

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 four of the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant to improve outcomes for children through increased access to high-quality services birth through grade three, with a focus on sustainability. 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 Tribal Nation.

Accomplishments in 2015 include expanding Parent Aware ratings to all Minnesota counties; continuing to revise the early learning standards; completing a new Minnesota Infant/Toddler Credential and additional training; launching the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System website and re-branding the new kindergarten entrance assessment: the Minnesota Kindergarten Entry Profile.

The state prioritizes 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 evident across components. The executive summary will share accomplishments, challenges and proposed solutions to identified challenges in 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.

In 2015, Minnesota made measurable progress in promoting program participation in Parent Aware. On January 1, 2015, full ratings for programs became available statewide. Five Parent Aware recruiters continued to work in local communities to strategically disseminate information on Parent Aware to early learning and development programs. Recruiters use community organizing principles and receive ongoing training on how to reach "hard to reach" communities and use Nation Builder (web-based data system) to track their communications with programs. These positions are allowing quality coaches to specialize in engaging with programs to improve their quality.

We are proud of our progress in increasing the number and percentage of ELD programs participating in the statewide TQRIS in year four of the grant. The total number of rated programs has increased each year of statewide implementation from 2012 to 2015: 529, 1322, 1892 and 2434 programs were rated each year, respectively. In addition, Minnesota made strong progress in maintaining and increasing the number of children with high needs enrolled in highly rated ELD programs.

Child Care Health Consultants (CCHC) also impact quality in early learning environments and facilitate the health and development of children, families and staff. In 2015, CCHCs in the two rural Transformation Zones documented 239 points of contact with Parent Aware participating providers, 46 on-site visits, 75 telephone calls, and 113 electronic communications. Some examples of CCHC activities provided include linking families with community resources for health and social needs, collaborating on the development of improvement plans using health and safety standards from *Caring for Our Children*, and providing training and health education materials for children, parents and staff. Maintaining CCHC staffing was a challenge in three of the four zones during this reporting period. Efforts to recruit and train another CCHC were successful in one zone; services will resume in February 2016. Because of the challenges experienced with providing CCHC services in the two

metro zones, plans are to provide health and safety training to family child care providers and family friends and neighbors in 2016. Efforts will be targeted to non-English speaking communities.

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 to financially support access to high quality programs 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. These initiatives occurred in four geographic areas, or Transformation Zones, across Minnesota selected by MDE: the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) in Minneapolis, the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN) in Saint Paul, Itasca County, and White Earth Nation.

Across the four Transformation Zones, 270 children were served with scholarships throughout 2015 and 964 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 completed the spring child-level assessments in 2015 to evaluate the impact of high quality early learning programs accessed through scholarships has on children's outcomes. Final evaluation results will be released in the winter and spring of 2016.

In efforts to provide continuity for all RTT scholarship recipients, 102 eligible children from the Transformation Zones were transitioned to the state scholarship program. Fifty children not yet meeting state eligibility requirements will remain on RTT scholarships through June 30, 2016 at which time most will be eligible to transfer to the state scholarship funding.

In this final year of the Pre-K Title I Incentive project, districts turned their focus to the future, focusing on quality and sustainability. Twenty-seven school districts, including two charter schools, are utilizing Title I funds and Title I Pre-K Incentives. Districts have reported many positive outcomes from the grant, including improved coordination between early childhood and K-12, and improved relationships not only within the school district but also between the district and families and community partners. Sustainability will continue to be a challenge due to budget pressures. To support districts, Minnesota developed a web page for grant recipients with resources and strategies. Minnesota also targeted Title I Pre-K Incentive grant schools for a Pre-K through Grade 3 Principal Leadership Series focused on building principals' competencies to effectively lead Pre-K-3 efforts.

In May 2015, the Department of Human Services (DHS) contracted with First Children's Finance to create business advisory councils that connect private sector representatives to local child care initiatives to support and provide technical assistance to quality child care programs in rural communities. The focus is on rural Minnesota as these communities have unique child care challenges. First Children's Finance has spoken at six rural community gatherings about how child care and economic development are linked and how private-public partnerships can increase the supply of high quality care. These community events stir the private sector into action. For example, as a result of the community event in Morris, Minnesota one local business owner committed funding to pay for training that child care providers need to maintain licensing requirements and advance in the Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System.

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, 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 (ECIP); the Comprehensive Assessment System; and Early Childhood Screening.

In 2015, Minnesota began revising the science and math standards. The revision process followed the same successful model that was used in the revision of the language, literacy and communication, and social and emotional domains that were done in 2014. Both the science and the math standards revisions will be completed in March 2016. The remaining domains: creativity and the arts, approaches to learning, social systems and physical development will be revised summer 2016.

To promote the use of the new early learning standards, Minnesota is contracting with the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota to develop training for trainers. This training is designed to help trainers embed the standards in all the training they are already doing.

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 2015, Minnesota continued to make considerable progress on the early childhood Comprehensive Assessment System including implementation of multiple online resources, supports for training and coaching and expansion of the system in grades K-3.

Minnesota completed a draft of uniform review criteria by which all early learning assessments for the kindergarten entry assessment, early childhood special education (ECSE) and comprehensive assessments will be examined in the future. Minnesota also completed the building of an online tool finder to assist early learning programs with choosing an appropriate assessment tool. This finder is designed to match respondents with assessments based on their needs via an online algorithm. The tool finder currently includes all Parent Aware approved tools and kindergarten entry assessments.

