

### **Focused Investment Areas -- Sections (C), (D), and (E)**

*The State must address in its application--*

- (1) Two or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (C);*
- (2) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (D); and*
- (3) One or more of the selection criteria in Focused Investment Area (E).*

*The total available points for each Focused Investment Area will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address in that area, so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points.*

### **C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children**

*Note: The total available points for (C)(1) through (C)(4) = 60. The 60 available points will be divided by the number of selection criteria that the applicant chooses to address so that each selection criterion is worth the same number of points. For example, if the applicant chooses to address all four selection criteria in the Focused Investment Area, each criterion will be worth up to 15 points.*

*The applicant must address two or more selection criteria within Focused Investment Area (C).*

#### **(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards.**

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to put in place high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards that are used statewide by Early Learning and Development Programs and that--

- (a) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- (b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the State's K-3 academic standards in, at a minimum, early literacy and mathematics;
- (c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities; and
- (d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development Programs.

*If the State chooses to respond to this selection criterion, the State shall write its full response in the text box below. The State shall include the evidence listed below and describe in its narrative how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State's success in meeting the criterion; the State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. If the State has included relevant attachments in the Appendix, these should be described in the narrative below and clearly cross-referenced to allow the reviewers to locate them easily.*

*In scoring the selection criterion, peer reviewers will determine, based on the evidence the State submits, whether each element of the selection criterion is implemented or planned; the quality of the implementation or plan (see the definition of a High-Quality Plan for the components reviewers will be judging); the extent to which the different types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State are included and addressed; and the extent to which the unique needs of the State's special populations of Children with High Needs are considered and addressed. The State is responsible for providing clear and detailed information to assist the peer reviewers in making these determinations.*

Evidence for (C)(1)(a) and (b):

- To the extent the State has implemented Early Learning and Development Standards that meet any of the elements in criteria (C)(1)(a) and (b), submit--
  - Proof of use by the types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State;
  - The State's Early Learning and Development Standards for:
    - Infants and toddlers
    - Preschoolers
  - Documentation that the standards are developmentally, linguistically and culturally appropriate for all children, including children with disabilities and developmental delays and English Learners;
  - Documentation that the standards address all Essential Domains of School Readiness and that they are of high-quality;
  - Documentation of the alignment between the State's Early Learning and Development Standards and the State's K-3 standards; and

**(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Guidelines (15 points)**

Florida's Early Learning and Developmental standards consist of two documents that form a continuum of development and learning from birth to age five across multiple domains of development. The first document is a set of birth-to-four-year-old standards that was revised in 2010 based on the latest research on child development and learning. These standards are divided into specific age ranges that correspond to important developmental milestones in young children, and include standards for children birth to eight months; eight months to 18 months; 18 months to 24 months; end of age two; and, end of age three. The second document is a set of standards for the instruction of four-year-olds that was revised in 2011. This document is completed and scheduled to replace two sets of separate standards for instruction of four-year-olds, one used by the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program and one by the Florida School Readiness program in October of 2011.

The state's recently revised standards are world-class, and outline appropriate, yet high expectations for the state's youngest children. They are research-based; developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate; horizontally aligned to the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and vertically aligned to the state's K-12 standards; and, appropriate and inclusive for children with disabilities.

Florida's early learning standards are the foundation of the state's early care and education system. By providing expectations for what children should know and be able to do at different ages of early childhood, these standards represent Florida's developmental and learning goals that have guided decisions regarding the state's current early childhood infrastructure, as well as the reform strategy outlined throughout this proposal. The state's program standards and Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS); workforce and professional development system; comprehensive assessment system; and health and community engagement initiatives have been designed to help early childhood programs and teachers meet these expectations. At the state level, reforms proposed in this application will allow child outcomes resulting from the system to be evaluated in light of the standards and used to guide decisions around system improvement. At the program level, the new standards will guide the pedagogical and program decisions made by program administrators and educators, including those related to curriculum, assessment, professional development, and family engagement.

Equally important, the state's early learning guidelines will serve as a way to coordinate the various early childhood programs that exist within the state. While Head Start, the Florida School Readiness Program (the Child Care and Development Block Grant), IDEA parts B and C, Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program, and the Maternal, Infant, and Preschool Home Visiting Program have different eligibility criteria, funding administration, and program standards, it is Florida's goal to unite them around a common set of expectations for children. Uniting around one set of standards is particularly important from a systems-building perspective as most early childhood programs in Florida participate in more than one federal or state early childhood program.

Most importantly, improving outcomes for high-need children requires that programs "begin with the end in mind." Florida standards provide the learning and development goals for

children to which every program should aspire. As such, Florida's high-quality plan has a number of goals related to the state's early learning standards.

