsive to and address family needs. The new standards will be integrated with the Early Learning Standards and will be employed across other existing programs within the early care, health, and education systems (C4c). The application states that Vermont will provide training and support to Early Childhood Educators by integrating the standards within the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and TQRIS although specific information about who will provide training, the frequency of training, and ongoing support is addressed (C4b).

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

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

	Available	Score
(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.	20	18

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)

Section A2 indicates that the state is writing to both parts of this focused investment area but only the heading for D2 is presented in this section. However, the state does include information on Table A1-10 about the status of early learning and workforce credentials currently available in the state and the Appendix provides evidence of the profession of core competencies for Early Childhood Educators within Vermont's unified professional development system (Northern Lights Career Development Center (NLCDC). This is aligned with the Department of Education's regulations regarding teacher qualifications (D1b). Vermont has developed many components of a high quality common, statewide Workforce and Knowledge and Competency Framework including alignment with the Early Learning and Development Standards, essential domains of kindergarten readiness, behavior management strategies and social emotional development(D1a). It does not include feedback from post secondary institutions and other experts and Early Childhood Educators (D1c). However, the state proposes in D2 to engage post secondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning their coursework and professional development opportunities with the current Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and credential (D1c). The additional colleges will increase the number of institutions providing coursework across the state, which will provide training opportunities that are in close proximity to all of the workforce.

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in Improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	20	10

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

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

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

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

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

Information Goals 10.1, 10.2, 10.5, and 10.6 are missing from the application. It is not clear what these goals addressed or what type of information they may have added to the application. The application states that few Early Childhood Educators are aware of and participate in the options for improving knowledge, skills, and competencies. Goals 10.3 and 10.4 will expand an existing higher education task force in an effort to include all colleges within the state in providing multiple pathways for Early Childhood Educators to complete preservice training and to obtain degrees or credentials (D2a). The additional colleges will increase the number of institutions providing coursework across the state, enabling them to offer training in close proximity to all providers. The application also identifies several activities to assist Early Childhood Educators such as career advising, grants, scholarships and tuition-free courses, apprenticeships and coaching, Child Care Apprenticeship Program which leads to a CDA credential, and mentoring programs for family child care homes, and 1:1 support through the MATCH program (D2b). The state also proposes to develop a framework (Multi-tiered system of support [MTSS]) that will function as Early Childhood Educator training and technical assistance regional networks. The application does not describe how the policies and incentives to promote professional improvement will be aligned with the Comprehensive Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework (D2b). Minimal information is provided to address D2c. The application states that the apprenticeship program will report to the Child Development Division on the number of individuals and family homes completing the program. The state will track the number of participants that have obtained level IIIB and Step One of the director credential. The application does not discuss publicly reporting aggregated data. The application identifies the number and percentage of children gaining progress as a milestone related to increased training and support for providers. It does not describe how this will be measured/evaluated. The goals for the number of Early Childhood Educators who will be credentialed by an aligned institution is not ambitious. The baseline level is 744 and this increases to 882 by 2015. The application states that the 5% increase is a conservative estimate in order to allow educators time to complete training and programs. However, several of the credentials do not require four-year degrees. For example, the Program Director credential requires 21 hours of credit, Level IIIB requires an Associate degree or completion of the Apprenticeship program or 21 hours of related college credits, Level II requires a CDA credential or 12 approved hours of college credits, and Level I requires completion of a Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals course.

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	14

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 Kindergarten Readiness Survey was not included in the appendix as stated. The current Kindergarten Readiness Survey is aligned with the Vermont Early Learning and Development Standards but it has not been validated for use with English Language Learners and children with disabilities. In addition, the domain of physical well-being and motor has not been aligned with Early Learning and Development Standards. The outcomes are not included in a statewide longitudinal data system and they have seldom been used by teachers to inform instruction, although the state has used child outcomes data to identify systems-wide strengths and needs for improvement in Early Learning and Development Programs and to request legislation to support early learning in Vermont (E1a, b, d). The application states that the Ready Kindergarten Survey needs to be reviewed and updated and then aligned with the updated Early Learning and Development Standards and the K – 3 standards. The application includes a plan to revise the existing assessment and to assure that Essential Domains of School Readiness are addressed, align the revised assessment with updated early learning and K – 3 state standards (E1a), pilot the assessment with a sample of programs, evaluate reliability and validity for different groups of children (E1b), and provide professional development training for teachers. The state also will develop a web-based reporting system to facilitate timely use of the data at the state level (D1d). The revised assessment will be implemented statewide by 2014 (E1c). The application does not directly address how the plan to implement a common statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment will be funded with federal and state resources other than those provided by the grant (E1d).

	Available	Score
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(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	20
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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 currently has several data systems that do not necessarily align and share information about children, families, programs, and staff. For example, Vermont has a comprehensive early childhood data system (Building Bright Futures Information System). This system has unique identifiers at child, family, workforce, and program levels and is statewide and web-based. It does not identify type of program. A separate system, Department of Education Data Warehouse, includes data for state funded pre-K and school-aged students but also does not identify type of pre-K program children attend. Information about state pre-K teachers also is maintained but information on other teachers is not maintained. Other data systems are maintained by specific programs or address specific elements such as Head Start, the Vermont Family and Child System, Medicaid, Health and Immunizations. Vermont will establish an Early Childhood Data Governance Council that will guide the enhancement and integration of the existing data reporting systems into a unified system (E2b). The revised and expanded system will include the Essential Data Elements (E2a) including include a workforce, instructor, and course registry; TQRIS quality level status; demographic information, child outcomes from the GOLD assessment, the Kindergarten Readiness Survey (or other developed assessment), developmental screening outcomes; and that links data across multiple systems (E2d). The system will be designed using standardized data elements that are easy to enter and readily available (E2c). The application states that the uniform, longitudinal data system will meet the Data System Oversight Requirements (E2d) and federal, state, and local privacy laws. Oversight for this will be provided by the Early Childhood Data Governance Council.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	196

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

Priorities

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

To meet this priority, the State must. In its application--

- (a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or
- (b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

Comments on (P)(3)

The applicant addressed selection criteria in E1 and earned 70% of the maximum points available for that criterion (b).

Absolute Priority

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

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

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

Comments on Absolute Priority

Vermont has developed a somewhat ambitious and achievable reform agenda that builds on progress to date. The state will build on effective partnerships across state and local agencies, private sector, and state organizations and current and recently passed legislation to support Early Childhood Education. The application will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by expanding effective programs and practices throughout the state. Vermont currently has a five-level TQRIS, Early Learning and Development Standards for preschool-aged children, and a Kindergarten Entry Assessment. The plan proposes to build on existing standards to develop an aligned set of standards from birth – five year of age and to develop a set of family engagement standards. The application has a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and discusses current and new strategies to support providers in improving their knowledge and skills. The state will merge several disparate data collection systems into a uniform, statewide longitudinal data system with oversight provided by an Early Childhood Data Governance Council. The application builds in sustainability of the program through legislative changes or changes to funding streams after the grant period has ended. The proposed agenda is likely to increase the number of Children with High Needs in high quality programs that are able to enter Kindergarten ready to success. However, goals that are more ambitious could have been proposed which would have resulted in even higher numbers of Children with High Needs entering Kindergarten ready to learn.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # VT-5034

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 9:35 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
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	17
<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

