

Transcript for Michigan Department of Education's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Webinar 3/2/15

Introduction

Jessica Gillard: Welcome the first Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Webinar, hosted by the Office of Great Start within the Michigan Department of Education. Thank you all for joining us.

My name is Jessica Gillard, and it's my voice that you will be hearing for most of the presentation portion of this webinar. I'm the project manager for Race to the Top Early within the Michigan Department of Education's Office of Great Start.

We also have some other key Race to the Top contacts from partner organizations in the room today. You will likely hear their voices during the question and answer portion of today's webinar. These are the partners that we have with us today.

So, the objective for today's webinar is to provide an overview of Michigan's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge initiative, including the context for the grant application and goals as well an overall description of projects and activities.

We will also spend some time answering participant questions. Given the large number participants, phone lines will be muted for the duration of this webinar. We will be taking questions electronically. You can send your questions to us by typing it into "enter a question for staff" box at the bottom right of the webinar chat box, and pressing send. We'll do our best to answer as many questions as we have in our time together today and we will be generating a Frequently Asked Questions document that responds to the questions posed during today's webinar. We will send the FAQ out to participants in the near future, and, with that, we're going to go ahead and get started.

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge is a federal initiative that provides competitive state grants to support purposeful efforts to ensure that greater numbers of children with high needs are able to access high quality, early learning and development programs, and that these programs are embedded within an integrated state system of programs and supports for young children.

Michigan submitted the highest scoring application in the final round of RTT-ELC and was awarded \$51 million in federal funding over four years to accomplish the goals and activities reflected in our application. The main partners in Michigan's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge initiative are the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department

of Human Services, Michigan Department of Community Health, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, the Center for Educational Performance and Information within the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget, and the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children.

Prior to this application and subsequent award, in 2013, the Michigan Department of Education Office of Great Start held conversations with 1,400 parents of young children, educators business leaders, and local and state program directors to inform development of a statewide plan to achieve Governor Snyder's stated outcomes for young children. The outcomes are:

Children are born healthy;

Children are healthy, thriving and developmentally on track from birth to third grade;

Children are developmentally ready to succeed in school at the time of school entry; and

Children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently at the end of third grade.

As a result of these conversations, OGS published "Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future: The Plan for Early Learning and Development in Michigan," which demonstrated that Michigan citizens and leaders recognize the vital foundation that a system rich in parent involvement, true community and state collaboration, and high-quality and widely accessible early learning and development programs can provide for our young children.

These conversations and the resulting plan provided the framework for Michigan's successful RTT-ELC application, including the goals and guiding principles of our RTT-ELC initiatives.

Michigan's RTT-ELC initiative is focused on six overarching goals that reflect the priorities of the funding source but that are also individualized to Michigan's needs. These goals also directly align with the projects we're going to talk more about in depth today. As you think about the RTT-ELC Projects, it will be helpful to refer to these goals since they represent the focus areas of the initiative.

The RTT-ELC projects that I will talk about next are planned for implementation within the four year grant time frame. We are currently in the first quarter of Year 2 with many activities in progress and many more slated for launch yet this year.

Michigan's RTT-ELC initiative is organized into 7 projects, with Project 1 focusing on grant implementation and oversight and Projects 2-7 involving the actual initiatives and activities.

Project 1: Grant Management and Governance

As you might expect, the project we have focused on for the majority of Year 1 is Project 1, which involves grant management functions and infrastructure. The overall purpose of Project 1 is to develop mechanisms

for strengthening and streamlining efforts through a coordinated grant management and governance structure.

Our grant scope of work for Project 1: Grant Management and Governance calls for cross-agency management through an identified governance body and integration of grant activities into the existing early learning system.

These efforts will be supported by overarching community and outreach efforts, as well as project specific communication materials and stakeholder engagement efforts. Similar to the experiences of other states, a significant amount of our efforts to date have focused on laying the necessary foundation for this unprecedented cross-agency effort through the development of detailed scopes of work and corresponding budgets, a comprehensive monitoring and reporting plan, interagency agreements, a technical assistance plan, and the hiring of Race to the Top staff.

