

# InFOCUS

Gretchen Kirby, Pia Caronongan, Andrea Mraz Esposito, Lauren Murphy, Megan Shoji, Patricia Del Grosso, Wamaitha Kiambuthi, Melissa Clark, and Lisa Dragoset

## Progress and Challenges in Developing Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems in the Round 1 Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge States

The Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) program, sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, aimed to improve young children's access to high quality early childhood education. RTT-ELC awarded \$520 million in the first of three rounds of grants to encourage states to develop and implement systems that rate these programs on quality and help them improve. These systems are known as tiered quality rating and improvement systems (TQRIS).

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge promoted progress in five areas related to TQRIS:

- Developing and adopting a common statewide TQRIS
- Promoting participation in TQRIS
- Rating and monitoring programs
- Promoting access to high quality programs for high-needs children
- Validating the effectiveness of the TQRIS

### TQRIS aim to improve children's access to high quality early childhood education.



Establish quality standards



Encourage programs to participate



Rate programs



Provide incentives for programs to improve and earn higher ratings



Publicize programs' ratings to help parents select better programs for their children

Nine states received Round 1 RTT-ELC grants: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington. They were expected to make progress in several areas related to TQRIS, including developing and adopting a common statewide TQRIS, promoting participation in TQRIS, and rating and monitoring programs.

A new report from Mathematica's study of RTT-ELC for the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences describes the progress these states made as of 2015 in these areas. The report identified substantial differences in the ways that states structured and implemented, promoted participation in, and rated and monitored programs in their TQRIS.

The nine states that received Round 1 Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants differed substantially in the ways that they structured and implemented, promoted participation in, and rated and monitored programs in their TQRIS.



**Eight of the nine states** had a statewide TQRIS in place by 2015.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Eight of the nine states had a statewide TQRIS in place by 2015.** Only four of the nine states had a statewide TQRIS in place in 2010, before the grant award.
- **States promoted participation in TQRIS in several ways.** States made it mandatory for certain programs to participate, such as public prekindergarten or Head Start programs. States provided alternative pathways into higher rating levels to ease the burden of data collection and verification processes on programs that already met high external quality standards. States offered financial incentives tied to higher ratings.
- **States used different methods to calculate ratings, some of which changed over time.** States also differed in the number of TQRIS components they used, the ways they defined these components, and how they used these components to rate programs, even for the highest rating level.
- **States used various sources of evidence to collect the information needed to rate programs, and they developed processes and standards to help ensure the reliability of this information.** States typically verified self-reported information from programs with information from another source, such as document reviews or on-site classroom observations. They also required training for the staff who collected information for the ratings.

## SAMPLE AND METHODS

Interviews conducted from January through April 2015 with administrators of TQRIS in the nine Round 1 RTT-ELC states form the basis of this analysis. The report describes these states' progress in developing TQRIS after the grant award.

## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report describes states' progress on three RTT-ELC areas related to TQRIS. The full report is available at <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/progress-and-challenges-in-developing-tiered-quality-rating-and-improvement-systems>.

Follow-up work will focus on other RTT-ELC areas by examining whether programs participating in TQRIS attained top rating levels and whether ratings convey meaningful differences in program quality.

**For more information, contact Gretchen Kirby, Senior Researcher, Mathematica Policy Research at [gkirby@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:gkirby@mathematica-mpr.com)**

