

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.

During 2016, significant progress was made implementing programs and activities funded by the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant in Wisconsin.

In 2016, the RTT-ELC funding continued to help improve the quality of the early care and education by enhancing YoungStar, helping children gain access to high-quality care, and helping child care providers improve the quality of the care they provide. From January 3, 2016 to January 31, 2017, 385 YoungStar rated child care programs increased their star rating.

During 2016, the YoungStar Formal Raters continued to use the software created by Branagh to conduct Environment Rating Scale (ERS) observations. In addition the new progression of family engagement standards went into effect and allowed providers to demonstrate quality in new ways. Also the results from the YoungStar validation study were used to propose refinements to the YoungStar rating scale. Outreach efforts in 2016 continued with the 4-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) programs as well as Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The new Head Performance Standards and changes to the automated case management system offered new opportunities for collaboration.

Child care programs also had many opportunities to increase their levels of the quality. These opportunities included new resources for providers serving children with disabilities and their families, additional T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, on-site technical assistance, Educational Opportunities Grant, grants to support accreditation, garden micro-grants, and new breast feeding friendly training materials. RTT-ELC funds were also used to acknowledge providers who increased their Star rating through the use of Challenge Awards.

Work was also completed to strengthen the overall system of early care and education in Wisconsin. Many collaborative opportunities for professionals from all sectors of the field early care and education were provided. These include the Tribal-State Relations Workgroup, the Online Professional Development Portfolio, the Professional Development Initiative, and the steering committees for the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards and the Wisconsin Pyramid Model.

Challenges associated with the creation of an integrated early childhood database continued in 2016. The cross-agency team continues to collaborate and work through the tough issues. During 2016 the agencies also had to tackle the challenge a new system of budget and finance tracking. The budget and finance staff at each agency were undertaking a great workload making it difficult for them to keep up with RTT-ELC issues. In addition, a new system of tracking expenses had to be created at The Department of Children and Families (DCF) in order to monitor spending from all three Departments. Staff had to ensure careful monitoring and constant communication around spending issues in order to obtain accurate data.