Project 2: Increasing Participation in Great Start to Quality

Project 2 focuses on increasing the number of early learning and development providers who participate in Great Start to Quality, Michigan's quality rating and improvement system. The Early Childhood Investment Corporation is the lead partner in this project.

As you know, Great Start to Quality helps parents find the best child care and preschool for their child, and helps providers improve the care and education they give to children. Standards set by Great Start to Quality are used to rate child care and preschool programs to ensure Michigan's youngest children have high-quality early learning experiences.

The strategies and activities in Project 2 are designed to increase the number of providers actively participating in Great Start to Quality - with a focus on home-based providers in targeted communities throughout the state. Key activities within this project include:

Launching of a cohort model for quality improvement among unlicensed, subsidized providers;

Hiring of additional Quality Improvement Specialists to provide individualized support to home-based providers in areas with larger populations of children with high needs;

Financial incentives for providers who serve children from low-income households and also agree to participate in Great Start to Quality;

Grants to support quality improvement plans developed by licensed providers; and

Coordination of efforts of licensing consultants and quality improvement specialists to increase and strengthen GSQ participation

Key metrics for measuring the success of this project that were included in our grant application are:

Increasing the percentage of licensed and registered providers participating in Great Start to Quality to 50% or more by the end of 2017; and,

Increasing the percentage of children with high needs participating in high quality programs to 30% or more by the end of 2017.

Project 3: Supporting Healthy Minds and Bodies.

Project 3 involves increasing the number of early learning and development providers who actively support the physical and social-emotional health of the children in their care. The Michigan Department of Community Health is the lead partner in this project. The strategies and activities in Project 3 are designed to strengthen and support efforts to optimize the physical and social-emotional development of young children in Michigan, with a focus on targeted communities with large population of children with high needs. Key activities within this project include:

Conducting a standards alignment process to ensure that Great Start to Quality program standards around physical and social-emotional health represent recognized best practice;

Development of training and related materials for providers and families related to healthy habits and developmental screening; and,

Hiring of specialized physical health consultants and social-emotional health consultants to support home-based providers.

Key metrics for measuring the success of this project that were included in our grant application are:

Increasing the percentage of young children with high needs who are screened for health and behavioral issues and are referred appropriately for follow-up, as well as,

Increasing the percentage of young children with high needs who participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well child care and who are up-to-date in a schedule of well child care.

Project 4: Improving Access to Great Start to Quality

Project 4 focuses on increasing both availability and access to high quality early learning and development programs for Michigan children and families. MDE will be working with the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, as well as tribal partners on this project. Project 4 focuses on engaging providers outside of state licensing jurisdiction such as Tribal programs and early childhood special education programs, in quality improvement efforts, while simultaneously implementing supports designed to increase access to high quality programs for children and families in targeted communities.

Key activities within this project include:

Technological enhancements to the Great Start to Quality platform to allow for seamless inclusion of recognized groups of providers who do not have state-issued license numbers;

Intentional outreach and communication efforts with tribal programs and early childhood special education programs around participation in Great Start to Quality;

Scholarships to support participation in high quality early learning and development programs for children with high needs who reside in targeted communities; and,

The provision of follow-up support for subsidy-eligible families in their search for a high quality setting for their child.

The metric used to measure success in this project is the same as in Project 2:

Increasing the percentage of children with high needs participating in high quality programs to 30% or more by the end of 2017.

Project 5: Developing Early Childhood Educators

Project 5 focuses on workforce development within the early learning and development system. The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children is the lead partner in this project. Project 5 serves to address a variety of gaps that have been identified in the early learning workforce development efforts, including access to higher education opportunities, quality of teacher preparation, and business training opportunities for home-based providers.

Key activities within this project include:

Development of an online credentialing program that will assist larger numbers of providers in accessing higher education opportunities that support their quality improvement efforts and professional goals;

Support for additional early learning programs associated with teacher preparation programs at community colleges to engage in an accreditation process through the National Association for the Education of Young Children; Expansion of current TEACH scholarships to support home-based provider degree attainment;

Creation of a new TEACH scholarship opportunity for bachelor degree or early childhood ZS endorsement attainment; and,

Business trainings targeted toward home-based providers to support their program administration.