Comment on (A)(1)
<p>--This applicant demonstrates a significant past and current commitment to and investment in the early development and learning of young children in their state, which is defined as prenatal through 8 years of age. It is clear through the level of state-funding that has been poured into programs in this State that early childhood development and learning is a high priority for at least the past two decades, despite a change in governing political parties. However, there is some concern that there has been no program expansion in Head Start since 2007. --Additionally, this applicant clearly defines their population of Children with High Needs, going above and beyond the accepted definition of populations set forth by the RTT-ELC NIA to recognize other vulnerable populations that exist in their communities. However, there are several of these additional vulnerable populations where data are not provided in Table A1-2 (i.e., children in custody of grandparents or other kin, children who are geographically isolated). While it is reasonable that it is difficult to gather data on these children and that they may already be included in a separate category, some information as to how this applicant would identify and seek to gain data on total numbers would be useful if they expect to meet their specific needs. --This applicant provides extensive evidence and comprehensive descriptions of the state- and community-level programs that are providing services and successfully reaching the intended audience, mostly as a result of implemented policies and legislation. Most of these programs have seen an increase in funding throughout the recent economic downturn that the State and the nation has experienced; it is clear that policymakers in the state have not wavered in their prioritization of early childhood throughout the last several years. Most notable is the legislation of Act 62 in 2007, which has lead the State to make significant progress in their program development, development of high standards, and statewide funding. Also, this applicant's overall commitment to early learning and development is further evidenced by the amount of private sector funding that has been secured for programs. This demonstrates the ability this applicant has to create partnerships and prioritize sustainability through a diversification of funds. --This applicant has provided strong data with rationale/further explanation to support the fact that there has been an increase in the number of Children with High Needs who are participating in early learning programs. While at times the increase has been slight, there has been a slow and steady increase in numbers in every program. However, it is not clear how/if Children with High Needs are being served by privately-funded early learning</p>

programs. A comprehensive picture of all programs serving young children in the state is lacking. --This applicant again provides impressive evidence of their current status in key areas that form all of the building blocks for a high quality early learning and development system. Their early learning standards for 3-5 year olds are well vetted and include a guidebook for families. This is one example of how this applicant engages families in their early learning system. They have implemented several programs that comprehensively meet the health needs of children and families. This reviewer is particularly impressed with the holistic approach this State seems to take with the health of young children, including social and emotional, cognitive, and language health and development included with physical health and development. This applicant is also involved in collecting longitudinal data on the well-being and development of young children, tracking data at key points in development, and coupling these data with all domains of learning and development at entry into kindergarten. Furthermore, this applicant's prioritization of health is evident by their working relationships with the AAP and AFP on a statewide quality improvement project that focuses on early screening for children at risk for developmental delays. This applicant also seems to engage and support families, most notably by their community-level programs. As presented in the application, it is agreed that it would be helpful to develop a set of standards to inform this work with the purpose of streamlining efforts to involve families in their child's learning and development. Further, it is clear that this state prioritizes their early childhood workforce through the provision of their statewide, community-implemented career development centers and the existence of community-level "support groups." There is no doubt that early childhood educators have one of the hardest and most important jobs in the world; thus they deserve a strong, committed support network to recharge and continue to be successful. Last, this applicant appears to have a well-established Kindergarten Assessment. Implemented since 2000, it surveys all kindergarten teachers annually. This illustrates a strong history and the applicant's commitment to data-informed practice and change. --Again, this applicant has proven through a variety of information that enhancing early child development and learning and meeting the needs of Children with High Needs are highly valued in their State.

	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)

--This applicant provides a highly organized and articulate overview of their reform agenda and goals in this section. Overall, the application proposes 13 main goals that address multiple aspects of system reform, including capacity building, assessment of current resources and programs, sustainability, and standards revision and creation. The system-wide goals are appropriately placed with regard to governance and the programmatic goals often include community partners. Given that the majority of this state is rural, these propositions illustrate the applicant's knowledge of and sensitivity to the significance of the "local voice." --The presented goals are certainly ambitious, but thoughtful and respectful of resources and communities. Thus, they appear to be reasonable and achievable. This applicant proposes a clear plan for improving outcomes for Children with High Needs a number of ways, including, but not limited to supplementing the Early Head Start and Head Start programs, in eliminating program transition for families, and proposing to enroll the majority of Children with High Needs in programs in the three top tiers of their TQRIS. These activities (along with others listed) illustrate a comprehensive approach to prioritizing this population. --It is evident that these 13 goals, when brought together, constitute a comprehensive and progressive approach that is highly likely to result in making and sustaining a quality early childhood system in this State. --Further, this applicant chose to respond to all Focused Investment areas. This seems appropriate given the quality description of their current status and need presented in Section A1.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

--This applicant presents a clear and comprehensive explanation of their governance structure to implement their state plan. This structure is an entity that was established by state statute in 2010 and recently obtained their 501(c) 3 status. The applicant's proposal to have this organization lead their early childhood system is strong as it's clear from their history (however recent) that the State intends to build a sustainable and long-term system. Also, the fact that this entity is "staffed" by current statewide leaders is a plus. However, this history is of some concern as the organization as a whole has no proven track record. Additionally, the applicant proposes to operate a number of Regional Council Coordinators to act as liaisons between the main governing entities and the locally-based programs. The purpose and role of these coordinators is not clear. It is of some concern that these roles will add an additional and unnecessary "top-down" layer, whereby resources may not be used as efficiently or effectively as they could be. Last, it is of concern that there is no parent/guardian representation on the State Council as they are appropriate partners in the early childhood system. --The governance-related roles and responsibilities for the proposed parties are thoughtful and clearly presented in the Master Agreement and corresponding scopes of work presented at the beginning of the application. The information provided appears appropriate for each agency. --This applicant provides some information about how decisions will be made, that is by consensus or, if this is not possible, they will be brought to the governing council. This seems appropriate, but it is not clear how "consensus" is defined. It is of concern to this reviewer that a major decision could be made if several members of the governing council are against it, for example a 6-5 vote. More specific information on this process would be useful. --This applicant presents a progressive and locally-minded process for delivering programs and services related to the state plan, which is a leadership model implemented at the local level. In this excellent model, the applicant proposes to involve a variety of stakeholders, including businesses, parents/guardians, etc. However, families of children with high needs are not mentioned specifically. More information as to how this population (specific to each locality) will be engaged is needed. A significant benefit to this plan is that the applicant proposes to develop a "menu" of evidence-based services that each locality will be able to choose from to meet the specific needs of their community with regard to early learning and development. This passes the ownership and implementation responsibilities to each community, thereby involving integrated stakeholders and those who are invested in their neighborhood. --This applicant provides valid scopes of work, and terms and conditions from each participating agency, including requested signatures; and impressive and positive letters of support from a variety of state-, region-, and local-level stakeholders.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	10

The extent to which the State Plan--

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

--Overall, the proposed budget appears reasonable and adequate to support the applicant's proposed plan. A notable aspect of the budget is that the majority of funds will go to the localities in which the proposed programs are being implemented, as opposed to administrative duties. This reflects the applicant's constant prioritization of giving local communities a voice and ownership over their early childhood programs. --Most of the numbers in the budget tables calculate accurately. However, the four-year totals were not provided and several cells were left blank. --The narratives appropriately explain what the line items will fund, which seems to match and justify activities in the proposed plan. --This applicant also provides evidence throughout the application of monies outside of the Race to the Top (RTT) funds that will continue to go towards existing supportive programs. This is particularly illustrated in the applicant's table (a)(4)-1 which details how nine other funding sources will support their early childhood system, including but not limited to Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), social services block grant, home visiting, and a local foundation. Yet, it is unclear how the state general fund will support this system financially. This entity is listed but is left blank in the table. --Also, it is evident that the administration prioritizes building sustainable programs as illustrated in the plan to repurpose funds from other system reform (corrections systems) or revenue programs (e.g. Building Bright specialized license plates) into the early childhood learning and development system. These facts strengthen their ability to sustain and build upon their proposed activities after this grant period is over.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10	5

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

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

(1) Early Learning and Development Standards;

(2) A Comprehensive Assessment System;

(3) Early Childhood Educator qualifications;

(4) Family engagement strategies;

(5) Health promotion practices; and

(6) Effective data practices:

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(1)

