

# New Mexico Race To the Top – Early Learning Challenge

Progress Report

December 2014

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**(Investment Zones and Professional Development will be addressed in a future progress report and the Annual Performance Report (APR))**

## Introduction

The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC) was awarded to New Mexico on January 1, 2013. The RTT – ELC is a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The purpose of the RTT-ELC grant is to improve quality early learning, development programs and services and close the achievement gap for children with high needs. The RTT-ELC is a competitive grant competition that focuses on improving early learning and development for young children by supporting a State’s efforts to design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning and development programs and services and to increase the number of children with high needs enrolled in those programs and services. The overarching goal is to make sure that many more children, especially children with high needs, enter kindergarten ready to succeed. (U.S. Department of Education, "Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge").

In the state of New Mexico, three agencies are tasked with the implementation and management of the grant; the Department of Health (DOH), Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) and the Public Education Department (PED). Management of the grant is based on six projects, and their associated tasks. These projects are designed to support the creation of a “system of systems” that transform disconnected, independent programs into a coordinated system that focuses on the building of high-quality, comprehensive, community-specific programs with a continuum of integrated services. The projects are as follows: Grants Management, FOCUS-Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (FOCUS-TQRIS), Early Childhood Investment Zones, Professional Development, Early Childhood Data Systems, and Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) (State of New Mexico, “New Mexico Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Annual Performance Report” 4).

New Mexico has made substantial progress towards their scope of work over the last two years. This document outlines the key accomplishments, challenges, lessons learned and next steps regarding select RTT-ELC project in the 2014 calendar year.

## Grants Management

### Key Accomplishments

In 2013, New Mexico established a governance structure to streamline the communication and management of different aspects of the grant. Building upon that structure in October of 2014, the Department of Health (DOH), Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) and Public Education Department collaborated in the development of a Governance Manual. The manual defines the relationship and communication between those involved with the grant, including the three state agencies, outside contractors, advisory councils and stakeholders, and describes the types of decisions made at each level.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

In December 2013, CYFD hired a Project Coordinator to oversee the day-to-day operations of the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT – ELC) grant. The coordinator is to collaborate with other state departments, project leads, contractors and sub-contractors. They are also responsible for submitting and tracking reporting as required at a Federal level. The New Mexico State Leadership Team ultimately decided that this position would be more efficiently housed at the lead agency, PED. The title changed and an Interim RTT-ELC Project Manager was hired in September. CYFD hired another Project Coordinator to work in partnership with the Manager and to coordinate the work at CYFD, where a significant portion of the RTT-ELC work is taking place.

### Next Steps

With feedback from the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) RTT – ELC Project Officers, the Leadership Team contracted with Tracy Zimmerman with the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation to develop a communications and marketing plan. Once a plan is developed, the State will use the Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire a contractor to carry out the communications and marketing plan. An Early Learning NM website will be launched in early 2015.

## **FOCUS – TQRIS (Tiered Quality Rated and Improvement System)**

### ***Public Education Department (PED)***

#### **Key Accomplishments**

In January 2014, PED reviewed the current FOCUS criteria and PreK Program Standards to create a crosswalk of both documents. The crosswalk, which included IDEA 619 and Title I programs, was completed in June. The PreK Program Standards were aligned with FOCUS criteria as a result and the PreK program contracts reflected these changes. Then the UNM Center for Development and Disabilities (CDD) was contracted to create FOCUS criteria, including monitoring tools with protocols for use in PED PreK, Title I and IDEA 619 programs. A FOCUS Project Manager was hired through the contract with CDD. UNM CDD is also in the process of hiring 2 FOCUS Training and Development Consultants to assist the Manager. Work started on the PED FOCUS revision in August 2014.

A draft of the New Mexico FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality for PED Preschool Programs (PreK, IDEA 619 and Title I) was completed in October 2014. Stakeholder meetings were held in October and November with approximately 45 PreK, Title I and Special Education administrators from the school districts throughout the state with the purpose to help participants gain an understanding of FOCUS and provide feedback on the PED FOCUS draft.

PED PreK, IDEA 619 and Title I program staff participated in Cross Sector Team meetings, Child Trends Meetings and State Implementation Team Meetings with members of the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) and Department of Health (DOH). Staff was also on hand for the NM FOCUS Orientation for Early Childhood Cross-Sector Consultants and Leadership in October and the Early Childhood Symposium in December.

#### **Challenges and Lesson Learned**

To be able to implement FOCUS and TQRIS in all public schools early childhood programs without offering monetary or other incentives may be a challenge.

The proposed FOCUS - TQRIS criteria differs across programs, particularly between public school, PreK and private child care. There is a need to validate the ratings across the system i.e. does a 5 star “exemplary” rating have the same meaning across sectors.