Key metrics for measuring the success of this project that were included in our grant are:

Increasing the number of early childhood educators receiving credentials from postsecondary institutions and professional development providers with programs that are aligned to the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are progressing to higher levels of credentials that align with the Workforce Competency Framework.

Project 6: Early Learning Data System

The focus of Project 6 is to develop an early learning data system that connects information on children across departments and programs. The Center for Educational Performance and Information, within the Michigan Department of Management and Budget, is the lead partner in this project.

Project 6 serves to create a more efficient and accessible repository of early learning data within the Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Data System to ensure that currently collected data can be better utilized at both the state and local level. Key activities within this project include:

Development of a governance structure and process for including and organizing early learning data within the state longitudinal data system;

Hiring of staff within OGS and CEPI who will support and facilitate the incorporation of essential data elements within MSDS;

Encourage and streamline inclusion of Head Start data into MSDS to allow for more accurate needs assessment processes and longitudinal data analysis;

Expand and improve early learning data reporting functions available through Mischooldata.org and in anticipation of new elements such as kindergarten entry assessment data; and,

Creation of professional development registry for early learning and development providers to improve and coordinate data on early childhood educators in Michigan.

Project 7: Increasing Family Engagement

Project 7 includes investments in family engagement and support strategies designed to increase access to high-quality early learning programs in targeted communities. The Office of Great Start is the lead agency in this project, but will be working in partnership with many entities to realize these activities.

Project 7 employs a variety of strategies as a means to engaging and supporting families in promoting the development of their children.

Key activities within Project 7 include:

Aligning and embedding the Strengthening Families Protective Factors within the GSQ program standards;

Hiring specialized family engagement consultants to support parents and providers in targeted communities;

Development and provision of training on updated GSQ program standards for family and community partnerships;

Annual training for Pathways to Potential success coaches to support understanding of GSQ and available resources;

Grants to support the establishment of trusted advisor networks in local communities to support families; and,

Development of informational materials for families about the Kindergarten Entry Assessment in Michigan.

The metric used to measure success in this project is the same as in Projects 2 and 4:

Increasing the percentage of children with high needs participating in high quality programs to 30% or more by the end of 2017. I recognize that this is a large body of work that I just went over relatively quickly. I have with me in the room today, representatives from some of our RTT-ELC partners. We would be happy to answer questions today but also to provide more information on any of these projects or activities as a follow-up to this presentation.

Questions and Answers

We've received numerous questions electronically. We'll try to answer the most frequently asked questions first. As time permits, we'll go through more specific questions. Any that we're unable to answer today will be responded to in a Frequently Asked Questions Document that will be forwarded to webinar participants and posted on the OGS website. Here are the instructions again for asking a question.

So this is a question for our colleagues from the Department of Community Health. When do you anticipate hiring other staff in the Pathways to Potential Communities, such as the social emotional specialists and health specialists?

We are...Hi, this is Nancy Peeler from DCH and Mary Ludtke from DCH is sitting right here. We are finalizing with the Department of Education our interagency agreement, and, based on that interagency agreement that will move funding from MDE over to our agency, we will be able to hire our lead staff that will be based in Lansing. In the meantime, we are meeting with all of the partners, including ECIC, because we want this project and these consultants to really be closely connected with and aligned with the current QI consultants in the expansion. So, we will be

working on that process while we work on the movement of the funding. And at that point, and I don't have a specific timeline for you, but at that point we will be able to move forward with identifying how we will be hiring staff, where those staff will be placed, and the communities that those staff will be in.

We also have a question about what are the specific Pathways to Potential areas targeted through Race to the Top. Race to the top has 7 original Pathways to Potential communities as our target communities, and those are Flint, Pontiac, Saginaw, Detroit, Muskegon, Warren, and Kalamazoo. There's also several initiatives that mention rural locations that are yet to be determined.