--This applicant's TQRIS (Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System [STARS]) is thoroughly integrated into their state plan. STARS was developed in 2004 and has since gone through an assessment with regard to how it utilizes national accreditation standards. More than half of their licensed centers and more than 10% of family home providers are participants. These data illustrate the significant work that has been put into a relatively new ratings system. --From the evidence provided, it is clear that STARS is based on several of the Program Standards listed in the RTT NIA, including the applicant's Early Learning Guidelines, educator qualifications, and family engagement. There is some question, however, about the STARS current ability to weave in specific assessments, health promotion strategies, and effective data practices, and clarification is needed on how the system operationalizes specific levels of educator qualifications. More specifically, the comprehensive assessment system does not address screening, and data practices are included for Head Start, but not specifically within the STARS. Moreover, Head Start is not necessarily part of STARS. --This applicant notes that assessments are used to inform curriculum development and that teachers use assessments to note specific criteria regarding children's development, however a specific assessment tool is not discussed. It is unclear whether providers who participate in STARS are required to use specific assessments in order to achieve this score, or if they are self-chosen. It is mentioned briefly that the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) is used, which is an excellent tool. However, it is not mentioned elsewhere at this point. --With regard to the inclusion of health promotion, there are no specific health and safety standards mentioned in STARS. This is surprising given the applicant's prioritization of holistic health, as evidenced greatly in the first part of the application. However, it is noted that the health promotion piece of STARS would be examined for improvement in the future. A more specific plan of how and when this will happen is not strongly described in this proposal. --Only slight information is given about the use of data practices in STARS. For example, it is noted that STARS uses current data collection systems. More detail is necessary to understand completely how the applicant collects, evaluates, and disseminates data on STARS. --In general, this reviewer found the STARS quality levels appropriate based on the provided criteria per level. However, some levels appear to be slightly vague and mostly left up to interpretation, thus not easily measurable. Also, it was difficult to determine the appropriateness of the educator qualification standards. According to STARS, they are based on completion of the DOE-approved worksheet that assesses items such as education level and professional development hours. This is a sensible method for measuring quality of staff, but since the worksheet is not given, it is difficult to assess whether it is an appropriate measurement of quality regarding this topic. --Also, this applicant provided no information as to how this program strives to meet the needs of children with high needs in their state. --It is clear that stars is linked to the state licensing system as evidenced by the fact that their first "arena" (out of five) is regulatory compliance history, which rates programs on how they have complied with state regulations and the results of a licensing on-site inspection within the last two years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

--A strength of this section is that legislation was passed that requires all public preschool programs and any program serving children eligible for preschool funding to participate in STARS and to have a high quality rating, defined as the top three tiers (3-5). This illustrates this applicant's ability to think, plan and implement progressive ideas for moving a system forward. Additionally, early learning and development programs funded under Title 1 of the ESEA are included in this group of programs because they are state funded programs. --For the remaining program types, programs funded under IDEA, Part C and programs receiving CCDF funds, this applicant proposes a slow and steady increase in STARS participation, with an annual increase of 7-10%. As a result, by the end of the RTT funding cycle, IDEA, Part C programs and CCDF programs will have increased by a total of 86.3% and 65%, respectively. This reviewer determines this to be reasonable and ambitious. Additionally, this plan illustrates the applicant's desire to utilize resources effectively over the four years to meet the intended results. --One area of concern is the fact that the applicant's milestones and measures for Goal 4.2 do not include the proposed increase in the number of programs participating in stars (as noted in performance measures for b2) as a benchmark. The first benchmark, "increase in the number of towns with public Pre-K programs" is accurate considering the proposed activities, but these data alone will not provide evidence for this goal. --One activity this applicant proposes to implement using RTT funds is to ensure that there is at least one center or home-based program that has a 4 or 5 star level in every community across the state. They also propose to create a "quality fund", funded by both public and private finances, with the purpose of providing incentives to high quality centers. These strategies, indirectly, could lead to helping more families afford high quality child care, but is unclear how these funds may filter down to the family-level. Similarly, it is not specifically addressed how families will better be able to afford high quality programs. --Additionally, this applicant proposes to convene a Task Force to conduct an analysis of the current status of incentives provided by STARS. Conducting an assessment to learn about improvements is an effective strategy. However, it is proposed that recommendations will be finalized and presented in the third quarter of year one of the grant cycle. It is unclear whether this is realistic given that key staff will need to be hired at the beginning of the first year. It is a concern of this reviewer that there may be too much planned for the first quarters of 2012.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	4

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)

--This applicant provided relevant background for revising their state regulations and expanding their capacity to regulate programs across the state, based on a 2009 National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) report. As a result, the applicant has an existing plan in place to do so, including supportive funds. Additionally, the applicant proposes to convene a variety of stakeholders together to update this document. However, this applicant proposes to complete this revision in the first year. This seems like an unrealistic timeline given the parties involved and the complexity of such a revision. Also, no details are given as to how the Licensing Field Specialists (existing and proposed 4 new positions) will be trained on the new regulations, which would be implemented in the second year of the grant cycle. --This applicant does acknowledge the use of all of the Environmental Ratings Scales (ITERS and ECERS) which is a thoughtful and appropriate choice for an assessment tool. However, it is unclear whether the revised versions will be used (ITERS-R and ECERS-R) as this is not stated specifically. Information is presented that the Licensing Field Specialists (LFS) will be trained on these scales for improved reliability, but no details are given. For example, it would be helpful to know who will provide the training (e.g., trained users of the scales in the state, the authors or liaisons to the authors of the scales, etc.), and when and how often this will be done to ensure continued reliability. Similarly, it is not clear how often programs will be monitored or how many programs will be monitored by one LFS. This application lacks a detailed plan that includes specific proposed activities. --This applicant also proposes to provide more in-depth information for families about STARS, but there are no specific related activities described as to how this will be done. This section is severely limited.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

--This applicant proposes to convene a Task Force to conduct an analysis of the current status of incentives provided by STARS with the intended result to learn if/how improvements can be made. However, it is proposed that recommendations will be finalized and presented in the third quarter of year one of the grant cycle. It is unclear whether this is realistic given that key staff will need to be hired at the beginning of the first year. Also, when referring to the "x" markings on Goal 4.3's Description of Key Activities chart, it is not clear whether these activities will occur throughout the life of the four year grant cycle. Other than this, there is no follow-up in the later years of the grant that provides evidence that the recommendations will be implemented. It appears that this applicant seeks to build an infrastructure for providing incentive to programs to support continuous improvement as evidenced by their proposal to link with an early learning intermediary organization that has statewide reach to develop and implement a tiered system of incentives and support. Also, the applicant seeks to work on this from years 2-4 of the grant cycle. While the specific policies and practices are not yet in place, this plan illustrates the priority it is given in the early childhood state system's plan. Additionally, it is a strength of this application that implemented policies have increased the demand for high quality programs. --This applicant provides some stats with regard to the percentage of children who are not enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start, despite being eligible. The applicant's proposal to increase capacity in these programs is appropriate and it is a benefit to the applicant that it is a goal to see increased enrollment throughout the life of the grant cycle, which is all four years. --With regard to other early learning and development programs, this applicant presents a strong rationale for why and evidence for how these programs will be expanded to reach more children and their families. Most notable, the applicant presents a current legislative proposal to reinvest dollars from the reform of the corrections system into early learning and development, specifically to provide subsidies in an effort to support families with children with high needs. This prevention method precisely illustrates what research has been supporting for years: that (1) dollars are best spent in prevention from a cost-effective standpoint, and (2) targeting the early years will have a long-term benefit on adult well-being, while also having an impact on the justice system. --Moreover, this applicant proposes an impressive goal related to supporting and increasing access for families of children with high needs, and that is giving significant attention to transitioning children within programs. As this is a common challenge for families with children with high needs, these activities illustrate the applicant's commitment towards, and interest in a more streamlined and comprehensive system between education and health. As a result, this applicant provides evidence of their significant history and leadership in addressing the problem of transitioning for this population. There is some confusion, however, with regard to the Measures of Success for this proposed activity. It is noted that two of the five measures of success will be the (1) Annual Ready Kindergartners Results Survey, and (2) the percentage of families satisfied with their child's transition from Part C to Part B, preschool to Kindergarten, and grade level transitions. First, there is no mention of the Ready Kindergartners Results Survey in the list of key activities, so it's unclear how this will fit into the plan. Similarly, there is no mention of a survey or activity related to gathering parent/guardian feedback. More clarification is needed to determine how these measures are related to these goals. --The applicant proposes realistic increases in the number of early learning and development programs in the top tiers of STARS - defined as having a star rating of 3, 4, or 5. It is a lengthy process to be reviewed in the quality rating system, and it seems that the applicant has taken this into consideration when determining annual increases of about 2% in each top tiered rating. It is projected that about 50% of programs will be in the top tiers of the quality rating system by the culmination of the four year grant cycle, thereby doubling the amount of centers in these tiers from the present. It is reasonable to anticipate an increased access to high quality programs throughout the state, and in a relatively short time period. The projected increase with regard to children with high needs being served by high quality programs is similar in nature. However, there is no evidence in the application that suggests supports will be put in place for programs. Thus, the longevity of these activities is in question.

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

--This applicant is already in the process of conducting a formal assessment of STARS, having consulted with a recognized national expert and agency on quality rating systems. This expert has also agreed to review the RFP that will solicit application for an external reviewer. It is a benefit to this plan to have this expert involved further in the plan. While this applicant's TQRIS has not been formally validated, their plan is minimally reasonable. No additional detail is provided as to what research questions and what type of design will lead them to validating the STARS. It is expected that the applicant's current partnership with an external reviewer would have enabled them to have some information to this regard. --This applicant clearly delineates the specific activities associated with assessing programs that participate in STARS. Further, they are appropriately staggered across the grant cycle. Also, soliciting external parties to conduct program or system evaluation is the most appropriate method as stated by the applicant.