The first is to train all early childhood educators and program administrators on the new standards. In order to improve instruction and promote program quality, particularly for high-need children, early childhood administrators and educators must understand the expectations for children set forth in the standards, why they are important, and how they should be used. The standards guide how program administrators conduct planning for their programs and how teachers will plan for and provide instruction for their children. It is the state's expectation that programmatic decisions and teacher interactions with children are designed to help children meet the expectations articulated in the standards.

To this end, the state has developed scaffolded, outcome-based training to ensure that early childhood program leadership and educators understand the standards and use them as the basis of programmatic and pedagogical decisions related to curriculum, assessment, teacher training, technical assistance, and family engagement initiatives. The trainings will be administered through the Early Learning Coalitions to administrators and teachers **in all early childhood programs across the state** including Head Start, child care programs, VPK programs, and programs receiving IDEA Parts B Section 619 and C funding. Future professional development will be adapted depending on the type of program.

In addition, a training module for Head Start programs will be developed that focuses on using the state standards in conjunction with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. The Head Start Framework contains domains, domain elements, and examples, but does not contain specific expectations for children. As part of the state's goal to unite programs through common expectations for children, the training will use the domain elements of Framework and the expectation set forth in the state standards to help Head Start programs develop school readiness goals for their children as required by the new proposed regulations for Head Start redesignation.

The second goal involves the implementation of reforms that more closely align system components to the revised standards. In the VPK and School Readiness Programs curriculum

and assessment approval processes are in place to ensure that the materials designed to educate and assess children are strongly aligned to the standards. Workforce development policies and the state's career ladder will be aligned to the standards to ensure the state is promoting teacher competencies that help them work with children to meet the standards. The alignment of the different program components is discussed in detail in sections B, C.2, and D.

The third goal is to reform the state's assessment and data systems to better monitor children's progress toward the standards. This goal is discussed in detail in sections C.2 and E.

The final goal is to engage in a revision of the standards in 2014 using a statutory requirement for "periodic revision." While the state feels that its current early learning standards are state-of-the-art and reflect the latest thinking in child development and learning, it is important that the standards be revised at periodic intervals to incorporate new research in the field. The state plans to use the revision process in 2014 to incorporate published research in child development and learning since the last revision, incorporate stakeholder input and the new Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, combine the two standards documents into one seamless set of standards, and continue to improve on the universal design of the standards and their linguistic and cultural appropriateness based on any new research.

The rationale, activities, timeline, specific responsibilities, and other requirements related to the implementation of these goals are discussed in the high-quality plan matrix in Section A-4.

*(a) Evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate across each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and that they cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness.*

As evidence that Florida meets the elements of (C)(1)(a) Appendix (C)(1)-1 includes the two new standards documents in truncated form<sup>1</sup>. Florida's revised standards are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Indeed, as a state with one of the largest Hispanic populations in the country, it is imperative that the standards

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<sup>1</sup> Both the birth-to-four and four-year-old standards include domains, sub-domains, standards, and benchmarks. To keep the page count of the appendices down, we have combined the documents and only included the domains, subdomains, and standards in the appendix.

possess these characteristics. “Developmentally appropriate” as it relates to standards means that the standards represent expectations for children that are challenging, yet achievable and derived from the vast body of literature on child development and early learning.<sup>2</sup> “Culturally and linguistically appropriate” means that standards are written and applied with a respect for the diversity of languages spoken in the state, how parents and families born outside of the United States or who speak a home language other than English interact, educate, and nurture their youngest children at home; and, how parents and families approach involvement in the state’s educational system and their barriers to involvement.

To ensure that the standards are research-based, as well as developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, their development was guided by an expert panel of state practitioners, researchers, and administrators. The panel consisted of experts in different domains of development, and in different populations of children (English-language learners and children with disabilities). In addition, the panel also consisted of expert practitioners who have to apply the standards in their programs. The panel critically evaluated each domain to ensure that the sub-domains, standards, and benchmarks included in the documents were reflective of the literature, universally applicable to all children, and would be of use to practitioners in the field. National and state experts also reviewed the draft and provided valuable feedback. Additionally, over 700 public feedback surveys were submitted and reviewed by the Florida Department of Education.

Finally, the standards address all important domains of development and learning. The RTT application defines “Essential Domains of School Readiness” as “the domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including mathematics and early scientific development), approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development (including adaptive skills), and social and emotional development.” Florida’s Early Learning and Developmental Standards are organized into five domains, or areas of development. These domains closely mirror the domains cited in the application, and include the

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<sup>2</sup> *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, Third Edition*, Carol Copple & Sue Bredekamp, eds. Copyright 2009 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

following: physical development; approaches to learning; social and emotional development; language, communication, and emergent literacy; cognitive development and general knowledge (including mathematical thinking and scientific inquiry).

