

# Rhode Island | Race to the Top

## EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE GRANT

### Informational Brief

Early Learning and Development Standards: What are they and how will they be used?

#### Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Goal

One of Rhode Island’s Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge goals is to develop high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Rhode Island defines high-quality to mean: 1) efficient, comprehensive; reflective of the research that shows the standard relates to child outcomes; culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate; and evidence-based; 2) clear, understandable, and consistent so that educators, parents, and the general public know what they need to do to support children; 3) aligned horizontally with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, State-approved curricula, and child assessments; and 4) aligned vertically with K-3 Common Core standards in mathematics and literacy. Rhode Island’s plan is designed to meet these high measures of quality.

#### Research and Rationale

Researchers define early learning standards as *documents that outline expectations for what young children should know or be able to do* (Kendall, 2003) The central premise is that early learning standards articulate what should be taught and what children should learn prior to kindergarten entry. Almost every state has developed early learning standards for young children and more than half of states maintain some process to monitor programs’ use of early learning standards.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDS) released a joint position statement in 2002 entitled “Creating the Conditions for Success” which identified four elements that support early learning standards being a “valuable part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of services for young children”. The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant seeks to implement the ideas expressed in the NAEYC and NAECS/SDS joint position statement and to be guided by research regarding the emerging issues related to early learning and development standards (ELDS). As stated in the joint position statement, early learning standards define the desired outcomes and content of young children’s education, supporting positive development and learning when they:

- emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes

- are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes
- are implemented and assessed in ways that support all young children’s development
- are accompanied by strong supports for early childhood programs, professionals, and families

These four elements are active and visible in Rhode Island’s RTT-ELC grant activities that are moving the development and implementation of our early learning and development standards.

Rhode Island’s Approach

Rhode Island’s plan, developed during the RTT-ELC application writing process, calls for the expansion and revision of the 2003 RI Early Learning Standards to reflect what research and best practice tells us what infants, toddlers and preschoolers should know and be able to do through 60 months of age or prior to entering kindergarten, whichever comes first. Once revised, the standards serve as one of three foundational components of our early childhood system, defining for early childhood professionals and families the learning goals the state believes will lead to later school and life success.

*Charting a Course for Success in the Ocean State: Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards* will serve several purposes in the state’s early childhood system. First and foremost, these revised standards will guide early care and education practices, such as curriculum and assessment choices, to ensure children receive every opportunity to make progress in the designated learning domains. These standards also can support shared understanding among caregivers and family members\* of key early learning milestones. Additionally, the standards inform primary grade teachers of the educational trajectory of the state’s youngest learners so that these teachers are even better prepared to serve all children.

The following guidance clarifies the intended use of the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS):

<b>How to Use These Standards</b>	<b>How <i>Not</i> to Use These Standards</b>
To guide early educators in the development of curriculum	As specific teaching practices or materials
To inform families about learning milestones	As a checklist of competencies

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\* A child’s primary caregiver may be a parent but also may be a relative or someone outside the biological family. For purposes of simplicity, this document uses the word “family” to mean that person (or persons) who has assumed the primary responsibility of caring for and raising a child.

To provide a framework for implementing high-quality early childhood programs	As a stand-alone curriculum or program
To promote optimal early learning trajectories into kindergarten	To determine if children are ready for kindergarten for the purpose of holding children back

Historically Rhode Island has invested in supporting early childhood professionals and families’ implementation of the early learning standards. The RI Early Learning Standards Project Professional Development Trainings and the Fun Family Activities are Rhode Island’s strong supports for early childhood programs, professionals, and families as they implement the standards. The Rhode Island Department of Education will continue to offer ongoing trainings, technical assistance and resources to help administrators, teachers, and families understand and implement our revised Early Learning and Development Standards.

Emerging considerations and questions from the field regarding the Early Learning Standards

*How will the state support early childhood professionals in understanding and appropriately implementing the newly revised standards?*

The state is currently working on two strategies to support early childhood professionals in understanding and appropriately implementing the newly revised standards. First the state is contracting with a design firm to re-design the standards booklet and to create supplemental materials. Design goals focus specifically on presenting the standards in such a way as to guide professionals and families in their use and understanding of the standards. Additionally, the new design will effectively communicate about the role of play and intentional teaching and the integrated nature of young children’s development.

Second, the state is organizing design teams to revise the RI Early Learning Standards (RIELS) Project trainings (Intro to RIELS, Levels I – III) as well as the Fun Family Activities cards. The RIELS trainings revisions will be completed on or before August 2013 and revised trainings will be piloted in fall 2013. Full roll-out of the revised RIELS Project trainings will begin in January 2014. The revised trainings will align with the nine new ELDS developmental dimensions and all content in all trainings will be expanded to include developmental knowledge of and recommended caregiving and teaching practices for infants and toddlers in addition to preschoolers.

*How will the state support families in understanding and using the newly revised standards?*

The Fun Family Activities are designed to support families and providers. The activities are based on *Charting a Course for Success in the Ocean State: Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards* and are designed to help children develop skills that are important for kindergarten. They were developed by a group of Rhode Island parents, teachers and other early childhood leaders in hopes that mothers and fathers, grandparents and caregivers will use these activities with the preschool children in their lives.

The Fun Family Activities card revisions will be completed by July 2013. Once the revision is completed a design team will then begin revisions of the Fun Family Activities trainings to align and update the trainings with developmental knowledge of and recommended strategies for parents and caregivers to support infant, toddler and preschoolers' healthy development, learning and promote success in school. It is anticipated that the revision of the Fun Family Activities Training of Trainers model and the revision of the trainings themselves will be completed by December 2013. In January 2014, the project will transition to the new training content and model. In the meantime, the current preschool version of the Fun Family Activities trainings continues to occur across the state supported with funding through annual community mini-grants.

*What is the best route to take if they have already completed RIELS Project trainings?* The state assures all RIELS certified professionals that their certificates of participation remain valid.

Opportunities to update one's understanding of the standards will be made available online and in face-to-face trainings over the coming months. When possible and appropriate to the content of the trainings, it is the goal of the state to create trainings that are user-friendly and accessible to professionals and families in the most effective and efficient format possible. The revised trainings will be piloted in fall 2013. Full roll-out of the revised RIELS Project trainings will begin in January 2014. As is current practice, these trainings will be offered free of charge to all early childhood professionals.

#### Decision-making process, timelines and opportunities to provide input/feedback:

The Early Learning Standards were revised with input from Early Learning Council Subcommittee, RTT-ELC Core Team, National Experts and providers from the field over a ten month period from June 2012 through March of 2013. Phase I, June through December 2012, defined the overall purpose and structure of the standards. In July 2012, public input was taken in two open forums focused on the areas of development and learning and the age categories as well as the structure of the document. The Core Team worked with a consultant during this time to revise the standards. In September 2012, the public was solicited again through nine public forums in September 2013. The feedback was incorporated and another draft completed.

Phase II started in December 2012 with external validation of the standards. National experts in specific domains of development and experts with specific populations of children were included in the process. These experts provided input on the document both in general and by their area of expertise. This input was incorporated into the document and the revised version went out for an additional round of public feedback in ten public forums in January 2013. Final revisions are in progress and the expected release date of *Charting a Course for Success in the Ocean State: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards* is April 2013.

#### References

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Scott-Little C., Lesko, J., Martella, J., & Milburn, P. (2007). Early Learning Standards: Results from a National Survey to Document Trends in State-Level Policies and Practices. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 9(1), 1 – 24 .

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