

Executive Summary

For the reporting year, please provide a summary of your State's (1) accomplishments, (2) lessons learned, (3) challenges, and (4) strategies you will implement to address those challenges.

Minnesota has made great strides in year three of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant to improve outcomes for children through increased access to high-quality services birth to grade three. Success has been driven through cross-agency partnerships between the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and the support of stakeholders, including Minnesota's four Transformation Zones- Itasca County, Northside Achievement Zone of Minneapolis, Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood and White Earth Reservation. Accomplishments in 2014 include developing an award-winning Parent Aware website, increasing Parent Aware availability statewide, publishing the Knowledge and Competency framework, revising the early learning standards, expanding training capacity statewide and piloting an innovative Kindergarten Entry Assessment.

The state has prioritized work into the components of a successful state system, including: High Quality, Accountable Programs; Increased Access to High-Quality; Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children; Great Early Childhood Workforce; and Measuring Outcomes and Progress. Accomplishments are prevalent across components. The executive summary will share accomplishments, challenges and proposed solutions to identified challenges through each of the five components.

High Quality, Accountable Programs

Minnesota's commitment to high-quality, accountable programs is demonstrated through Parent Aware, the state's voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system for early care and education programs.

Parent Aware made measurable progress in promoting program participation. As planned, full ratings for programs have expanded from 22 counties and seven tribal communities in 2013 to 45 counties and eight tribal communities in 2014. Quality Coaches and five Parent Aware recruiters were hired to support and recruit programs, respectively. Recruiters are using a community organizing approach and Minnesota is eager to learn the impact of this strategy in 2015, the first year of full implementation.

The state exceeded targets for program participation across most program types, rating 1,892 programs as of December, 2014 or 72 percent of our overall target for Year Three of the grant. Minnesota made significant progress increasing the number of rated non-accredited child care programs. From 2013 to 2014, the number of non-accredited Family Child Care programs increased by 150 percent and the number of rated non-accredited child care centers increased by nearly 100 percent. Most importantly, Minnesota exceeded most targets for increasing the number of Children with High Needs who are enrolled in highly rated early learning programs. Finally, www.ParentAware.org launched in August 2014, connecting parents to a database of more than 12,000 licensed programs - highlighting Parent Aware rated sites. The website was recognized for its outstanding contribution to human services program clients at the 2014 Commissioner's Circle of Excellence Awards ceremony.

Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs), available in the four Transformation Zones to Parent Aware rated early learning programs, also support child care providers' quality. CCHCs assist child care providers and quality coaches with health and safety questions. In 2014, they documented 839 points of contact with providers, 69 on-site visits, 295 telephone calls, and 475 electronic communications. CCHS also provided training to child care staff, parents and children on a variety of important topics such as emergency preparedness, food safety and oral health. The program has to date been most successful in reaching center based programs. Efforts are

underway to increase the number of family child care providers that are aware of and access the services of CCHCs.

Increased Access to High Quality

Minnesota's approach to increasing access to high-quality early childhood education and care programs by children with high needs is two-fold. First, Early Learning Scholarships are provided to families in each of the four Transformation Zones to financially support access to a program participating in Parent Aware. Secondly, Title I Pre-K Incentive grants are provided to school districts who contribute Title I funds to support high quality early childhood programming.

Each of the four Transformation Zones continue implementing the Early Learning Scholarships in their local community. Across the Transformation Zones, 369 children were served with scholarships throughout 2014 and 951 have been served over the period of the grant. Transformation Zones report that they have involved more children in high quality early childhood programs, resulting in promising outcomes. Minnesota continues to work with SRI International to conduct a multi-year evaluation. In fall 2014 child level assessments were conducted on four year olds receiving scholarships, and follow-up assessment are scheduled for spring 2015. Second year evaluation results will be available winter/spring 2015.

Title I Pre-K Incentive grants continue to grow in interest and implementation. Thirty-one school districts are utilizing Title I funds and Title I Pre-K Incentives, an increase from 22 in 2013 and six in 2012. Districts have reported that the grant has improved communication and planning between early childhood and K-12. Sustainability will be a challenge as districts explore how to continue funding their programs at higher levels after the incentive sunsets. One challenge will be competing with other district initiatives for limited space to accommodate increased enrollment. To support districts, Minnesota is increasing communication with grant recipients to share ideas across programs. Minnesota is also targeting Title I Pre-K Incentive grant schools for a Pre-K-Grade three Leadership Institute focused on improving alignment of programs and services between early childhood and K-12.

Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

Minnesota supports early learning and development outcomes for children by first defining what children are expected to know and do across multiple domains and at different stages of development and then working to have a structure in place to screen and assess individual children and their environments and programs. This is done through the revision of the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (ECIPs); the comprehensive assessment system; and screening.

A revision process has been completed on two domains of the ECIPs: 1) language, literacy and communication and 2) social and emotional. The revision process was led by two domain specific committees and included extensive reviews by national, state and culturally specific experts. Previously, Minnesota had two versions of the ECIPs- one for birth to age three and one for preschool age. The revision has resulted in one document across age bands so the continuum of learning and development is clear. Moving forward, support documents will be created and a training of trainers will be implemented to help trainers embed the standards in all of their trainings.

The Comprehensive Assessment System works to support an early childhood system of measurement with decision making across settings and points in time. Minnesota's efforts around the development of a Comprehensive Assessment System include helping early childhood programs understand the why, what and

how of assessment and ensuring they have the tools to implement assessments appropriately and use the data in order to adapt their instruction and improve outcomes for children.

In an effort to improve early childhood programs' understanding of the why and what of assessment, Minnesota finalized a common set of 21 assessment definitions to align communication and efforts between early childhood sectors. Minnesota also began the development of an online needs assessment tool to help programs choose which assessment tool is right for their population and program structure.

In 2014, Minnesota also completed work that improves providers' ability to implement assessments. This work includes an effort to improve the availability of training on specific assessment tools. Forty-one trainers were trained throughout the state on six assessment and curriculum tools. Minnesota will continue to expand this effort in 2015 by offering more training of trainers and assessment user groups. Minnesota also completed the content for four training modules on assessment supports, modules include: Authentic Assessment Practices and Supports for Administrators; Embedding Authentic Assessment in Everyday Practice; Using Data to Inform Practice; and Connecting Assessment to Standards and Curriculum.

In similar efforts to improve the use of assessments by early childhood providers', Minnesota has made progress on assisting programs with bridging their student information system with assessment data. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is working to expand the project beyond one student information system vendor. Through a contractor, Minnesota conducted interviews with student information system and assessment vendors to identify capabilities, data fields and ability to link systems. Minnesota anticipates releasing an RFP in 2015 to identify vendor(s) to move forward. The RFP stresses the connection between identified/validated early childhood assessment systems and various ways the software vendors could set up their student information systems to be of best use to teachers and administrators. This effort will help programs to have easier access to and a stronger understanding of their assessment data in relation to program information, so they can use data to individualize instruction and policies based on where children are and where they need to go. If national student information system vendors apply and are selected, this will assist other states in better utilizing program and assessment information in real time.

Another component of monitoring children's progress is ensuring children receive developmental and social-emotional screening in order to flag developmental concerns early and refer children to appropriate services. Minnesota is improving the delivery of developmental and social-emotional screening by piloting electronic screening access. In 2014, Minnesota finalized a contract for the use of online versions of the ASQ and ASQ-SE screening tools with twelve pilot programs. The pilot programs represent diversity in geography and program type, including: Head Start, public health, family home visiting and school districts. All four Transformation Zones are participating. Pilot sites have received training on screening and use of select instruments. Efforts are aligned to other state-led early identification initiatives such as Minnesota's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant and Minnesota's implementation of the National Help Me Grow System. After the pilot phase, Minnesota will look to sustain and expand electronic developmental and social-emotional screening efforts statewide in order to increase access to screening and support the coordination of care for young children in Minnesota.

Great Early Childhood Workforce

Minnesota made great efforts to support the early childhood workforce in 2014. One effort was the release of *Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals*, which articulates both expectations of what early childhood educators need to know and be able to do. Minnesota also made progress increasing the number of early childhood educators with credentials in the state.

Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals was released in December of 2014 in three versions: for individuals working in Family Child Care, Preschool-Aged Children in Center and School Programs, and with Infants and Toddlers. The documents which combine Board of Teaching Standards and field developed competencies will be used as a basis for both preservice and inservice education.

Minnesota also launched the development of training on the framework. Implementation of the framework will be promoted in 2015 through messaging, training of trainers and practitioners, and integration into the Career Lattice, programed into Develop, Minnesota's online Quality Improvement and Registry Tool.

In addition, Minnesota continued to develop new, and revise existing credentials and training. This included providing increased access to training aligned with the Knowledge and Competency Framework and Parent Aware. The Minnesota Child Care Credential, offered in four languages, was revised in 2014 to meet all Parent Aware training indicator requirements. Minnesota also completed the development of a 30-hour Minnesota Infant/Toddler Credential. Bilingual/bicultural trainer capacity was increased through learning communities, including 21 trainers representing eight languages.

An eight-hour training for legally non-licensed, or Family, Friend and Neighbor, providers was developed that addresses health and safety, child development and school readiness. During 2014, 80 providers from Hmong, Somali, Latino and Karen groups were provided with information on how to become licensed through New Americans Network. Nineteen new American providers attended at least one event. Of the 80 providers participating in the New American Network, 38 were provided information on becoming licensed (the others were already licensed) and 13 of those went on to participate in the licensing process.

Another Family, Friend and Neighbor project is in place in three of the four Transformation Zones using Early Childhood Family Education parent educators to work with local Family, Friend and Neighbor Providers. Minneapolis decided not to participate in the initiative because of existing work. Participating Transformation Zones each created their own project plan. Each include a home visiting component; including Family, Friend and Neighbor providers in existing parent education activities; and quarterly check-ins with MDE staff. MDE staff have created a toolkit of over 300 existing early childhood resources to be used to guide and support providers. Resources include topics such as: home safety, health and school readiness. Effort was made to include translated materials in Spanish, Somali and Hmong.

These combined efforts, carried out in coordination with other state initiatives, continue progress toward ensuring our youngest learners are in high quality environments with highly skilled adults who teach and care for them.

Measuring Outcomes and Progress

Minnesota is working towards increasing measurement and use of data in order to better understand children's early experiences and answer broad and meaningful questions about outcomes for Minnesota's youngest children. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) and revised Kindergarten Entrance Assessment will enhance the state's ability to answer these questions and improve children's earliest experiences.

Minnesota made progress in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data system through finalizing data sharing agreements allowing the integration of data from the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health and Human Services. The first loading of data into the ECLDS was completed in late 2014. Significant progress was made in planning for sustainability, including technical meetings centered on long-term planning for Preschool to 20 and Workforce (P20W) integration and stakeholder focus groups regarding communication about the data system.

One measure that has received a lot of attention in Minnesota is school readiness of children as they enter kindergarten. In 2014, Minnesota completed an analysis between a menu of assessment tools and Minnesota's early learning and kindergarten standards. This analysis helped Minnesota determine which assessment tools are best aligned with Minnesota's early learning standards and would help Minnesota measure the school readiness of children.

In the fall of 2014, Minnesota began implementing a second phase of analysis to determine the alignment of the selected assessment tools to one another by using outside observers to double-code students. Minnesota also worked on a replication of phase one of the study, which determined the alignment of each assessment tool to Minnesota's learning standards. Analysis of these two data sets will be complete in 2015. As in previous years, recruitment is a challenge for the pilot study because of lack of understanding of the new process, unfamiliarity with available tools, and voluntary nature of the study. Another challenge is misconceptions among K-3 professionals on appropriate methods/purpose of early childhood assessment. Minnesota is working with communications experts to increase understanding of appropriate assessment and the study process- these efforts will help increase recruitment.

Conclusion

The state of Minnesota is committed to ensuring that all children get the great start they need to succeed in school and life. The state is actively leveraging Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant funds, along with public and private local investments, to expand available support programs and initiatives; build and maintain quality early care and learning environments; and ensure access through robust outreach efforts and supports to families with high needs. Through coordinated efforts among our three core agencies - Education, Health and Human Services - and bipartisan support from leadership across sectors, Minnesota is well positioned to benefit from these investments for years to come.