As evidence that the standards address all Essential Domains of School Readiness as defined by the application, we have included an alignment of the standards to the domains highlighted in the application in Appendix (C)(1)-2. This alignment clearly indicates that all of the domains are addressed.

*(b) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are aligned with the K-3 academic standards in, at minimum, early literacy and mathematics*

The revision of Florida's Standards for Four-Year-Olds took place after Florida's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA). The Standards for Four-Year-Olds were revised to be aligned with the kindergarten CCSS. In addition to mathematics and ELA, Florida has kindergarten-standards in the subject areas of social studies and science. The progression of the Standards for Four-Year-Olds into the kindergarten standards is seamless across all of these subject areas. As evidence of this alignment, Appendix (C)(1)-3 provides an alignment of the Standards for Four-Year-Olds to the kindergarten standards.

*(c) Includes evidence that the Early Learning and Development Standards are incorporated in Program Standards, curricula and activities, Comprehensive Assessment Systems, the State's Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, and professional development activities.*

Florida's early learning standards represent the foundation of the state's early learning system. All aspects of the system are either currently designed to help children meet the state's early learning standards, or will be aligned based on the reforms outlined in this application

Specific examples include:

- Curriculum and assessment approval processes ensure that these vital aspects of early learning programs are aligned with the standards;
- A set of workforce development competencies and career ladder that are aligned with the standards;

- A kindergarten readiness screening assessment aligned with the standards (evidence of this alignment can be found in Appendix (C)(1)-2);

*(d) The State has supports in place to promote understanding of and commitment to the Early Learning and Development Standards across Early Learning and Development programs.*

The typical early childhood program in Florida receives funding from a variety of federal and state early childhood funding sources. For example, Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Programs also receive funding from Florida's School Readiness program. Given the complications and burden of having a single program adhere to multiple sets of early childhood standards, Florida has begun the process of moving every early childhood program in the state to one set of early childhood standards.

The revised Standards for Four-Year-Olds, approved by the State Board of Education in October 2011, were created through a collaborative process between the Agency for Workforce Innovation (now the Office of Early Learning) and the Florida Department of Education. While each program prior to this collaboration had to adhere to its own set of early learning standards, the new Standards for Four-Year-Olds will apply to both Florida's School Readiness program and the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program. Another key area of coordination is between the state standards and the recently revised Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. State School Readiness and VPK programs are required to align their curriculum and other program features to the state's early learning guidelines, while Head Start programs are required to do the same with the Framework. Given that both the Federal Head Start program and the State of Florida used the latest research on child development and learning to guide the expectations for children, there is strong alignment between the two sets of standards. Appendix (C)(1)-4 highlights this alignment. As discussed above, Head Start programs in the state will be trained on how to use the state standards in conjunction with the Framework set school readiness goals for their children.

**(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems.**

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to support the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate Comprehensive Assessment Systems by--

(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes;

(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;

(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs; and

(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services.

*If the State chooses to respond to this selection criterion, the State shall write its full response in the text box below. The State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. If the State has included relevant attachments in the Appendix, these should be described in the narrative below and clearly cross-referenced to allow the reviewers to locate them easily.*

*In scoring the selection criterion, peer reviewers will determine, based on the evidence the State submits, whether each element of the selection criterion is implemented or planned; the quality of the implementation or plan (see the definition of a High-Quality Plan for the components reviewers will be judging); the extent to which the different types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State are included and addressed; and the extent to which the unique needs of the State's special populations of Children with High Needs are considered and addressed. The State is responsible for providing clear and detailed information to assist the peer reviewers in making these determinations.*

**(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems (15 points)**

With the turbulent economic times, Florida has more high need children in early childhood programs than ever before; many of whom are in multiple programs, making interagency collaboration and efficiency crucial. Florida has made significant investments and strides toward implementing a comprehensive assessment system which like our proposed reforms are based on two highly respected works in the field of early childhood assessment, *Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality* (Early

Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007) and the National Research Council's *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*, 2008. These works articulate a vision for a comprehensive assessment system that is grounded in the state's early learning standards; reliable and valid; aligned to the other components of the state's early childhood system; well-funded; and, financially supported to ensure appropriate implementation. Florida's high-quality plan for its assessment system builds on the current infrastructure to create a comprehensive assessment system that contains the characteristics outlined above.