There is a question about that. What progress has been made toward the rural initiative part of Race to the Top?

Those conversations are still happening. I can say that we will be looking at things like numbers of children with high needs, similar to the other work in Race to the Top, as well as capacity of the community. But those details have not yet been worked out.

We also had a question...Just sorting through to make sure we're getting the frequently asked questions here. Will there be more information on Quality Improvement Grants for licensed providers? Kelly would you like to speak to that?

Kelly Kreider: Yes. This is Kelly Kreider from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, and we are working through the eligibility criteria in collaboration with the Office of Great Start, so once we have eligibility criteria formalized, then we will be able to share through the local Great Start to Quality research centers what that process will look like.

So we have a question about In addition to creating new opportunities for early childhood teachers and providers, will you be working to evaluate or build capacity within existing early childhood teacher preparation programs?

I would let Erica add to this. I would say in Race to the Top specifically we have the initiative focused on NAEYC accreditation for teacher preparation programs, and, then also building their capacity to offer online an online CDA opportunity. We'll be working with 5 to 6 different institutions for higher education to build our capacity for online program offerings.

Questions about could I give a little more information on the plan engage the Early Childhood and Special Education programs in the quality improvement process?

I would say that we are still working through that process and we will definitely be engaging programs as well as staff here in the department to really figure out how we want to go about launching that initiative, and, as well as, involving the groups that already come together with

Early Childhood Special Education programs throughout the state to figure out what is the best path for that work.

Just joining us in the room a few minutes ago, I want to make sure that she is introduced is Kaitlin Ferrick. I'll let Kaitlin introduce herself.

Kaitlin Ferrick: Hi. This is Kaitlin Ferrick and I'm the Head Start State Collaboration Office Director at Office of Great Start Michigan Department of Education. One of the questions was, "Was Head Start mentioned as a partner?" And, yes. One of the projects that is actually underway already is the inclusion of Head Start data into the longitudinal data system. That is under Project 6, and myself and Jessica have been convening with Head Start directors and staff in a data advisory along with CEPI, and we are working on launching within the next couple of months the pilot to assign Unique Identifier Codes to Head Start grantees. That project is underway and we are sort of the first stage Head Start is engaged in the first stage of the data.

Jessica Gillard: And I just want to point out that, when I was saying the Office of Great Start as a partner, I was including the Head Start Collaboration Office. So, Head Start is a key partner in the work through Race to the Top, so with Kaitlin being housed here at the Department of Education I just included her in the Office of Great Start.

We have a question about incentives. What incentives will be available for all providers, not just those identified in the Pathways to Potential communities?

We have two incentives planned to support different parts of participation in Great Start to Quality. And, those will be a participation bonus, as well as the quality improvement grant that we already mentioned. Both of those will have eligibility criteria around them targeting programs and providers that accept children who are eligible for the CDC subsidy. So, look for more specific information about both of those incentives to come in the coming months.

Jessica Gillard: A couple questions about sustainability. What will happen to the programs Great Start to Quality, etc. when the grant funds end in 2017?

Race to the Top really prioritizes building in sustainability throughout the course of the grant, so that will be something that we will all be mindful of as we're moving through the process. But, also, just to clarify, Great Start to Quality in and of itself is not funded through Race to the Top. There are separate funding streams available. I can let Lisa Brewer-Walraven speak to that just to clarify.

Lisa Brewer-Walraven: Currently Great Start to Quality is funded through our child care development fund block grant dollars that come to the state. States are required to invest in subsidy as well as quality. So, that is our primary funding source for Great Start to Quality. Race to the Top really allowed us to expand what we were currently doing to bring more providers into participation.

Jessica Gillard: I have a question about which website will the PowerPoint be available on, but Ursula can speak to that.

Ursula Hines: There is already an Office of Great Start website. We will be adding pages to that specifically for Race to the Top and that's where the resources from this webinar and any of the projects that we make available will be housed.

Jessica Gillard: Got a question about will community based child care programs input data into the longitudinal data system?