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

Each State must address in its application--

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

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

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

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

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	15	10

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(1)

--This applicant's Early Learning Guidelines (VELS) have an extensive history in informing state policies, serving as the foundation for developing goals for an Individualized Education Plan, guiding practice, and serving as a resource for selecting child assessments. Also, they currently cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness. However, their current guidelines are only for 3-5 year olds. --This applicant proposes a plan to revise the guidelines so that they reflect ever-changing current research in early learning and development. For example, they no longer currently align with the Head Start Framework and they do not currently include standards for infants and toddlers. This applicant also seeks to maintain alignment between the early learning and the K-3 standards, one reason being to further support the facilitation of smooth transitions, a previously explained priority in this applicant's state plan. These two activities (revision of ELGs and activities associated with transitions) appropriately support one another. This applicant's recognition of the low alignment since first publication of the ELGs and proposing a plan to prioritize a revision is to be commended and is an appropriate use of funds. --Additionally, this applicant proposes a variety of activities related to professional development opportunities to educate educators about the VELS. One model that is proposed by the applicant is a train-the-trainer model. This is recognized as an efficient use of funds and resources for educating a far-reaching population. --There are several activities that could benefit from a more detailed explanation, specifically key activity 6.1b. It is proposed that a working group of infant, toddler, and preschool level practitioners and researchers will be assembled to determine the cultural, linguistic, and developmental appropriateness of all state standards. However, there is no information as to what kind of researchers, and from where these members will be targeted. --Additionally, it is noted in key activity 6.4 that a Families Guide for VELS will be developed. However, there is no benchmark noted for this publication. The second benchmark explains that evidence will be pulled from various sources to inform the participating agencies whether the VELS are incorporated in curriculum planning (i.e., undergraduate and graduate ECE programs), implementation, and assessment. Several clarifications about this benchmark are necessary to better understand how this fits into the larger plan. First, there is no key activity associated with incorporating the VELS into any ECE curriculum. Second, there is a concern that there is no strategic process associated with "gathering evidence."

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.	15	8

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

- (a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;
- (b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;
- (c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and
- (d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(2)

--This applicant proposes to implement two assessment tools: the Teaching Strategies Gold (TS GOLD) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which assess child development and adult-child interactions, respectively. An ad hoc group, which included a group of early childhood educators and administrators from a variety of early learning program settings, was convened with the purpose of identifying these tools. This appears to be a reasonable process for determining assessment tools. --This applicant again proposes to utilize a trainer-the-trainer model to educate practitioners, educators, administrators, and consultants on these tools. As stated in another criterion, this education model is highly effective and a thoughtful use of resources and time. Moreover, another strength of this plan is that it will offer categorized training specific to three age groups, e.g. toddlers, preschoolers, and K-3. This, coupled with the on-site coaching, appears to be a comprehensive approach to ensuring the proper use of the tools. Last, it is further evidence of this applicant's ability to implement proposed activities that two trainings have already taken place. --This applicant appears to prioritize streamlining their assessments and creating a component of care coordination for children with high needs as illustrated by Goals 7.2-7.4, which are all aimed at having specific populations (i.e., health care providers and their community partners, and early educators) utilize a valid and reliable common and comprehensive assessment. While the applicant includes a component of assessment follow-up in their plan, it is unclear how services will be coordinated for children with high needs. Specifically, while pediatric health providers and educators will be utilizing the assessment tools, it is not clear how these two sets of providers will share information and work together to meet the identified needs. A communication plan between the two is not discussed. --There are several explanations missing from this section, including information associated with Goals 7.1 and 7.2. This missing information includes the rationale, activities, benchmarks, and how this strategy seeks to meet the needs of children with high needs. These details would increase the understanding of how these intended goals fit into the overall state plan.

	Available	Score
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(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.	15	8
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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)

--One of the main goals of this applicant's plan to address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs is to enhance the capacity of the Children's Integrated Services (CIS), a successfully established single-point-of-entry holistic health system that targets children, prenatally through 8 years of age in the state. This applicant provides evidence of how the state has implemented significant systems-level reform through these programs over the past seven years. Another benefit of the proposed continuation and expansion of these programs is their partnership with the Nurse Family Partnership. Their proposal to expand this program using RTT funds is appropriate because of its proven results and benefits to young families. --This applicant proposes to coordinate several existing systems and programs of care (health and behavioral) to meet the needs of children with high needs. In doing so, it is evident that these programs, all of which are high-quality, evidenced-based programs, will streamline their standards and mechanisms for delivering care, thereby collectively promoting children's health (in every aspect) across the level of program standards. --This applicant provides evidence that instructors of the I Am Moving I Am Learning (IMIL) have already participated in the training necessary to train early educators in how to support young children in being physically active. However, there is no additional discussion about if/how educators will be trained in additional components of the health standards, and there is no evidence that there is a progression of health standards. Also, it is not discussed how programs will be supported after the training has been implemented. --With regard to the promotion of nutrition and physical activity practices, this applicant proposes to expand the IMIL program and promote the provision of healthy meals through the 3 Squares Vermont program. However, no details on either of these programs are provided in the application. Thus, it is hard to determine the appropriateness of the goals and activities with regard to their intended results. Also, the benefits of an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity in early childhood settings are indeed beneficial. However, it should be noted that current national standards recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity for toddlers and at least 90 minutes for preschoolers per day. While children may not be in full-day programs, it is still important to be aware of and acknowledge these standards when proposing reform strategies. --This applicant provides clear evidence that the standards and periodicity schedule of the EPSDT are and will continue to be embedded in their early childhood system.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	15	9

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)

--This applicant proposes to develop the Family Engagement Framework (VFEF) over the course of the four year grant cycle. This process begins with implementing community-level meetings of families. While it is not stated specifically, this grass roots method of soliciting feedback from families is a reasonable strategy for providing the framework committee with recommendations for how the standards can be culturally and linguistically appropriate for the intended audience. Further, it again illustrates this applicant's commitment to and value placed on local communities and their residents. --This applicant proposes to train and support early childhood educators on an on-going basis to implement family engagement strategies. While this is an effective step in streamlining family engagement strategies, more details are needed. It is not clear who will provide the training and how often it will occur. --It is clear that strengthening family engagement strategies is a priority to this applicant, as a variety of entities will be involved in the proposed activities. Also, as this applicant has proven in other sections of the application, planning and implementing evidence-based strategies are a priority. However, overall, this section is limited in scope.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

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

	Available	Score
(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.	20	8
<p>The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to--</p> <p>(a) Develop a common, statewide Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework designed to promote children's learning and development and improve child outcomes;</p> <p>(b) Develop a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework; and</p> <p>(c) Engage postsecondary institutions and other professional development providers in aligning professional development opportunities with the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.</p>		

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)

--A copy of the applicant's workforce knowledge and competency framework (VNLCDK) is provided in the Appendix. Thus, there is evidence that one is in place. This document is comprehensive in that it addresses six levels of competencies, takes into account child development, families and communities, teaching and learning, healthy and safe environments, and professionalism and program organization. However, this section of the application was left blank; thus it was difficult to determine the full extent of this applicant's plan to promote children's learning and develop a progression of credentials from their framework. --Because specific key activities and a timeline for implementation are not provided, it is difficult to understand the full extent the WKCF is being intertwined in the applicant's state plan. Strategies describing how the framework aligns with credentials and degrees are not provided. --As noted in Section D2 of the application, it is described that the Center responsible for the NLCDK is involved in several aspects of the applicant's professional development plans, as well as activities to move educators up in their career ladder. One example is that the NLCDK is a member of the Consortium of institutes of higher learning, whose charge is to conduct research on successful models of supporting educators and creating recommendations for increasing opportunities for educators. It is clear from just this example that the WKCF has provided a constant foundation for this systematic change.