There are five components to Florida's comprehensive assessment system. These are:

1. A screening and referral process;
2. Ongoing, observation-based child assessment used for formative purposes and to inform and individualize instruction;
3. Program assessment, including classroom-level measures of environmental quality and teacher-child interactions;
4. A kindergarten readiness assessment; and,
5. Overall system monitoring and evaluation

Florida's reforms focus on ensuring that all assessment information collected on high-needs children, and the teachers and the programs that serve them, is secure, accurate, and has a clear purpose and use, either in identifying delay, guiding pedagogical decisions, informing program improvement, or guiding systemic change. To be accurate, assessment instruments must be designed for their intended use, have strong psychometric properties, and have individuals who are trained to use them. To be useful, assessment data has to be collected with a clear purpose or set of questions in mind, and have individuals who are available to analyze and respond appropriately to the findings that are revealed. Each of Florida's five assessment system components is in various stages of development. The sections below outline the current state of each component, and how each will be improved and connected through this grant. Data security issues are discussed in section E.2 of the proposal.

*(a) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to select assessment instruments and approaches that are appropriate for the target populations and purposes*

*Component 1: Early Childhood Screening and Referral*

The early identification of developmental and learning delays is vitally important to a child's long-term success, particularly among children with high needs. Therefore, the purpose of early childhood screening is the early identification of children who may be at risk of developmental delay, and the referral of children identified at risk for additional testing and intervention as necessary. Florida's Healthy Start provides universal screening beginning at birth with all newborns receiving the Healthy Start Newborn screening while in the hospital. After birth, developmental screenings are offered in numerous places including School Readiness, Voluntary Prekindergarten, and Head Start programs, as well as through home visits.

Florida's screening rate is outstanding. The Medicaid Child Health Checkup handbook recommends that providers follow the guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Bright Futures program for screenings under the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Testing program (EPSDT). For children younger than one year, Florida had 100% screening rate with the number of screens (632,059) exceeding the expected number (409,346) for the periodicity schedule. For children between the ages of 1-2 there was an 84% screening rate; and for ages 3-5, there was an 85% screening rate. Of the children ages 0-5 eligible for EPSDT, 9.15% were referred for treatment to Early Steps (the Part C program for 0-36 months) or the Florida Diagnostic Learning Resource System (the Part B program for 3-21 years of age).<sup>3</sup>

Florida's high screening rates can be attributed partially to the fact that in 2010 the state went to the statewide implementation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (ASQ-3<sup>TM</sup>). Currently, every child who receives a School Readiness subsidy in Florida receives a screening for delays in the areas of communication, gross motor, fine motor, and problem solving. The instrument, which takes 10-15 minutes to administer and 3 minutes to score, was

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<sup>3</sup> Florida Agency for Health Care Administration analysis using 2011 screening data.

chosen specifically for its psychometric properties, ease of use, and reporting features. For example, the technical report, which summarizes psychometric data on over 18,000 children at specific age breaks from birth to five-year-old, indicates that it has high overall validity (measures what it is intended to measure), reliability (measures it the same way repeatedly), sensitivity (can distinguish delays at small age intervals), and has a similar identification rate to other high-quality tools (concurrent validity).

The state has a contract with the ASQ-3™ for 240,000 screens annually. Early Learning Coalition staff and contractors have been trained to train on the ASQ-3™ screening protocol and these trainers have begun training teachers. The selection of one appropriate screening tool simplifies this area of the comprehensive assessment and assures that the right instrument is used for the right purpose.

The statewide implementation of the ASQ-3 is a good first step, but many high-need children fall through the cracks. Of particular concern are children in child welfare for whom national data indicate that 27.8% of children reported for maltreatment two years or younger would require early intervention; however, of those, only 13.4% had an IFSP indicating services. Similarly in Florida, many children involved in the child welfare system with delays are not getting services. Using national longitudinal data and Florida child welfare data, a total of 29,825 children ages 0-3 touched by Florida's child welfare system are estimated to have delays but did not receive Part C services in 2009-2010. For Florida children 0-5, an estimated 53,363 have delays but did not receive intervention services in 2009-2010. Although these are estimates, clearly the need exceeds the number of current children referred to Part C from child welfare.

Currently, there are both redundancies and gaps in the screening process, and poor communication regarding the follow-up on referrals. Through this application, Florida will improve access to services through a screening and referral process that is simple, well known and understood by families, coordinated, community based, and connected with the child welfare and early education systems. To accomplish this, the State's high-quality plan creates better communication linkages between its early childhood and early intervention programs. In partnership with the Children's Cabinet, the state will include as part of its Early Learning Information System (ELIS) the ability to share screening and referral data so that Early Learning

Coalitions and their providers can see and share the screening histories of children and track the progress of children they have referred to early intervention programs.