Also, IDEA 619 special education programs operate in various settings, including private child care, PreK, Head Start, the family’s home, and public schools, so it is challenging to have a set of criteria that effectively covers all methods of service delivery.

### **Next Steps**

The NM FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality for PED Preschool Programs (PreK, Special Education, and Title I) will be piloted in 4 school sites starting January 2015. In December or early January, the school sites will be selected and trained. Baseline measures and performance targets for participation in the pilot phase will also be established during this time period.

PED plans to seek resources or participate in networks that will provide information on quality rating systems specific to special education and public schools. This will add in the creation of monitoring tools and a verification system.

### ***Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD)***

#### **Key Accomplishments**

A revision of the FOCUS TQRIS was released in July 2014. The additions supported the full participation of each child including: Family Engagement; Inclusive Practices for Children with Developmental Delays or Disabilities; Culture and Language, including support of Dual Language Learners; and Promoting Social Relationships. Statewide dialogues took place also took place in July, which centered on the revised FOCUS criteria and allowed participants to share their feedback.

There was a FOCUS Institute held on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014, with 200 participants in attendance. At the institute, the new criteria was unveiled. The contractor “Child Trends” was also on hand to provide updates on the FOCUS TQRIS validation process.

Over 20 programs were verified at a “3 star” level in 2014. A third and fourth pilot phase of FOCUS participant programs were added this year as well. In October representatives from most of the fourth pilot phase attended a FOCUS Kickoff event. This event was designed to begin building positive relationships between programs and their consultants.

State funding was leveraged to increase funding to the four regional Training & Technical Assistance Programs (TTAPs) to assist programs on the FOCUS waiting list to “Transition into FOCUS.” Technical Assistance (TA) includes: the review of entry survey results to determine initial knowledge of FOCUS, assistance with completion of the transition survey and evaluation of results to determine TA and training needs and level of support provided to help program prepare for entry into FOCUS. Local communities of learners are being established to support programs not currently in FOCUS. The development of an action plan to support a program’s self-study process until acceptance into the next pilot phase and assignment of a FOCUS consultant is underway.

State funding allowed the four regional TTAPS to hire additional Child Care Inclusion Specialists and increase services provided and their services were extended to FOCUS participants.

The New Mexico Pyramid Partnership selected and began training a Master Cadre, consisting of 13 members, in preparation for promoting the social/emotional development of children (0-5) using the modules of the CSEFEL (Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning) curriculum.

The FOCUS Orientation for Early Childhood Cross-Sector Consultants and Leadership was a 2 day meeting held in October with over 130 participants. The meeting allowed consultants to get to know each other and build stronger regional and cross sector relationships. Another Cross Sector Consultant and Leadership event is scheduled for February 2015.

CYFD hosted the Early Childhood Symposium at the beginning of December 2014. For two days, a group of national experts in the Early Childhood field presented on the Full Participation of Each Child.

Conversations have begun between PED, CYFD, Tribal Programs and the Navajo Nation. In December, staff from both Departments made a presentation at the regional and statewide Tribal conferences. There was also tribal representation at the Early Childhood Symposium.

CYFD hired 3 Home Visiting Monitors who will begin aligning the statewide Home Visiting TQRIS Implementation process.

### **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

The recruiting and hiring of qualified FOCUS consultants is time consuming and delayed the initiation of the next pilot phase. It is also difficult to recruit consultants in critical areas of the state. Along those same lines, execution of new State contracts and contract amendments is time consuming and delays the ability to meet established RTT timelines.

The WELS (Web-based Early Learning System) database is behind schedule in development and implementation. This has delayed the FOCUS application and critical data collection process and has necessitated using other methods of data collection.

CYFD is looking at providing assistance to Head Start programs and identifying a consultant to work with participating programs. The Head Start Collaboration Office has identified programs that may be interested in participating.

### **Next Steps**

Training and Technical Assistance Programs (TTAPs) have received amended contracts for the 2015 Fiscal Year (FY15). CYFD will meet with them to discuss the “Transition to FOCUS” plan and determine specific types of support to be provided based on current personnel and



expected new hires. Transition services will begin immediately to programs on the FOCUS waiting list.

UNM Continuing Education (UNM CE) is the current contractor providing FOCUS consultation services. They have been directed to provide a plan of action to remedy current consultant vacancies and support for FOCUS programs in areas of the state where a local consultant is not available. Other available resources will be considered.

UNM Continuing Education and the CYFD Office of Child Development (OCD) staff will continue to work with WELS to complete the online FOCUS application and self-study process. In addition, work on the FOCUS verification materials will be completed online.