Under Race to the Top, at this point, our focus is on building the capacity of Head Start programs, so some of those may be community based, but I think the question is specifically referencing more non Head Start programs. And, right now, our efforts do not target those providers for inputting data into MSDS, but, rather the state and federally funded programs.

We have questions about when to expect the Race to the Top pages on the OGS website. Those are in process right now. In the interim, we will make sure that participants get a copy of the PowerPoint sent to them electronically.

We're just in the process of working through the department processes for getting our website pages launched. There's another question about communication for programs that are not Head Start or GSRP, what is the best way to stay involved or on top of Race to the Top requirements or funding opportunities. I would say that our web pages are going to be the best way to stay in touch.

We're also working on an electronic communication format that people will be able to sign up for to receive information. If you've registered for the webinar, you're now kind of in our database of contacts, so, we'll make sure as those pieces are developed and launched that you receive that information.

We have a question about will the increased access for children with high needs include younger children in the GSRP program?

I can say, not as a part of Race to the Top will there be any extension of GSRP to a different age group of children.

Will there be classes to help people to become licensed providers through Race to the Top? There will not be, although we do have someone here from the Bureau of Child and Adult Licensing, if you want to introduce yourself Colleen, and you can speak to where someone can find information about becoming a licensed provider.

Colleen Nelson: My name is Colleen Nelson. I'm from the Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing, and we do have information the application and then just general steps on how to become licensed on the licensing website, and our web address is www.michigan.gov/childcare. We also have the unlicensed subsidized provider cohort that will be happening through targeted community regional resource centers. Kelly might be able to

speaking a little bit more about in general what regional resource centers could offer to individuals interested in becoming licensed.

Kelly Kreider: Well, also, Great Start to Quality Resource Centers offer training for the different tiered reimbursement levels for the unlicensed, subsidized providers. You can reach out to your local Great Start to Quality resource center by calling 1-877-614-7328. We will be launching small cohorts of unlicensed, subsidized providers in two, phases pilot some different methodology about supporting people to obtain tier two training for that group of providers, and with the ability to support progress towards licensing. That is the goal.

Jessica Gillard: Someone just wanting clarification about whether community based centers are included in these projects. And I would say anywhere there is a reference to licensed or registered providers, that includes both family group and center based providers. To be clear.

I think we've made our way through most of the questions. We have a few questions about when the activities in Project 7, well, actually, this is referencing the professional development registry, which is not in Project, but that's okay. The professional development registry work is already happening. So, I will let Lisa and Kelly talk a little bit about that.

Lisa Brewer-Walraven: This is Lisa. We have through the Office of Great Start in coordination with ECIC a professional development stakeholder group that comes together to talk about the early care and education workforce. There is a work stream who worked really diligently on researching registries in other states finding out how other states were operating registries and has made a recommendation and the data element that would be important for Michigan to collect through a registry.

The next steps are the steps I'll let Kelly talk about because we have to find a way to collect those data elements through our current system.

Kelly Kreider: At the Investment Corporation, we are taking the recommended data element, and we will be working with one of our existing system contractors to build out the actual platform that the registry will live on. So, we will be in communication with the work stream that Lisa mentioned, and as we develop those we will be engaging stakeholders for feedback.

Jessica Gillard: Thank you. There is a question about the status of the Engaging Families, Project 7, and whether or not the work is only Pathways to Potential communities. Some of the elements of Project 7 are targeted to Pathways to Potential communities, such as the specialized consultants and grants that will be available for convening parent cafes. There's also broader work that will benefit folks statewide around the standards for Great Start to Quality, and the trusted advisor work that will be happening.

A question about whether the participation incentives that will be available for Great Start to Quality will only be given to programs

serving children below 185% of the poverty level and whether or not that will be the same for grants to improve quality.

I will say that I will turn that over to Kelly with the final details in terms of eligibility for those opportunities are still being worked through.

Kelly Kreider: Yes, and I'm just going to mimic what Jessica said. We are finalizing the eligibility criteria and those will be shared once they are finalized.

Jessica Gillard: There's a question about whether there will be some sort of standard assessment form available for preschools that aligns with the proposed kindergarten entrance exam.