A second goal for the state's high-quality plan includes creating a long-term plan for a comprehensive statewide system of care that includes a stronger system of referral once the screening tool has identified a potential delay, and determining and implementing the best methods to ensure effective follow-up services for children who receive a referral. The state has already created a Statewide Screening Task Force, led by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. The project proposed as part of this application will include researching and developing guidelines for a referral and follow-up process for families. The outcomes will include: 1) the pursuit of buy-in from stakeholders to endorse and participate in a comprehensive, coordinated system, and, (2) the production of a final report that reflects a review of national research to seek effective approaches to the referral process in Florida and includes any Task Force recommendations.

*Component 2: Ongoing, observation-based assessment used for formative purposes and to inform instruction*

On-going, observation-based assessment is a key component to quality early care and education, and serves a number of important purposes. At the most basic level, early childhood assessment reinforces good early childhood practice. The act of assessing, for example, reinforces for teachers the key elements of school readiness. In addition, good observation-based assessment tools provide research-based progressions of child development so teachers know what they are seeing and what to expect next. Most importantly, these assessments give a good indication of the developmental level of children, so teachers can tailor instruction to a child's particular areas of need. This use of observation-based assessments is critical to improving the outcomes of high-need children who may enter early childhood programs at vastly different levels than same-aged peers who are not high need.

Programs receiving School Readiness funding in Florida are required by law to conduct a pre- and post-test of children. Accordingly, most early childhood programs in Florida administer one of a number of observation-based early childhood assessment instruments, including the Early Learning Accomplishment Profile or E-LAP (48.5 percent), Teaching Strategies GOLD

(6.1 percent), the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (18.2 percent), the Child Observation Record (3 percent), or Galileo, Work Sampling, or something else (39.4 percent).<sup>4</sup>

Currently, assessment practices across the state are determined independently by each of Florida's 31 Early Learning Coalitions. Therefore, the first goal of the state's high-quality plan related to observation-based assessment is to streamline the use of different observation-based assessments and improve formative assessment practices. The state will create a list of approved observation-based early childhood assessments that have been vetted to ensure that they are designed for formative assessment, have strong psychometric properties, align to the state's early learning standards, and have web-based data reporting capabilities.

In addition, the assessment tools will be vetted to ensure that they can meet the standards and reporting requirements of multiple public programs. For example, approved assessment instruments must align to the Florida early learning standards and Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, as well as be able to produce reports that meet the requirements of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), satisfy Head Start program monitors, as well as any relevant School Readiness and VPK regulations. Recently, the Association of Early Learning Coalitions (an association of the Executive Directors of all 31 early learning coalitions) issued a statement of commitment to adopt Teaching Strategies GOLD statewide, which means that the Coalitions will begin moving toward the use of one assessment system that will feed data into the state's data system (see section E.2). This assessment tool aligns to the multiple standards discussed above and has the capability to generate reports that meet the reporting requirements of federal and state early childhood programs. Having the progress of children measured by one assessment system will significantly streamline assessment system, decrease the probability of redundancy, and make the interpretation of the results easier for the state.

The second goal is to ensure that every early childhood educator is appropriately trained in observation-based assessment to enable to use the assessments results to inform their classroom practices. This is discussed in section (d) below.

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<sup>4</sup> Results are from a recent survey of early childhood programs. Note that percentages do not sum to 100 because providers may be using different tools for infant and toddler and preschool children.

*Component 3: Program assessment, including classroom-level measures of environmental quality and teacher-child interactions*

Program assessment, including classroom-level measures of environmental quality and teacher-child interactions, is an essential component of ensuring high-need children are in high-quality care. Currently, Florida state statute defines broad parameters with regard to early childhood program assessment. For example, statute requires that Early Learning Coalitions define the conditions under which an early learning program can receive funding from the School Readiness program, but does not specify the program assessment tool to be used or the score to be achieved. Accordingly, the state's Early Learning Coalitions have developed a variety of program assessment processes.

The Environmental Rating Scales developed by Harms, Clifford & Cryer are the most frequently used program assessment tools. Implementation of the tool varies, with some coalitions utilizing coalition staff (trained by the developers), others contracting with a vendor trained in use of the instrument, and still others encouraging providers to self-evaluate using the tool.

Given the current context, the state has two goals regarding program assessment. The first is working with the Association of Early Learning Coalitions to develop consistency in the reliability and validity of ERS scores across the state, and the scores on the ERS that would disqualify a program from being a school readiness provider. Prior to the RTT-ELC announcement, Florida had moved to build its existing ERS assessor capacity. By the end of 2012, there will be ERS assessor training for approximately 75 additional assessors to reliability on the different ERS tools, and a Train the Trainer system in place in Florida. As part of the pilot and validation study of the TQRIS, the state will assess the effectiveness of the subscales in predicting positive child outcomes in order to minimize assessment of inputs and maximize assessments leading to the greatest child outcomes.

