

## **Executive Summary**

Please provide a brief summary of accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned across the reform areas.

North Carolina's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge plan is a unique and promising opportunity to take bold action to improve early learning and development outcomes for children across the State. North Carolina's commitment to ensuring that children enter kindergarten ready to succeed is long-standing and proven, with several successful initiatives with strong statewide support, including state-funded prekindergarten, child care star-rated licensing, Smart Start, and pediatric developmental screening.

North Carolina's Early Learning Challenge plan emphasizes long-term capacity building in early learning, incorporating the following four focus areas:

- Strengthening the state's early childhood system and building its capacity to foster positive outcomes for young children
- Enhancing the quality of programs to serve young children and families and improving access to high-quality programs
- Strengthening the early childhood workforce to increase staff and system effectiveness and sustain change
- Targeting high-intensity supports and community infrastructure-building efforts to turn around poor outcomes for young children in the state's highest-need counties (the Transformation Zone initiative)

North Carolina's progress and accomplishments in the first year of the grant have well positioned the State for effective implementation of the approved scope of work in these four focus areas over the course of the grant. In the first year, North Carolina established its grant implementation infrastructure, including:

- detailed project and activity plans and budgets for all projects
- high-quality staffing
- raising awareness
- partnerships across multiple state and local agencies, including numerous contracts with key state, university and non-profit partners to accomplish specific activities
- advisory groups
- policies, procedures and oversight mechanisms

These critical steps have led to a successful start-up of all funded projects as North Carolina enters year two of the grant focused on full project implementation, programmatic and fiscal monitoring, performance tracking, and maximizing the impact of the grant. North Carolina's attention to grant implementation infrastructure throughout the first year will ensure the highest accountability for the \$69,991,121 in funding and for the effective accomplishment of our approved scope of work.