	Available	Score
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.	20	16

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

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

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

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

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(2)

--This applicant proposes to provide and expand access to a multitude of professional development opportunities through five key activities. It is the opinion of this reviewer that the applicant has developed a comprehensive plan that will be able to serve the needs of professionals across the state. Two programs that are most notable are the Apprenticeship Program and Mentoring, Advising, Technical Assistance, Coaching and Helping (MATCH). Both of these proposed programs utilize the knowledge and skills of established leaders in the field as teachers for new or established, yet stagnant professionals, and operate on a regional level, so community-specific issues (i.e., lack of access to an institute for higher learning) are able to be addressed. These programs, coupled with the incentive and educational offerings will only increase the quality of this applicant's early childhood workforce. Further, this applicant is to be commended for having existing partnerships with two national leaders in providing technical assistance: Centers for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL). --It is the opinion of this reviewer that the applicant has proposed realistic, yet impactful increases in both the progress in the number of educators who will receive new or additional credentials from post secondary institutions or professional development providers and the number of educators who will progress in their career ladder with institutions who align with the workforce knowledge and competency framework. The former is illustrated by a significant increase in each level of credential level over the course of the four year grant cycle. The latter is illustrated by initial 2% increase, followed by an annual 5% increase. --There are, however, several clarifications needed with regard to this plan. In Performance Measures for D2d1, it is unclear why the total number of "aligned" institutions and providers do not increase at all throughout the grant cycle when it is discussed earlier in this selection that all public and private colleges that provide early childhood education programs will be invited to be part of a Consortium. Given this, it would be expected that these programs would also work to align with the Framework. Also, with regard to the progression of credentials, it is not clear why there are no current educators in Level VI (which is a doctoral degree), and why there are no plans to increase this number at all through the course of the grant cycle. --Also, there seems to be content for several goals under Goal 10: Degrees and Credentials missing from the application; thus making it difficult to understand the full extent of the applicant's plan for supporting early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

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	12

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(1)

--This applicant already has an established kindergarten entry assessment (Ready Kindergartners Survey) that is conducted annually with participating teachers. However, this survey is not included in the application, making it difficult to conduct a complete analysis of the appropriateness of the tool. Because the survey is 11 years old, this applicant has put forth a solid plan for revising the survey, including aligning it with the applicant's early learning and development standards, and collecting and summarizing data. However, while children with special needs are addressed within the goal to make the document more culturally and linguistically appropriate, no details are provided. --This applicant proposes to hire a school readiness contractor to guide these activities. It is not clear whether this is someone the applicant has a current relationship with or whether a bid will be publicized to solicit qualified applicants. If the former, it would be appropriate to have this person's CV included in the application for review. --The process by which this survey will be developed and implemented was well thought out as evidenced by the appropriate timeline and activities. One notable proposed activity is that the applicant proposes to pilot the revised survey, examine results, and then make additional revisions before finalizing and disseminating the new survey. This demonstrates the applicant's experience with making systematic changes, something that has been illustrated throughout this application. Another noteworthy proposal is to enlist a network of leaders to conduct training and provide consultation to Kindergarten teachers on the survey. This is an appropriate use of resources and aids in collegial networking and support. --Per the criterion for this application, it is the proposal of this applicant that the final survey will be implemented by the third quarter of the 2014-2015 school year. --The applicant proposes the development of a secure web-based application for collecting and compiling survey data, then to link it to the statewide system. However, it is not clear who will be responsible for this activity. --It is not clear from the narrative provided how these activities will be funded.

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

--As evidenced in Table A1-13, this applicant currently operates 3 data systems, two of which cover all essential data elements. However, this applicant proposes a comprehensive plan for enhancing the data system to support the proposed state plan by partnering with a list of what appears to be highly qualified personnel. --The applicant seeks to collect and provide data for a variety of key question, covering topics such as program quality, workforce quality, program access, and child outcomes. --The applicant's plan allows for the exchange of data among a variety of participating agencies through the proposed infrastructure. Similarly, this infrastructure allows for data to be accessed at any time, while also maintaining strict confidentiality. --This applicant has provided evidence that the data system will follow privacy laws and oversight requirements, as evidenced by their experience and compliance with current data systems and the existence of their Early Childhood Data Governance Council. --This applicant proposes reasonable and appropriate strategies for operating a comprehensive data system; however the implementation of these strategies is currently low.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	179

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

Priorities

	Available	Yes/No
Competitive Preference Priority 3: Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	0 or 10	No
<p>To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--</p> <p>(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Status Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or</p> <p>(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.</p>		
Comments on (P)(3)		
<p>--Currently, the applicant's Ready Kindergartner's Survey does not meet ALL of the elements in Status Table A1-12 as evidenced by how the applicant completed the table. --Additionally, this applicant was given a score of 60% for selection criteria (E)(1).</p>		

Absolute Priority

	Met? Yes/No
Absolute Priority - Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.	Yes
<p>To meet this priority, the State's application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.</p> <p>The State's application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.</p>	
Comments on Absolute Priority	
<p>--This state has maintained the prioritization of their high needs population throughout the application as evidenced by how items within each section were focused on this population. --The first piece of supporting evidence is that legislation was passed that requires all public preschool programs and any program serving children eligible for preschool funding to participate in stars and to have a high quality rating, defined as being in the top tiers (3-5). --For the remaining program types, programs funded under IDEA, Part C and programs receiving CCDF funds, this applicant proposes a slow and steady increase in stars participation, with an annual increase of 7-10%. As a result, by the end of the RTT funding cycle, idea, Part C programs and CCDF programs will have increased by a total of 86.3% and 65%, respectively. --With regard to other early learning and</p>	

development programs, this applicant presents strong rationale for why and evidence for how these programs will be expanded to reach more children and their families. --Second, this applicant provides evidence of their significant history and leadership in addressing the problem of transitioning children with high needs between programs, which matches to their proposed strategies. --Third, this applicant appears to prioritize streamlining their assessments and creating a component of care coordination for children with high needs as illustrated by Goals 7.2-7.4, which are all aimed at having specific populations (i.e., health care providers and their community partners, and early educators). --Last, one of the main goals of this applicant's plan to address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs is to enhance the capacity of the children's integrated services (CIS), a successfully established single-point-of-entry holistic health system that targets children, prenatally through 8 years of age in the state. Although, the inclusion of health and safety does not infiltrate the entire state plan, it does illustrate a minimum priority.



Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Review



Technical Review Form Page

Application # VT-5034

Peer Reviewer: [Redacted]
Lead Monitor: [Redacted]
Support Monitor: [Redacted]
Application Status: Reviewed
Date/Time: 11/16/2011 - 9:02 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
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20	17
<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) The applicant adequately documents significant financial investments in early learning and development from Jan 2007 to the present in relation to the size of the population of children with high needs. Although the state indicates that funding has increased by 40% over the past 5 years, investments for most programs have remained stable, slightly dipped, or slightly increased during the last three years reported. Much of the funding to specific early learning activities is determined at the local level, and the public investments reported indicate that support for early childhood is at least remaining consistent. In addition, the state reports financial investments have been made through private supporters such as the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative. As such, widespread support is evident. (b) The state provides minimal evidence of growth in preK enrollment during the reported time period. Although the number of children served in Title I funded programs of ESEA have slightly increased, there has been no expansion of Head Start/Early Head Start since 2007. Children in CCDF funded programs dipped in 2009, though the numbers are 1000 more children now than in 2007. This may be a result of new family assistance policies recently established and implemented. Although the state has made an effort to increase enrollment through the various policy changes, the results to date have been relatively small. (c) Several policies and legislative actions reported by the applicant indicate a strong commitment to serving children with high needs through quality early learning and development programs. Of significant importance in the state's plan is Act 62 which codified standardized quality practices among state funded preK programs and created a structure for the state's universal PreK program. Though VT's state preK program is voluntary from both the parent and local education agency (LEA) perspective, the state reports that 90% of all LEAs offer preK under this system. This demonstrates the local recognition of the importance of early childhood and a strong commitment to ensuring children come to school ready for success. (d) The state currently supports implementation of many of the essential building blocks of an early learning and development system demonstrating a strong foundation on which to build its reform agenda. Some of the components have been underway for several years. In particular, the state provides evidence of a well aligned, comprehensive assessment system. State funded programs, both those serving children with special needs and those serving typically developing children are required to use one of two approved valid/reliable formative assessment strategies to measure children's progress (though the state is

transitioning to the use of a single tool in the next year). This demonstrates a desire for statewide, consistent measurement across state funded programs. Additionally, the state currently maintains a "state of the art" data system that integrates data related to the workforce, program quality, and licensing functions. However, moves to make this data system integrated across state agencies and stakeholders have stalled. With regard to learning standards, the state has a completed set of early learning standards for children 3-5 which have been in widespread use since 2003. Infant and toddler guidelines are in draft form and planned for finalization in fall 2011.