The second goal involves the introduction of the CLASS as a technical assistance tool for early learning programs. As discussed in Section B of this application, the state will use CLASS as part of its Tier Quality Rating and Improvement System. To complement this work, the state will provide CLASS assessment and training to the Early Learning Coalitions to use with their

programs to help them improve their TQRIS rating. A number of coalitions have begun to use CLASS as an additional program assessment tool, and this will be a welcome addition for the coalitions.

*Component 4: A kindergarten readiness assessment*

Florida has a well-developed early kindergarten readiness assessment system. This assessment is discussed in detail in Section E.1 of this proposal.

*Component 5: System Monitoring and Evaluation*

The purpose of system monitoring and evaluation is to answer big picture questions about the system that guide both short- and long-term system planning. System monitoring refers to a process of on-going data analysis to ensure that program elements are operating correctly and working together so that children meet the expectations set forth in the early learning standards. System evaluation, on the other hand, allows for the independent review of the system by a third-party evaluator using sophisticated methods that allow the state to understand the impact of its approach, and validate the data collected by the various pieces of the assessment system.

As part of Florida's high-quality plan, the state will create the Florida Early Childhood Research and Evaluation Committee consisting of the best researchers in Florida and nation, the Florida State Board of Education, and well as representatives from each program area including, Head Start, Migrant Head Start and Indian Head Start; the Florida School Readiness Program; the Florida Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program; the Maternal, Infant, and Preschool Home Visitation Program; IDEA Parts B and C; and Title I. The committee of the whole will meet every six months to determine the direction of the state's early childhood research agenda, but will also be organized into subcommittees based on the system components that will meet monthly and carry on the substantive work of the committee.

The research committee and its staff will have three roles. The first is to develop a monitoring system to analyze data and publish a "state of the system" report to the governor and the legislature based on the data collected by the new data system (described in section E.2). The reporting will provide both process and outcome analysis of the reforms articulated in this plan.

The second is to develop a simple reporting dash board that will give communities easy access to information about program quality and school readiness information in their area. The third is to oversee and broader impact evaluation of the system to determine the impact that the system is having on children. This will involve a quasi-experimental design and an independent review team.

*(b) Working with Early Learning and Development Programs to strengthen Early Childhood Educators' understanding of the purposes and uses of each type of assessment included in the Comprehensive Assessment Systems;*

The state has, and will continue to, dedicate significant resources to working with early childhood programs to strengthen their understanding of the purposes and uses of different types of assessment. Beginning in 1986 with the implementation of IDEA, Florida has invested in a variety of education and training in this regard. Extensive statewide and local training and technical assistance has been provided over the years and will continue to be provided. Webinars, online courses, college courses and conference presentations have been offered in numerous venues including the Head Start Annual Conference, the Florida Early Childhood Association and the Summer Early Learning Conference. In 2008 the Florida Children's Forum conducted a statewide training conference on screening and assessment, and developed training materials for early intervention and child care providers, the *Making a Difference* series. The statewide system of training will be strengthened under this high-quality proposal, relying on the dissemination of existing assessment materials. The Florida Children's Forum has previously developed a comprehensive training program, *Making a Difference: Best Practices in Screening, Assessment and Curriculum Mean Quality Outcomes for Children* to equip leaders in the field with the basic terms and types of evaluation in early childhood programs, and how these are used in daily practice. These include the evaluation of child development (screening, observational assessment, and norm-based assessments), the link between child assessment and curriculum usage, and overall evaluation of early childhood programs. In addition, in order to help programs make informed choices in their selection of assessment tools, the Florida Partnership on School Readiness commissioned the *Birth to Three Screening and Assessment Resource Guide 2004* which lists the psychometric properties and other important considerations of the available instruments. Information in the report included the reliability and validity of the instruments, the

developmental appropriateness of administration formats, and the amount of training necessary to achieve reliable and valid results.

We also propose a strengthening of the statewide system of laboratory and demonstration preschools, identifying them as major partners in the use of assessment to improve classroom teaching and school readiness.

In sum, in addition to the support that has been provided, the fact that the state has purchased and provided training on one screening tool has highlighted both the importance and purpose of early childhood screening and referral among early childhood educators. In addition, the planned approval process for a limited number of observation-based assessments and the ELC Association's commitment to go with GOLD will allow the state to target resources on appropriately administering this tool across the state. Perhaps most importantly, early childhood programs in the state will be held accountable for training program staff on the different types of assessment. This area has been included as part of the rating system of the state's proposed TQRIS. Accordingly, the state will provide support and hold programs accountable for the assessment practices taking place within the system.