In partnership with the University of Minnesota, the state completed work on a series of hybrid learning modules that focus on authentic assessment for special topics. Early learning programs can access in-depth face-to-face training or view online overview of content across a variety of topics including embedding authentic assessment into everyday practice, involving families in the assessment process, support for administrators and more. In order to ensure the information captured in the online modules is translated into K-3 friendly terms, MDE is reproducing four of the previously mentioned modules for K-3 audiences. These online resources will be completed by December 2016.

Another component of monitoring children's progress is ensuring they receive developmental and social-emotional screening in order to flag developmental concerns early and refer children to appropriate services. Minnesota has experienced many successes and several challenges during the first six months of actively piloting an electronic screening initiative.

Successes include pilot sites have documented that they are able to screen more children using the electronic system versus paper and 90 percent or more of the staff reported satisfaction with using the electronic screening system. Additionally, a high percentage of families have reported that the electronic system is easy to use and that it helped them understand and support their child's growth and development. A few pilot sites have experienced unanticipated technical challenges relating to their local IT resource capacity; full implementation for these sites is expected by early March 2016.

Most pilot sites experienced internal IT barriers/capacity, which led to a significant delay in getting the sites up and running. For example, many local IT services were reluctant to put a new software and data on their servers or there was a protocol to having IT committed to spend time on this project that wasn't planned for adequately in advance. Additionally, during the first several months, there were

frequent electronic screening system glitches that needed to be addressed before the sites could move forward. Patient Tools Inc. has been very responsive and has correctly glitches as they come up.

Great Early Childhood Workforce

Since the release of *Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals* in 2014, the focus in year four has turned to implementation of the revised framework, through consultation with institutes of higher education on its content; development and delivery of training for trainers and practitioners; alignment of the new framework with the Professional Development Registry and Minnesota's Career Lattice; and promotion of the framework to early childhood practitioners, trainers and institutes of higher education.

As an additional support, companion guides to accompany the Family Child Care and Preschool versions of the framework have recently been completed and posted on the MDE website. Companion guides combine the key concepts found in the framework with suggestions and examples of what it might look like in an early childhood setting. They are intended to help people working with young children have a beginning understanding of what to do. In partnership with these efforts, DHS is working to align training and supports for the early childhood community with the framework.

After the 2014 revision of the Minnesota Child Care Credential, Minnesota saw a large increase in interest in the revised credential and thus a significant increase in completion rates in 2015 compared to previous years. Additionally, development of the Minnesota Infant/Toddler Credential (MNITC) has been completed and English and Spanish cohorts are scheduled to begin in early spring 2016. Overall, we are proud of our continued progress to meet or exceed our targets to support early childhood educators in progressing to higher levels of credentials and degrees.

MDE staff created a toolkit of over 300 existing early childhood resources to be used to guide and support providers. The toolkit provides resources that align to CCDF reauthorization requirements. Resources include topics such as home safety, health and school readiness. Effort was made to include translated materials in Spanish, Somali and Hmong. In 2015, MDE branded this as the Early Childhood Resource Directory and partnered with DHS and Child Care Aware of Minnesota to make the directory available online.

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 toward increasing measurement and use of data 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.

In 2015, Minnesota made great progress in the ECLDS, resulting in the launch of the new ECLDS website at the end of January 2016. Challenges faced were similar to many states with a late start in the work, delays in hiring initial teams, and relationship-building between departments in navigating the construction of data-sharing agreements and governance structures. Timing challenges were addressed by engaging in sound project planning principles and practices. In terms of relationship-building, the cultivation of functional relationships across agencies has supported the work of the ECLDS, which has required persistence and regular check-ins about goals and the obligations to the grant. Establishing commitment to the end product was essential to maintaining forward momentum.

One measure that has received a lot of attention in Minnesota is school readiness of children as they enter kindergarten. In 2015, after completing its two-phase kindergarten entrance assessment pilot, Minnesota began implementing the Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP), which is designed as a tool to measure children's status on the state early learning standards beginning at kindergarten entry. In order to do this, the menu of tools from which districts can choose underwent a substantial amount of rigorous alignment and validity testing, paying close attention to the domain coverage of the standards. As a result, Minnesota has adopted the following tools: Desired Results Developmental Profile - Kindergarten; Formative Assessment System for Teachers; Teaching Strategies Gold; and Work Sampling System - Minnesota Adapted Version.

Transformation Zones

Minnesota has focused a majority of its Race to the Top efforts in four high poverty communities that represent diverse populations in our state. The four Transformation Zones provided Minnesota with the opportunity to differentiate strategies based on key factors of each community including location to an urban center and demographics of the population. Additionally, the close work with the Transformation Zones provided strong feedback to the state regarding the impacts of the Race to the Top efforts in each of the diverse communities on increasing access to high quality early childhood programs.

Over the four years of the grant, Transformation Zones have stressed the huge benefit of having the flexibility to design their own programs with the RTT-ELC grant. They see a great value in building on their knowledge of their local area's systems and relationships to develop their scholarship programs. Flexibility was also key in helping families with complex needs. Zone's found that they at times needed to be able to work with families on a case-by-case basis and they were able to establish their processes to allow for that individualization.

The work with the Transformation Zones also provided essential feedback to the state on implementation and policy decisions that were producing positive outcomes or facing local challenges. All Zones indicated that the RTT-ELC efforts in their area led to an increase of collaboration across stakeholders and providers and brought a new level of emphasis to the importance of high quality early childhood experiences in their area. Challenges faced by the the Zones included transportation issues, lack of providers, isolation of providers and a lack of physical space to expand classrooms. Some of these challenges were resolved over the time of grant like the increased participation of child care providers in Parent Aware or the use of Title I Incentive funds for transportation. However, other challenges will take longer and additional state and local resources to provide long-term solutions like the building of new spaces for programs.

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 has actively leveraged Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant funds, along with public and private local investments, to expand and 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.