CYFD is reviewing options to provide consultants informational ASQ training. The trainings will cover the ASQ-3 (Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Third Edition) and the ASQ:SE (Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional) so that consultants have good overall knowledge of both tools.

FOCUS trainings are now being developed and revised based on the amended criteria. Trainings are also being reviewed with the goal of offering them online via the UNM CE Training HUB.

The revised FOCUS criteria will be reviewed to determine alignment and development of QRIS criteria for other participating systems including the Family Infant Toddler Program, Home Visiting, Public School PreK and 619 programs. We are having Child Trends validate the star rating across sectors.

## **Department of Health (DOH)**

### **Key Accomplishments**

The Family Infant Toddler (FIT) Program at the Department of Health hired a manager to oversee the development of their FOCUS TQRIS criteria in 2014. A contract was also

established with the University of New Mexico (UNM) – Center for Development and Disability to develop criteria and tools, provide training and coaching, validate tools and FOCUS TQRIS measurement. The FIT Program is in the process of developing TQRIS criteria through a stakeholder group of providers and parents and state agency personnel. This process has involved a review of the literature to determine evidenced based early intervention practices, as well as the knowledge and professional wisdom of the stakeholders. The initial stakeholder meeting took place in September 2014 with a second one in November. There was also a meeting held with UNM – Early Childhood Learning Network staff to identify and develop an initial list of potential TQRIS criteria.

The Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC), which advises and assists the FIT Program, designated the quality subcommittee to provide input and recommendations regarding the development of TQRIS criteria.

A contract was established with Larry Edelman, University of Colorado at Denver, to provide training and technical assistance and establish clear policies and procedures for the use of video technology in early intervention. Video will be used as part of an observational tool used to measure quality early intervention practices. There were consultant conference calls held to plan implementation of scope of work and identify parameters of the video project. Six provider agencies have been recruited to participate in a video demonstration project, with an initial training in March 2015.

At the FIT annual meeting, a workshop on Reflective Supervision was held with a national expert. Ongoing training and support regarding reflective supervision is in UNM's Scope of Work.

The FIT Program developed an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) Quality Review tool, which has undergone a number of revisions as it moves toward being an agency self-assessment tool and less a state monitoring tool. In the last year, FIT Program staff went onsite to teach a number of provider agencies how to use the tool with fidelity. The tool is currently being validated by ENVISION NM, under the contract with the University of New Mexico.

## **Challenges and Lesson Learned**

Some local programs have voiced concern about TQRIS and what it means to them in terms of time commitment. While most provider agencies have had little difficulty in using the IFSP Quality Review Tool, an ongoing concern is with inter-rater reliability.

## **Next Steps**

Recruit FIT provider agencies to participate in a video demonstration project. Providers will use video to enhance their practice and examples will be posted on a web based video library. Videos will also be used for training and measuring quality practices.

The UNM contract includes a subcontract with ENVISION New Mexico to validate the tools for inter-rater reliability, including the IFSP Quality Rating Tool. The FIT Program will also be developing an online training for the IFSP tool.

The FOCUS – TQRIS criteria and tools for measurement will be developed and finalized by the summer of 2015 at which time they will be piloted by 4-5 provider agencies.

## Early Childhood Data

### Key Accomplishments

In 2013, WELS (Web-based Early Learning System) was identified to design and implement a system to capture data regarding the creation of a trainer registry, educator registry, training calendar and TQRIS component. WELS has outlined key data elements and data flow processes needed to design these elements. There has been major progress towards the completion of the trainer and educator registries. The Training Calendar and Database are expected by spring 2015.

The Data Governance Committee was established, coordinating policy and practice decisions across agencies. A Technical Team was also assembled and began meeting on a regular basis in July. Decisions were made by the data governance committee based on White Paper recommendations from the technical team. These decisions were regarding use of the Common Educational Data Standards and a process for generating a Unique Identifier.

Enterprise Provider Information Constituent Services (EPICS), the system that will replace the current CYFS application, became operational in October, 2013. In 2014 several components of the new system were completed. In Phase 1, the Background Check (BC) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) were added. Phase 2 consisted of the completion of foundational client management components. There was a focus on person and staff components including CYFD Human Resources.

Existing system inventories were completed for the Person Entities – Child, Parents, and Staff, comparing existing data sources with CEDS (Council for Educational Diagnostician Services). Preliminary database diagrams and dictionaries completed and displayed on New Mexico's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge SharePoint as well.

## Challenges and Lesson Learned

A new Early Childhood Data Systems Project Manager was hired and began work in December 2014. The position had previously been filled by an Interim Project Manager who was familiar with the Race to the Top Scope of Work. The Interim Project Manager eased the transition by cataloging the Data team’s progress on our RTT-ELC SharePoint website.