*(c) Articulating an approach for aligning and integrating assessments and sharing assessment results, as appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of assessments and to coordinate services for Children with High Needs who are served by multiple Early Learning and Development Programs*

Florida has made significant progress in reducing duplication and coordinating services for children with high needs who are served by multiple programs. Florida's Transition Project has provided technical assistance for more than a decade to ensure sharing assessment information across programs, particularly at age 3 when children move out of the Part C system.

Although programs don't all use the same screening and assessment tools, interagency agreements have allowed Head Start, VPK, School Readiness and Part C programs to share assessment results across programs, eliminating the cumbersome and costly process of re-screening and re-assessment. Many programs have also worked out agreements with pediatricians to receive screening information so there is alignment with overall health care.

Healthy Start has a state-of-the-art data system called the Well Family System, a maternal child and family health program and case management system designed to allow multiple agencies to manage services and activities in complex family situations with common family support plans. The web-based system reduces duplication or the chance of clients “falling through the cracks” and streamlines the process of delivering services.

Moreover, each component of Florida’s comprehensive assessment system has a distinct purpose and provides information that either directly or indirectly affects the quality of care received by children with high needs. The implementation of the ASQ-3 as the state’s screening tool allows for a uniformity of screening that is collected and reported. All early educators in the state will be familiar with the reporting format of the tool and how to interpret the results. Results will be housed in the state’s data system so they can be accessed by authorized personnel to avoid duplicating the screening process. Also, the plan to limit the number of assessment systems (and the ELC’s choice to use GOLD) will streamline the number of observation-based tool used in the state to those that can be used across program contexts and meeting multiple reporting requirements.

Recently, the Florida State Board of Education mandated that VPK program implement a pre- and post-test for their children, making the assessment requirements the same for the VPK and School Readiness Programs. This action further aligns the assessment processes in the state.

Finally, the Early Learning Data System and PLATIUM represent to two data systems that will be used to coordinate data and share assessment results. These systems are discussed in section E.2.

*(d) Training Early Childhood Educators to appropriately administer assessments and interpret and use assessment data in order to inform and improve instruction, programs, and services*

Florida has significantly invested in training and will continue to do so. In terms of child screening, statewide trainings have been provided on Bright Futures, DECA, ASQ, ASQ-SE, and others to help programs administer the tools effectively. As noted, extensive training has been and continues to be provided on the ASQ by the Early Learning Coalitions. In terms of child

assessment, the state will be providing additional training through this grant. In terms of program assessment, authors of the Environmental Rating Scales have trained numerous teams to achieve reliability in utilizing the scales. Head Start has received extensive training and technical assistance on the Galileo Assessment Technology and Galileo K-12 Online systems.

Assessment is a critical part of Florida's early childhood system and the reform agenda outlined in this proposal. Given this fact and that programs will be held accountable for their assessment practices through the TQRIS, training the states early childhood workforce on the different components of the comprehensive assessment system will be critical. Accordingly, the state will offer a combination of state-developed training on assessment complimented by training offered by the assessment publishers. For example, the state will work with vendors to develop training modules related to properly administering observation assessments and will focus on five different areas of assessment:

1. Understanding the constructs to be measured as defined by the state early learning standards
2. Conducting good observations of children
3. Connecting observations to the constructs
4. How to use the body of evidence collected through the observations to make a determination of where the child is on the rating scale
5. How to use the child's rating to plan instruction.

These modules will be complimented by assessment training on the specific observation-based assessment tool.

In summary, Florida is well poised to successfully improve its comprehensive assessment system to enhance screening and assessment so that children with high needs don't fall through the cracks; to better use technology to create efficiencies and better data sharing; to train teachers to observe and assess children's abilities to inform and individualize curriculum and instruction; to implement a more consistent system of program assessment and teacher-child interactions to be used for continuous quality improvement; and to conduct overall monitoring and evaluation to inform and improve the system so that all children achieve their highest potential.

(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs by--

(a) Establishing a progression of standards for ensuring children's health and safety; ensuring that health and behavioral screening and follow-up occur; and promoting children's physical, social, and emotional development across the levels of its Program Standards;

(b) Increasing the number of Early Childhood Educators who are trained and supported on an on-going basis in meeting the health standards;

(c) Promoting healthy eating habits, improving nutrition, expanding physical activity; and

(d) Leveraging existing resources to meet ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number of Children with High Needs who--

(1) Are screened using Screening Measures that align with the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit (see section 1905(r)(5) of the Social Security Act) or the well-baby and well-child services available through the Children's Health Insurance Program (42 CFR 457.520), and that, as appropriate, are consistent with the Child Find provisions in IDEA (see sections 612(a)(3) and 635(a)(5) of IDEA);

(2) Are referred for services based on the results of those screenings, and where appropriate, received follow-up; and

(3) Participate in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care, including the number of children who are up to date in a schedule of well-child care.