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(2)

(a) Overall, the state's plan includes goals that are overly broad and likely unattainable. Most of the goals as written lack a clear direction toward improving program quality or outcomes for children and are not measurable. For example, the state's goal to invigorate and strengthen the governance structure is neither time bound nor has a clear and measurable outcome. (b) While the state's vision is ambitious, the plan summary is poorly articulated. The connection between the goals and the specific plan for this funding is unclear. The individual tasks outlined seem appropriate, but interrelating the goals and tasks to demonstrate a clear and credible path toward early childhood reform is not evident. Many of the goals require the outcome to be an investment in a task, such as expansion of Head Start. How these actions would be maintained or measured was also unclear. Additionally, the state seems to be focusing on expansion efforts or developing systems that were reported in A(1)(c) to already be in place. Therefore, the rationale for this direction is confusing. (c) The state indicates that it intends to address all of the additional selection criteria, but provides poor rationale for its selections. The plan inadequately integrates the selection criteria in a way that demonstrates the implementation will lead to achievement of the state's goals. Additionally, the state appears to be attempting to strengthen the movement for early childhood across the state during this process as a means to ensure future sustainability. Creating public will in the short period of time of this grant funding seems unrealistic. Although certain structural components are in place, such as a tiered rating system, the state seems to be focusing on infrastructure development, such as reforming its governance structure. The choice to address all the criteria and attempt to "do it all" seems unrealistic relative to the plan summary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(4) The plan for when and how the State will involve representatives from Participating Programs, Early Childhood Educators or their representatives, parents and families, including parents and families of Children

with High Needs, and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the activities carried out under the grant;

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

- (1) Terms and conditions that reflect a strong commitment to the State Plan by each Participating State Agency, including terms and conditions designed to align and leverage the Participating State Agencies' existing funding to support the State Plan;
- (2) "Scope-of-work" descriptions that require each Participating State Agency to implement all applicable portions of the State Plan and a description of efforts to maximize the number of Early Learning and Development Programs that become Participating Programs; and
- (3) A signature from an authorized representative of each Participating State Agency; and

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (A)(3)

(a) The organizational structure described for managing the grant effectively builds on existing interagency structures by naming the Department of Children and Families as the lead agency and indicating cross agency collaboration through representation on the Building Bright Futures Council. Governance related roles and responsibilities of the participating agencies are clear in regards to leading, developing, and participating in various strategies related to the funds. Where applicable, decision making roles are also included. The state also articulates a clear plan for civic engagement of community stakeholders by including in its structure the development of regional councils that will be charged with local decision making. (b) MOUs included with the application sufficiently demonstrate participating agencies' commitment to the state plan. MOUs provide sufficient details in scopes of work and terms and conditions to garner confidence that each agency will implement the strategies as applicable. MOUs also adequately outline the alignment of existing funds by including statements related to abiding by the submitted budgets for each program and agency. Scopes of work do not provide a commitment to leverage existing resources to support the plan, however. (c) Letters of intent adequately demonstrate community and stakeholder support of the plan. Numerous letters are provided from a variety of organizations including non-profit and community based providers. Letters identify agency commitment to the state's plan but lack persuasiveness due to the use of a form letter by most stakeholders who provided signatures.

	Available	Score
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant.	15	6

The extent to which the State Plan--

- (a) Demonstrates how the State will use existing funds that support early learning and development from Federal, State, private, and local sources (e.g., CCDF; Title I and II of ESEA; IDEA; Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; State preschool; Head Start Collaboration and State Advisory Council funding; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Title V MCH Block Grant; TANF; Medicaid; child welfare services under Title IV (B) and (E) of the Social Security Act; Statewide Longitudinal Data System; foundation; other private funding sources) for activities and services that help achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, including how the quality set-asides in CCDF will be used;
- (b) Describes, in both the budget tables and budget narratives, how the State will effectively and efficiently use funding from this grant to achieve the outcomes in the State Plan, in a manner that--
 - (1) Is adequate to support the activities described in the State Plan;
 - (2) Includes costs that are reasonable and necessary in relation to the objectives, design, and significance of the activities described in the State Plan and the number of children to be served; and
 - (3) Details the amount of funds budgeted for Participating State Agencies, localities, Early Learning Intermediary Organizations, Participating Programs, or other partners, and the specific activities to be implemented with these funds consistent with the State Plan, and demonstrates that a significant amount of

funding will be devoted to the local implementation of the State Plan; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (A)(4)

(a) The state's budget inadequately addresses how it will use existing funds to support outcomes in the state plan. The budget, like the goal summary, seems disjointed from current activities. The applicant states in the narratives that none of the participating agencies elected to include other funds in their budgets, thereby making it difficult to determine how outside funding sources will be used together with this funding opportunity. (b) The effective use of funds is unclear in the state's budget. No budget narrative is provided for the overall state budget explaining the use of funding. Additionally, numerous errors and missing data in the budget tables make it difficult to determine whether the state's use of funding is adequate. The applicant provides individual participating state agency budgets that effectively detail which plan activities are funded for each organization. (c) The state's budget and narrative provide little evidence of sustainability beyond the grant period. In the overall state budget summary, the total funding request equals just over \$45 million. The state indicates that funds from other sources used to support the state's plan amounts to just \$75,000 (though this is contradicted in Table (A)(4) identifying a \$250,000 investment by other sources to support the plan, and still relatively minimal). The state appears to be using nearly 100% of funds from this opportunity to not only enhance systems, but also expand various early childhood programs and services. The state indicates that growing support for early childhood will sustain the planned reform agenda, and the applicant demonstrates strong support from state leadership. Structural and agency reforms intended to consolidate services and garner budget savings are being promoted by the governor who has pledged that the savings from this reform will go toward early childhood supports. Additionally, the state plan indicates that it will work to make changes in the public will related to early childhood. However, what will result from those changes in public will is not described (i.e. will they levy a tax, support legislative changes, etc). With so few dollars being leveraged to support the efforts, it is questionable that the activities could be maintained beyond the funding period.

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs

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

(a) The applicant currently maintains a quality rating system that is based on a set of measurable tiered quality standards, though the state intends to utilize this funding to review and revise the current rating system. In its current form, the system includes most of the components required, but is lacking a progression of health promotion program standards. QRS programs in the state must utilize the early learning standards and at the higher levels of quality also conduct formative and summative assessment on children. However, it is unclear what program assessment strategies are incorporated for understanding environment or adult/child interactions. The applicant mentions ERS tools, but provides insufficient explanation outlining how they are used in the system. Additionally, the applicant identifies that the CLASS will be used in the future, but in what capacity is unclear. Teacher qualifications are also incorporated as a component of the tiered system. The state also uses the Building Bright Futures Information System to collect data and track enrollment and quality of participating programs. Family Engagement strategies are included as a component of the current system as evidenced in the

state's STARS (the TQRIS) manual. (b) The state maintains a set of clear and measurable standards for identifying program levels of quality. At the highest levels, programs may demonstrate quality by receiving national accreditation showing a clear alignment between the standards and nationally recognized indicators of quality. (c) The applicant demonstrates a strong linkage between the state licensing system and the state's quality rating system. Programs are eligible for participation only if licensed by the state system. Additionally, levels of compliance with licensing (i.e. the number of years without violations), are related to the various program levels of quality. Those with greater compliance demonstrate higher levels of quality within the STARS system.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(2)

(a-b) The state has made significant efforts to increase families' abilities to afford quality early learning and development experiences. In state fiscal year 2010 (SFY10), the state implemented several reforms to its child care assistance rate and increased funding with \$4.8M in new investments. With the new rate structure, more families are provided with benefits. Additionally, quality incentive rates were increased for providers. Higher reimbursement rates are paid to programs with higher quality ratings which encourages programs to improve and offer greater access to high quality. In addition, parent copays decrease dependent on the family enrolling in a higher quality program. The result was an increase in the number of children enrolled in high quality rated programs. However, the number of programs assigned a higher quality rating did not increase at the same rate. The state has also successfully implemented policies which require all state-funded early learning and development programs to participate in the STARS program. CCDF rates are linked to quality levels as well. (c) The state plan inadequately establishes ambitious targets for the programs participating in the rating system. Since all state funded programs are required by statute to participate, the state focus is on the programs receiving CCDF funding. The state explains that policies have increased the number of children in higher quality programs, but that the demand for higher quality enrollment slots appears to be rising faster than the number of programs available. Yet, the plan does not sufficiently provide for ambitious increases in the programs receiving CCDF funding. Targets for 2012 and 2013 only demonstrate a 7% increase in participation. In addition, the state makes a strong case for the need to increase the number of family home providers participating in the rating system, yet does not identify a target for those increases.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15	8

