

# Implementation of Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems in States that Received Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grants

Four recent publications describe the progress of nine states that received Round 1 Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grants in implementing systems that rate early learning and development programs on quality and help them improve. These systems are known as tiered quality rating and improvement systems (TQRIS). RTT-ELC had five TQRIS objectives: (1) developing and adopting a common, statewide TQRIS; (2) promoting participation in the TQRIS; (3) rating and monitoring programs; (4) promoting access to high quality programs for children with high needs by increasing the number of programs in the top levels of the TQRIS, and increasing the number and percentage of children with high needs who are enrolled in programs in the top levels; and (5) validating the effectiveness of the TQRIS.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **States differed substantially in how they promoted TQRIS participation, defined quality standards, verified that programs met standards, and calculated ratings.** For example, states varied in whether they made participation mandatory for certain types of programs, offered alternative pathways into higher rating levels, or offered financial incentives tied to higher ratings. They also differed in the number of and definitions for components used in their ratings and how they combined components to calculate ratings. (NCEE 2018-4003)
- **TQRIS participation in the nine states increased by 10 percentage points from 2014 to 2016. Just under half (48 percent) of all center-based programs (that is, programs operating in community- or school-based settings) participated in TQRIS by 2016.** (NCEE 2019-4000)
- **While most states increased the percentage of programs rated at top TQRIS levels, most center-based programs (68 percent) remained at the same rating level during the study period.** Most of the programs rated at the top two levels at the end of the study period had achieved that rating before the first year examined or at TQRIS entry (73 percent), rather than improving their rating over time. (NCEE 2019-4000)
- **Lack of data prevents addressing the question of whether the number of children with high needs enrolled in TQRIS programs at the top rating levels has increased.** None of the nine states could provide data for all programs on the numbers of children enrolled, or the numbers of children with high needs (such as those from low-income households) enrolled. States provided complete data on programs' capacity (the maximum number of children a program could serve) for only one type of program (licensed centers). (NCEE 2019-4000)
- **While the percentage of licensed centers receiving child care subsidies rated at the top two TQRIS ratings increased from 31 to 39 over the study period, only 30 percent of the total capacity of these centers was in centers rated at the top levels.** We focused on the capacity of licensed centers receiving subsidies (which represent 46 percent of TQRIS participating programs) because they likely serve more children with high needs than other licensed centers. (NCEE 2019-4000)
- **State TQRIS validation studies showed that although programs with higher TQRIS ratings also had higher scores on independent measures of quality in most states (7 of 8 states), the overall level of quality for programs with high TQRIS ratings was not in the high range on these independent measures.** For example, for most states that used Environmental Rating Scales as their measure of program quality, the average scores for both higher- and lower-rated programs fell in the minimal range (scores of 3 or 4 on a range of 1 to 7). (NCEE 2019-4001)
- **State TQRIS validation studies found that children attending programs with higher TQRIS ratings generally did not have better developmental outcomes than those attending programs with lower TQRIS ratings.** (NCEE 2019-4001)