*If the State chooses to respond to this selection criterion, the State shall write its full response in the text box below. The State shall include the evidence listed below and describe in its narrative how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State's success in meeting the criterion; the State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. If the State has included relevant attachments in the Appendix, these should be described in the narrative below and clearly cross-referenced to allow the reviewers to locate them easily.*

*In scoring the selection criterion, peer reviewers will determine, based on the evidence the State submits, whether each element of the selection criterion is implemented or planned; the quality of the implementation or plan (see the definition of a High-Quality Plan for the components reviewers will be judging); the extent to which the different types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State are included and addressed; and the extent to which the unique needs of the State's special populations of Children with High Needs are considered and addressed. The State is responsible for providing clear and detailed information to assist the peer reviewers in making these determinations.*

*Additionally, States must provide baseline data and set targets for the performance measures under (C)(3)(d).*

## Evidence for (C)(3)(a):

- To the extent the State has established a progression of health standards across the levels of Program Standards that meet the elements in criterion (C)(3)(a), submit--
  - The progression of health standards used in the Program Standards and the State's plans for improvement over time, including documentation demonstrating that this progression of standards appropriately addresses health and safety standards; developmental, behavioral, and sensory screening, referral, and follow-up; health promotion including healthy eating habits, improved nutrition, and increased physical activity; oral health; and social and emotional development; and health literacy among parents and children;

## Evidence for (C)(3)(b):

- To the extent the State has existing and projected numbers and percentages of Early Childhood Educators who receive training and support in meeting the health standards, the State shall submit documentation of these data. If the State does not have these data, the State shall outline its plan for deriving them.

## Evidence for (C)(3)(d):

- Documentation of the State's existing and future resources that are or will be used to address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs. At a minimum, documentation must address the screening, referral, and follow-up of all Children with High Needs; how the State will promote the participation of Children with High Needs in ongoing health care as part of a schedule of well-child care; how the State will promote healthy eating habits and improved nutrition as well as increased physical activity for Children with High Needs; and how the State will promote health literacy for children and parents.

<i>(Not Applicable)</i>
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(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families.

The extent to which the State has a High-Quality Plan to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information and support to families of Children with High Needs in order to promote school readiness for their children by--

(a) Establishing a progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate standards for family engagement across the levels of its Program Standards, including activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development;

(b) Increasing the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators trained and supported on an on-going basis to implement the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards; and

(c) Promoting family support and engagement statewide, including by leveraging other existing resources such as through home visiting programs, other family-serving agencies, and through outreach to family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

*If the State chooses to respond to this selection criterion, the State shall write its full response in the text box below. The State shall include the evidence listed below and describe in its narrative how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State's success in meeting the criterion; the State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. If the State has included relevant attachments in the Appendix, these should be described in the narrative below and clearly cross-referenced to allow the reviewers to locate them easily.*

*In scoring the selection criterion, peer reviewers will determine, based on the evidence the State submits, whether each element of the selection criterion is implemented or planned; the quality of the implementation or plan (see the definition of a High-Quality Plan for the components reviewers will be judging); the extent to which the different types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State are included and addressed; and the extent to which the unique needs of the State's special populations of Children with High Needs are considered and addressed. The State is responsible for providing clear and detailed information to assist the peer reviewers in making these determinations.*

Evidence for (C)(4)(a):

- To the extent the State has established a progression of family engagement standards across the levels of Program Standards that meet the elements in criterion (C)(4)(a), submit--
  - The progression of culturally and linguistically appropriate family engagement standards used in the Program Standards that includes strategies successfully used to engage families in supporting their children's development and learning. A State's family engagement standards must address, but need not be limited to: parent access to the program, ongoing two-way communication with families, parent education in child development, outreach to fathers and other family members, training and support for families as children move to preschool and kindergarten, social networks of support, intergenerational activities, linkages with community supports and adult and family literacy programs, parent involvement in decision making, and parent leadership development;
  - Documentation that this progression of standards includes activities that enhance the capacity of families to support their children's education and development.

Evidence for (C)(4)(b):

- To the extent the State has existing and projected numbers and percentages of Early Childhood Educators who receive training and support on the family engagement strategies included in the Program Standards, the State shall submit documentation of these data. If the State does not have these data, the State shall outline its plan for deriving them.

Evidence for (C)(4)(c):

- Documentation of the State's existing resources that are or will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide, including through home visiting programs and other family-serving agencies and the identification of new resources that will be used to promote family support and engagement statewide.

*(Not applicable)*