Cross-sector dialogue needs to address the WELS system in order to customize it to the needs of Head Start, Public Schools, the Family Infant Toddler Program, 619 Special Education and PreK. Discussion around optimizing our collaboration process will ensure continual progress and efficient use of staff time on all data projects.

Project Certification from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), required for all projects over \$100K, was scheduled for September, which delayed the Department of Health (DOH) awarding a contractor. The original plan to have a blanket initial Project Certification was not possible, and individual certifications by an agency are required prior to “umbrella” certification.

## Next Steps

In August 2014, the Children, Youth and Families Department Early Childhood Services and Information Technology started planning the client provider requirements for the Child Care case which include Eligibility (continuation), Waiting List Management, and Non-Custodial Parent for Child Care. The CYFD EPICS program team consists of two Child Care Supervisors, Program Policy, Child Care Audit and the CYFD IT/EPICS program managers and developers. Once requirements are finalized, the team will work on the Provider section to include Provider Services and Service Rates. Additional meetings continue to take place with any follow-up questions developers may have for program staff.

The University of New Mexico (UNM) will ensure WELS uses all resources at its disposal to complete the database project in a timely manner, consistent with industry standards and within the contracted Scope of Work. Weekly monitoring of the database development will

continue with this in mind. It also needs to be determined if and how an incremental roll-out of the WELS components is feasible and appropriate for users.

There is still work to be done to assess address quality and geocoding readiness for centralized CEDS database records.

## Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)

### Key Accomplishments

The Public Education Department (PED) contracted with WestEd using the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to validate the New Mexico Kindergarten Observation Tool. Conference calls took place on a bi-weekly basis to plan and monitor ongoing tasks.

A survey was conducted with a sampling of district kindergarten teachers and PreK teachers to obtain feedback on the New Mexico PreK Observational Assessment. PED also reached out to Occupational Therapists, Regional Reading Coaches, School Psychologists and Social Workers for further voluntary review.

The contractor, WestEd, revised the PreK Observational Assessment and Essential Indicators to align with Common Core State Standards in the pilot KEA. After which the final draft of rubric language was provided to PED. Training materials, that include PowerPoint, an assessment manual and rubric samples, were created around the KEA. Then two online training sessions were conducted with kindergarten teachers in the state.

The Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT) was designed with 3 phase implementation in mind. Phase I began in April. Between April and November, the initial period of compiling validity evidence was completed and then reviewed. The evidence was then compiled into one resource to direct future recommendations for the KOT. The pilot window opened November 23<sup>rd</sup> and ends January 23<sup>rd</sup>. It consists of approximately 50 kindergarten classrooms. Some feedback has already been received.

PED developed a technology plan for KOT future data collection and reporting. They also met with Mike Archibeque, the PED Chief Information Officer, to begin work on Application Development and data systems integration.

A coordinator for the project was contracted and begun working with PED in November 2014.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Public Education Department is aware that messaging stakeholders in the current climate of concern about over-assessing students will be imperative moving forward.

It has been a challenge to recruit teachers to participate in the KOT pilot due to lack of incentives. Unfortunately, there were a few teachers who changed their minds about participating.

## Next Steps

PED plans to take a closer look at the rubrics to address concerns around the KOT using an outside expert. They will also work on another survey to release at the start of the school year to obtain feedback from additional kindergarten and PreK teachers.

After the initial pilot, field testing will be done with 50% of the school districts in New Mexico. That will be in Phase II of the KOT Implementation. That implementation includes any modifications that need to be made based on the analysis of the pilot data. The timeline for this phase is January 2015 to October 2015.

Phase III will then be from November 2015 to April 2016. During this time period, data analysis, reflection and reporting will occur. The state wide roll out of the observation tool with 100% of the school districts participating is scheduled for fall 2016.

PED will continue to work with WestEd to improve the KOT. This will be done by supporting teachers in implementing pilot protocol, analyzing data from the pilot and conducting focus groups. They will also continue to revise the assessment materials, protocols and trainings in reflection of these results. PED would like to the revision to include video content and in-person professional development.

As a part of messaging the public, PED and WestEd will have re-branded the Kindergarten Observation Tool. In rebranding the Assessment, the following considerations were made:



acronyms being used by other agencies/projects, appropriateness of re-branding, re-branding with purpose, and coordination with all partners.

Awaiting response from Information Technology (IT) at PED to start application development and data system integration. A Request for Proposal (RFP) will be created for a KEA Data System once this information is received. PED will work with IT to identify potential vendors that can meet the project requirements.

## References

"Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge." U.S. Department of Education. Web. 8 Jan. 2015. [www.2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html](http://www.2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html) .

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