

Executive Summary

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

Year 1 of Washington State's (Washington's) Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) was one of development, with Washington making significant progress in all reform areas outlined in our RTT-ELC application. Washington's RTT-ELC reforms are built on scaling efforts statewide that had previously been piloted and tested on a smaller scale. This has required an intense focus on building the needed infrastructure to support the work long-term. The five projects of Washington's RTT-ELC reform effort are highlighted below.

Project 1: Grant Management

The Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) has built the internal infrastructure and systems to support the ongoing management of the RTT-ELC reform areas.

Key Accomplishments

- DEL's Information Technology Division has completed several development projects, providing new and robust integrated systems functionality to meet the business needs of the RTT-ELC grant and full implementation of Early Achievers, Washington's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS).
- Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA-WA) launched a new tracking system in July 2012 to track activities related to enrolling Early Achievers participants and providing support to participants as they complete prerequisite steps and prepare for their rating, including outreach, marketing, and technical assistance to child care providers.
- DEL has finalized performance-based contracts for all RTT-ELC subrecipients and their scopes of work.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Integration of data continues to be a challenge, as data are collected across multiple organizations and drawn from disparate systems.
- It is necessary to marry program decisions with supportive infrastructure. For example, delivery of professional development incentives was reliant on a payment system to disburse incentive awards and the ability to implement tiered reimbursement is tied to the development of appropriate infrastructure.

Project 2: TQRIS Expansion

Early Achievers launched on July 1, 2012. In the first six months of implementation, Early Achievers has enrolled 913 early learning programs around the state.

Key Accomplishments

- All CCA-WA regions met or exceeded their 2012 RTT-ELC enrollment targets. As of December 31, 2012, 415 family home child care providers and 317 child care centers have enrolled, with a capacity to serve 20,106 children.
- Nine Head Start and ECEAP grantees with 181 sites enrolled in a pilot to determine how state and federal pre-K programs will participate in Early Achievers. These programs serve 11,189 children, 210% of the 2012 target for reaching children in these programs.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Decision to conduct a full rating on all Head Start and ECEAP pilot participants delayed moving programs into the higher tiers of Early Achievers.
- Ensuring continuity of implementation across all regions of the state is critical.
- Programs need varying levels of support and varying amounts of time to complete Level 2 requirements.
- Head Start/ECEAP programs view the ability to become a state, regional, or local training hub as an important incentive to participation in Early Achievers.

Project 3: TQRIS Infrastructure

The support structure for Early Achievers has been significantly enhanced in Year 1 of the RTT-ELC grant.

Key Accomplishments

- Professional Training Series launched, comprising six required trainings for Level 2 participants of Early Achievers including training on the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines and Strengthening Families.
- The University of Washington began a pre/post study on the Early Achievers levels, documenting the level of quality in 41 preschool classrooms and the pre/post gains in children's learning, development, and school readiness.
- CCA-WA has strengthened its capacity to provide Technical Assistance and Training in each of the 7 regions of the state. As of December 31, 2012, Regional Coordinators have been hired in 6 regions, while 43 Technical Assistance Specialists and 10 coaches have been hired by CCA-WA and trained by the University of Washington to support facility-level quality improvement plans.
- Completion of the Head Start/ECEAP pilot to inform a reciprocity agreement for participation in Early Achievers.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Articulating the roles and responsibilities across implementation partners is critical as programs progress through the Early Achievers levels.
- Additional training on the program standards is needed at all levels in the system.

Project 4: WaKIDS – Kindergarten Readiness

WaKIDS, a key reform area, reached 23% of kindergarteners in the State, implementing the three elements of the kindergarten transition: 1) a whole child assessment using Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD, 2) a family connection between teachers and parents, and 3) an Early Learning Collaboration between schools, districts, and regional levels, which includes early learning providers, kindergarten teachers and school principals. Washington is currently on track to provide state-funded full day kindergarten across the state in the 2017-18 school year.

Key Accomplishments

- During the 2012-13 school year, 1,003 teachers in 102 districts participated in WaKIDS. This includes 308 schools with 21,811 incoming kindergarteners. While we did not hit the targets for the 2012-2013 school year, we did reach 82% of our original goals.
- Results from the fall 2012 administration of TS GOLD have been available to teachers, principals, and school district administrators through the TS GOLD website since early November. Results were made available to the public in January 2013.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- It has been difficult administering WaKIDS in half-day kindergarten classrooms due to the time it takes to administer the assessment. This school year, we had to rely on volunteer schools to augment the number of full-day classrooms.
- Administering WaKIDS takes time to administer the assessment, family visits, and data entry. Teachers are still learning how to embed WaKIDS into their practice rather than view it as separate from classroom instruction. Teachers and principals found the “Family Connection” component of WaKIDS to be extremely beneficial; however, arranging parent meetings and conducting conferences took time.
- Principals need additional opportunities to understand the purpose of WaKIDS, its connections to other state initiatives, and how to assist their teachers in administering the assessment.
- Additional support is needed for teachers and principals to successfully administer WaKIDS and realize the benefits of the assessment.

Project 5: Professional Development Incentives

Key Accomplishments

- A new trainer approval process launched as a key strategy to ensure alignment of community-based training and higher education coursework with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework to promote high quality training opportunities; ensures that all trainings are grounded in the State’s Core Competencies and Early Learning Guidelines.
- DEL, in partnership with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), created statewide “stackable certificates” in early childhood education. This three-stage stackable certificate includes consistent course numbers, course descriptions, and learning objectives that align with the Core Competencies.
- Seven colleges are now offering Opportunity Grants to low-income professionals who work in Early Achievers programs. Washington Scholarships have expanded and are aligned to support professionals employed in Early Achievers programs.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- MERIT, Washington’s professional development registry system, required additional technical assistance statewide to support registration. DEL responded by training “super users” statewide that can assist with MERIT enrollment.
- Additional regional support is needed for ongoing MERIT support.

Looking Ahead:

Moving into Year 2, Washington’s reform effort will begin the shift from *development* of new systems and processes to full-scale *implementation* of these new systems and processes. For example:

- While many Early Achievers programs were rated in 2012 through the Head Start/ECEAP pilot, Early Achievers will begin the rating process for child care providers in 2013. As a result, Early Achievers will start to provide coaching and quality improvement awards to participants at higher quality levels.
- WaKIDS will continue to expand to additional schools, and will refine its processes as implementation is scaled throughout the state.
- Professional Development Incentives are designed to support early learning professionals as they progress on the Washington State Career Lattice. Distribution of incentives began in January 2013.

Moving from development to implementation will no doubt bring future learning as well as the opportunity to impact the most at-risk children. With the foundation in place, all levels of the early learning system are embracing continuous quality improvement as the method to support children, families and providers.