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

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

(b) Providing quality rating and licensing information to parents with children enrolled in Early Learning and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(3)

(a) The state currently has a partially implemented rating and monitoring system. The state indicates that program monitoring occurs through a combination of provider self-reported evidence and a third party verification process. The state currently uses the Early Childhood Environmental Scales (ECERS), a valid tool for measuring environmental quality. In addition, quality ratings are developed on top of a licensing foundation that is monitored through the state licensing system. The applicant further explains, however, that monitoring in the state is inadequate, citing a report from the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies placing Vermont 44th in the Nation. While the need for more licensing specialists is clear, the plan to use this funding to increase the number of licensing specialists inadequately addresses the criterion. Licensing is an important function of the system, but the plan provides no further details as to how programs in the system will be rated. It is unclear who the third party verification group is or how inter-rater reliability is ensured within the current implementation. Although reliability is not adequately addressed in the current status of implementation, the state does outline effective strategies in its plan to train specialists to reliability in the future. (b) The state provides information that adequately demonstrates communication methods for reporting licensing and rating information. The state employs an accurate data system, BFIS, that publicizes regulatory compliance and quality ratings. The state proposes that as part of this opportunity it will update and improve this system by providing a greater amount of relevant information. However, the applicant does not address how families across the state receive information if they are in more rural communities. It is unclear if efforts to connect families to information is meeting the actual needs of the state's highly dispersed communities. The state's plan provides insufficient action in its timeline to ensure achievement of the stated performance objectives. The applicant proposes to use funding under this selection criteria to improve transition services between Part C and Part B children and to kindergarten. The state provides inadequate rationale for connecting this strategy and performance objective. The activity and targets do not align and therefore achievement of the performance objectives is unlikely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (B)(4)

(a-b) The state has made some efforts to support continuous improvement of early learning and development programs indicating that this criteria is in partial implementation. In SFY10, the state implemented several reforms to its child care assistance rate and increased funding with \$4.8M in new investments. With the new rate structure, more families were provided with benefits. Additionally, quality incentive rates were increased for providers while decreasing co-payments for families for enrolling in higher quality programs. These policies in turn increased the demand for high quality programs. Furthermore, all programs are eligible to receive state preK funding provided they achieve a 3-5 star quality rating. Since all program types are eligible to receive state PreK funding a wide variety of opportunities exist for families such as full day, full year, etc. Although there are many financial incentives for programs to meet specific levels of achievement, it is unclear what additional supports the state provides to assist programs in moving through a continuum of quality improvements. (c) The state's goals for improving the number of participants in the top tiers of the VT STARS and increasing the number of children in high quality programs seem unambitious considering the state includes the 3 star level in its definition of "top tiers." While the state identifies the top tiers as 3, 4, and 5 stars, to be eligible for state funding a program must have an improvement plan in place to reach a 4 or 5 star rating if only at a 3. This would imply that three stars are not of sufficient quality. To identify performance targets of reaching a 3 star level to only increase by 2% each year is inadequate to support moving programs through a continuum of quality and successfully increasing the number

children enrolled in them. Moving between higher rates of quality (from a 4 to a 5 star) is more challenging and an increase of 2% each year for programs attaining a 5 star rating is appropriate and achievable. Overall, however, the state proposes a goal of 50% of total programs have a 3-5 star rating at the end of the grant period. Since a 3-5 star rating is a statutory requirement of all state funded programs, it seems inadequate that only 50% of QRS participants would have achieved such a rating at the end of the period.

	Available	Score
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.	15	7

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality**

Comments on (B)(5)

(a) The applicant provides minimal descriptions of its plan for designing and implementing an evaluation of the VT STARS system. The applicant indicates that it has held preliminary discussions with a leading evaluation expert and has begun to review research questions. However, it has not finalized the research questions and therefore, it is unclear whether the evaluation will address whether the tiers are effectively differentiating among quality programs. In addition, neither the design nor methodology being considered are described, only that they will be developed. While the timeline the state provides shows an RFP process to access a third party evaluator, the applicant provides no assurances regarding the use of research-based methods it intends to employ. (b) The applicant provides minimal assurances that the research design will adequately measure progress. The applicant sought the assistance of a leading researcher to assist in the process. However, no further details are provided to indicate what the applicant will be seeking in an RFP bidder to ensure the use of appropriate design and measures of progress. The timeline for the state's plan, sufficiently outlines the steps necessary to hire an evaluator to conduct the study.

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

Each State must address in its application--

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

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

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

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

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.	15	9

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(1)

(a) The state has a current set of early learning standards for children 3-5 and a draft set of standards for infants and toddlers. The proposed plan outlines steps to review, revise and combine these documents to create a single set of birth to five standards that are aligned with the state's adoption of the common core standards and curricular practices. The state's plan adequately addresses the state's process to create a quality document that includes developmental, cultural and linguistic appropriateness by including the convening of groups, analysis of alignment and strategies to disseminate the new information. (b) The current state standards adequately align with the state's K-3 standards. However, as the applicant notes, adoption of the common core standards requires a new analysis. The plan proposed by the state appropriately addresses the activities necessary to conduct such a review effectively. The applicant indicates that it will pull a team of experts together to review the various documents. Team members will include those familiar with infant-toddler issues as well as preK and kindergarten development. (c) The applicant provides sufficient evidence that the state's early learning standards are incorporated into program standards, curricula and activities. The state demonstrates that its early learning standards form a foundation of quality in its system. Licensing requirements address the use of early standards as do the teacher qualification competencies. (d) The state provides sufficient information regarding its plan to disseminate and train program personnel on the use of the developmental guidelines for children birth to K. However, the plan's timeline appears inadequate in ensuring all personnel receive what they need to implement revised standards that incorporate such significant changes as alignment with new K-3 standards and addition of 0-3 standards. According to the timeline, train the trainer sessions will occur in the third quarter of 2013. This seems like an inadequate amount of time to devote to this activity.

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

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

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

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

(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(2)

(a) The state plan describes the various components of a comprehensive assessment system including screening, child assessment to guide instruction, and program assessment. Statute and state policy have made strides in assessment procedures by requiring all state funded programs to use consistent forms of assessment of children's progress. The state recently moved toward all such programs using a single tool, the Teaching Strategies Gold which it indicates is valid in the state. The state also indicates that it will soon be implementing use of the CLASS instrument to measure interactions. However, it is unclear how the state measures program quality of the environment. Since the state requires specific instruments, the plan adequately addresses how programs select instruments. (b) The state sufficiently describes its plan to work with programs and strengthen their understanding of formative assessment strategies. The state outlines a variety of strategies such as developing a cadre of trainers to ensure classroom level understanding of the use of the Teaching Strategies Gold tool. Additionally, the state plans to provide similar level training for the CLASS instrument. However, screening activities appear to be isolated to the medical arena and the state plan does not adequately address the connection between screening, formative assessment and the referral system. Screening activities appear to be disconnected from the educational aspects of the system which is problematic in ensuring a coordinated, integrated early childhood agenda. (c) The state plan provides little information regarding alignment and integration of assessments and how results are shared. As noted above, screening activities are being developed in isolation and outside of the early learning program arena. It is unclear what efforts will be made to ensure an

approach to assessment and service delivery that reduces duplication and improves coordination. (d) The state adequately addresses plans to train educators on the administration and use of assessment data. The state recognizes the need to improve the promotion of the use of data to guide practice and intends to conduct a variety of training activities around this topic. The state explains it will use a cadre of trainers as well as individual coaches who have expertise in the use of the chosen instruments to support educators in their professional development related to assessment.