I just want to clarify that what's being talked about for our kindergarten entrance assessment, and what's been piloted and field tested in Michigan around the kindergarten entrance assessment is in no way shape or form an exam or anything near an exam that's being given to young children. Right now we're using an observational tool of teaching strategies that helps teachers to collect information about where children are across a variety of domains. But is in no way shape or form an exam or something that can be passed or failed, etc. So, I just want to clarify that first of all.

I think what was at the heart of this question is whether there will be guidance for preschool programs, and how they might better support children coming and meeting those expectations at kindergarten entry and I would say that those efforts are absolutely being talked about within the Michigan Department of Education. They're not specifically through the Race to the Top initiative, but it is definitely something that is being talked about and discussed.

I have a question specifically about where Pathways staff are placed in areas for birth to five families to reach or in K-5 elementary buildings, and I don't have anyone specifically in the room from the Department of Human Services today that could speak to where the Pathways to Potential specialists are currently housed.

If this question is referencing the specialist in terms of physical and social emotional health or the family engagement specialists that will be funded through Race to the Top, their location is yet to be determined. We're still working through several models and what might work for local communities to figure out what is the best place for them to be located.

I'm just looking through to make sure we've answered all these questions. I have a question about Head Start and GSRP programs that are having problems in the recruitment of eligible children. Will Race to the Top programs help with this?

I would say no. There's nothing specific in Race to the Top that works on recruitment.

Question about whether participants in the CDA opportunities will be charged a fee.

Erica Willard: CDA opportunity is scheduled to be working with the colleges to create a new CDA online training availability, and there's not an intention to charge a fee for that. For the creation of the training, but the courses, yes. There would be a fee required to take the courses through the colleges.

Jessica Gillard: But potentially they could access scholarships. TEACH scholarships.

Erica Willard: Yes.

Jessica Gillard: I have a question about we referenced Early Childhood Special Education and Tribal providers not being licensed and asking whether we're moving towards licensing Early Childhood Special Education programs. I would say that is not a focus of Race to the Top. The goal of this initiative is to really create an opportunity and engagement point for programs that are interested in participating, and so that we have a mechanism for them to participate. So, it focuses on both the mechanics of actually having a way for them to come into the system, and, then, also separate outreach efforts so that they understand what is available to them through Great Start to Quality and the benefits of participation.

Question about whether any incentives are available for programs that have already participated in Great Start to Quality?

Kelly Kreider: I would say, look forward to hearing the official eligibility criteria as those are released.

Jessica Gillard: Question about if there are any plans to use the CKCCs to develop an evaluation tool for early childhood staff?

I would say not through Race to the Top. We do not have that as a targeted initiative at this time.

Another question about the KEAs. If there is no passing or failing basis, how will it be determined if the child meets the mark?

I could speak to what's currently being used are widely held expectations of a national data sample. The tool has been validated to see where exactly we would expect children to be coming in at kindergarten, and the tool itself also has been aligned with the Common Core state standards. Most of the tools are for states that are using those. Though, it isn't, like I said, a pass fail, but where a child is in position to widely held expectations at kindergarten entry.

I think we have all of the questions. We have just a few more minutes if there's any remaining questions. We have a question about whether we will post the answers to these questions on the site, and yes. We will be generating a Frequently Asked Questions document from these questions so that you'll have the information as it stands now, and then we'll

continue to update that information as we have more details available around some of the specifics on these.

Another question about whether Race to the Top will be considering offering incentives to programs who are already fully inclusive programs. Right now, that is not a current consideration in Race to the Top, but that does not mean that it wouldn't be moving forward. Just at this point that it's not a targeted element.

Okay. Well, I think we are through all of the questions that participants have today. Thank you for your interest in Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge work in Michigan. We really appreciate your participation and your questions. You will receive a survey link via email that will help us to determine topics for future communication efforts like this for Race to the Top.

So, please complete that survey, so we can make sure we're sharing information that is of the most interest to you moving forward. Thanks, again. Have a great day.