	Available	Score
(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.	15	2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(3)

(a) The applicant provides a limited description of its plan to establish a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety. The applicant includes a brochure and statutory information regarding the various levels of program standards, though these pieces of evidence offer few specifics of progressing health and safety standards. The applicant identifies the various entities and the health and developmental services they offer, but the plan lacks a clear vision for connecting the services together with the standards. (b) The applicant provides minimal information regarding the training of early childhood educators to meet various health standards. How early learning programs are supported beyond training related to I Am Moving I am Learning curriculum is unclear. The state's plan discusses some individual program services such as I Am Moving I Am Learning, but lacks clarity in how the various training activities move programs through a continuum of program standards related to other health factors such as screening, behavioral health, safety, and social-emotional development. (c) The state provides adequate evidence that its plan supports the promotion of healthy eating and nutrition. The state's Department of Health has established the Fit and Healthy Vermonters State Plan 2011. The DOH program addresses the promotion of active movement for young children in early childhood settings and includes a research and evaluation component. (d) The state provides minimal evidence of its intent to fully leverage resources to meet its targets. It is unclear how the various programs and various other plans and policies among the agencies are coming together to create a comprehensive, integrated system. The targets seem out of alignment relative to the goals and the activities outlined in the plan. Programs and services proposed are isolated in nature rather than creating a streamlined and cost efficient set of strategies leading to increased participation in health care, use of screening, or appropriate referral and follow up.

	Available	Score
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.	15	2

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

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

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (C)(4)

(a) The state's plan for establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards across the levels of its Program Standards lacks clarity in its intent and outcomes. The applicant provides narrative that indicates the state has no statewide family engagement standards. However, the STARS system is rated on five overarching components, one of which is family engagement. At each of the levels of the STARS system, family engagement standards are identified. Although minimal, the STARS does include family engagement indicators that progress with increased rating demonstrating that family engagement standards are at least partially implemented. The state's plan calls for development of an additional set of standards for family engagement activities. Connections between the future standards and progressive levels of quality in the program standards are only briefly mentioned and a convincing argument for creating a parallel system is not made. (b) The state's plan fails to outline the activities necessary to increase the number and percentage of early childhood educators trained and supported in implementing family engagement strategies. Although the applicant mentions that Head Start and Early Head Start programs often extend their professional development to the broader community, the plan provides no explanation or description of training being systematically or collaboratively offered across the state. It is unclear how the state intends to promote family engagement practices without a plan for developing and disseminating information. (c) The state indicates it has a variety of resources from which to draw leveraging for the promotion of family support. However, the plan for using these resources in a timely and efficient manner is unclear. The state provides minimal information as to how the entities will connect and work together. Much of the plan outlines early development of family engagement strategies with inadequate planning for their implementation.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

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

	Available	Score
(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials.	20	5

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (D)(1)

(a) The state includes a copy of its competency and knowledge framework in the appendices, but no narrative to explain its use. The framework appears to include all of the required elements indicating that the state has substantially implemented a knowledge and competency framework with a progression of credentials. (b) The state identifies a career lattice with six levels that currently reflects degrees, credentials, and a recognition of experience. The state reports that a minority of the workforce participate or access the supports connected with the career ladder. The timeline of activities poorly addresses specific strategies to further enhance the career ladder or engage more professionals in its use. (c) The state plan adequately addresses engagement of postsecondary institution, but not other professional development providers in the alignment of professional development opportunities. The state proposes to convene a Higher Education Early Education Task Force whose only membership includes public and private colleges. Other professional development providers are not listed. While the current system appears well-aligned and established, the plan provides minimal information regarding how any new programs will be developed to ensure alignment of competencies and ongoing professional development across the state.

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

20

16

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

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

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

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

(d) Setting ambitious yet achievable targets for--

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: Quality and Implementation

Comments on (D)(2)

(a) The applicant provides evidence of a strong foundation on which to expand access to professional development opportunities. The state's Northern Lights Career Development Center (NLCDC) plays a leading role in these efforts. Two significant programs the state provides include an apprenticeship program and a mentorship program. Both systems provide individuals with the opportunities to grow and develop skills aligned with the state's competencies. The foundation elements for the system are substantially implemented, and the state makes an effective case for needing stronger professional development opportunities that better address rural providers or family home providers. However, the strategies and key activities do not substantially connect to this need, especially that of the family home providers. (b) The state outlines a plan that demonstrates a wide array of effective policies and incentives for improved and enhanced professional skills. Higher competencies are embedded as part of the quality rating system for the state, and reimbursement rates are tied directly to higher quality ratings. Additionally, the state provides scholarships, bonuses, and reward stipends for attaining higher education credentials. The state continues to evaluate the effectiveness of these incentives as well as add innovative strategies to those already offered, such as the newly established Higher Education Cohort Grants that support postsecondary institutions with recruitment of students into early childhood. (c) The applicant provides minimal information regarding the reporting of aggregated data on early educator development. It is unclear from the plan outlined how the state intends to address this component of the criterion. (d) The state reports that all postsecondary institutions are currently aligned with the state's knowledge and competency framework. The applicant indicates that the necessary next step for its professional development system is to better articulate programs between institutions and improve access to coursework by individuals in more geographically outlying communities. The applicant provides appropriate rationale citing that many individuals are more than 100 miles from a professional program. Addressing the state's professional development system through both access to coursework as well as individualized, and targeted mentoring provides a strong likelihood of success. Performance targets are ambitious, especially at the higher levels of achievement. However, the state has a strong foundation on which to further augment professional development services and has made a good effort to identify achievable targets.

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	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)

(a) The state currently utilizes a kindergarten readiness assessment aligned with the state's early learning and development standards. The state's plan adequately addresses issues of alignment to ensure that future versions maintain alignment to the newly adopted common core standards. (b) The state's assessment in use relies on teachers' self-reports during the first few weeks of school. While the state provides appropriate rationale for use of observational assessment in kindergarten, it does not adequately demonstrate how it ensures reliability of results. Survey assessment methods are considered weak in reliability unless certain procedures to reduce bias and inconsistent responses are in place. The state's plan provides little information regarding such procedures to demonstrate it provides the most reliable results possible. Appropriately, the state's proposed timeline includes an analysis of the revised assessment's reliability. (c) The state has a current assessment in place with no plans to stop the assessment during the revision process. Therefore, the timeline meets this indicator. (d) The state's plan is insufficient for providing a clear and credible path toward ensuring data are reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). The state indicates in its timeline that it will work to develop a secure web-based application for collecting and compiling survey data. However, no further details are provided related to how data will be shared across state systems. (e) The state's plan inadequately addresses funding for the development and revision of the state's kindergarten assessment. The state has budgeted over \$350K to the project with all funding identified in the department of education budget. It appears from the proposal that no other funds support the state's plan for development of a new kindergarten survey instrument.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies.	20	17

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

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

Scoring Rubric Used: **Quality and Implementation**

Comments on (E)(2)

(a) The state provides sufficient information indicating that the current data system in place collects all of the essential data elements. Although the state is working to develop a more comprehensive SLDS, the state currently operates an early childhood system that collects a variety of early childhood data including information about program quality and the workforce. (b-e) The state's plan is adequate to ensure uniform data collection and generate timely and relevant information. However it is unclear how data will be exchanged between agencies. Although some areas may still be at the conceptualization stage, the Building Bright Futures Information System provides a strong foundation of early childhood data on which to build a more comprehensive system. The state's intent to establish a data governance council provides a sound plan for ensuring data oversight requirements of the various systems and agencies are met across the SLDS.

	Available	Score
Total Points Available for Selection Criteria	280	155

Priorities

Competitive Preference Priorities

Priorities

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

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

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

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

Comments on (P)(3)

The applicant does not adequately address selection criterion (E)(1) with a clear, high quality plan. Therefore the competitive preference priority is not met.

Absolute Priority

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

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

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

Comments on Absolute Priority

Overall the state's plan attempts to meet the priority. However, most of the plan is disconnected offering individual, isolated strategies that do not comprehensively address increases in quality of early learning and development programs. Additionally, much of the plan appears to be in the conceptualization phase, and the state does not seem ready and prepared to implement a coherent early childhood reform agenda. Additionally, the state's plan attempts to "do it all" rather than focusing its investments strategically on the specific strategies that might be most successful in forwarding its agenda. The state's plan to revise its Early Learning Standards is poorly articulated and does not adequately address improving educators' knowledge of the state's standards and their use. Although the state has a well-established workforce framework, the plan provides insufficient key strategies to increase participation in the state's career ladder. The state's plans for measuring outcomes and progress, especially around kindergarten entry are poorly outlined. In summary, the application was lacking the fundamental planning necessary to make significant movement toward its early childhood agenda.

