Kentucky Race to the Top – Early Leaning Challenge Grant
Sustainability Recommendations

**Introduction:**

In December 2013, Kentucky Governor’s Office of Early Childhood was awarded a four-year, $44.3 million Race to the Top-East Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant to ensure more high-needs children had access to high quality early care and education. In 2017, Kentucky Governor’s Office of Early Childhood (GOEC) contracted with an independent consulting firm, Compass Evaluation and Research, to facilitate and coordinate a validation study of the All STARS initiative and a sustainability planning process to ensure the work of the RTT-ELC grant continues and expands. The sustainability planning efforts have employed four main methods: stakeholder input, supportive data collections, coordinated knowledge management, and an expert National Advisory Panel review.

In June 2018, an Interim Report of the Sustainability Plan was shared with the Early Childhood Advisory Council. This interim report shared information on the RTT-ELC impact, project highlights and outcomes, stakeholder feedback and survey findings, and opportunities for moving forward.

This brief will include the following sections:

- Summary of Opportunities from Interim Report,
- Sustaining Quality through Strategic Financing,
- All STARS Theory of Change, and
- Sustainability Recommendations.

### Overview of Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy 1: Improving the quality of all early care and education programs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Stars: Redesigning the tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS).</td>
<td>$35,269,314</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Standards: Integrate Kentucky’s Early Childhood Standards in all early learning and development programs.</td>
<td>$49,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development: Develop a responsive system of professional development and create a unified registry.</td>
<td>$1,766,127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strategy 2: Engaging families as a child’s first and most important teacher**

- Born Learning: Expand Born Learning Academies. $1,247,282
- Strengthening Families: Implement the Kentucky Strengthening Families Framework across the Commonwealth. $14,992

**Strategy 3: Enhancing ability to measure impact through improved data collection and integration**

- Data Integration - Integrate all early childhood data into Kentucky’s Longitudinal Data System to create a birth to workforce data system. $1,000,153

**TOTAL** $44,348,482

Note: Project 1: Grants Management Total Budget: $5,000,999
Sustainability Opportunities

Through the sustainability planning process of data collection and review and stakeholder synthesis of the successes, lessons learned, challenges and current context, opportunity areas were identified for further consideration and discussion.

A Focus on Implementation

Coordination and Collaboration at the State Level

Now that the development, start-up and initial implementation phases of All STARS are complete, the focus will be on ongoing implementation and sustainability of All STARS as a comprehensive and continuous quality improvement system. During the RTT-ELC grant, GOEC served as the coordinator and convener for All STARS by bringing partners together, facilitating cross agency communication and collaboration, working with outside experts and contractors as necessary, and monitoring progress against grant goals and deliverables. More than two-thirds of stakeholders surveyed indicated that ‘collaboration and coordination’ was a key area of focus for Kentucky over the next five years. Having a convener and collaborator office or officer once the grant ends will be critical to serving as a liaison with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), continue the ongoing work of All STARS as a unified set of standards, and foster the cross-agency collaboration necessary to provide a comprehensive TQRIS system.

Ongoing quality improvement: A State level process and structure

In addition to a convener, it will be important to develop a process wherein All STARS models continuous quality improvement at the state-level by being able to regularly review, revise, issue guidance and offer support to local entities. All STARS must continue to be aligned with best practices research as well as connected to the local needs and issues that arise. Fostering a cross-agency, state-level structure to monitor progress, review current research, make decisions and facilitate feedback loops to stay connected with the field, will provide All STARS the ability to support quality over time within a changing context.

Model fidelity and best practices

Classroom instruction, screening and assessment

Research indicates that quality, teacher-child interactions offering developmentally appropriate early learning opportunities are a significant factor in achieving positive child outcomes. All STARS standards require the use of curricula, screening, and assessment tools and the RTT-ELC grant provided many child centers with research-based screening and assessment tools as well as curricula. These tools were paired with professional development training. Survey respondents and interviewees reported that providing these tools was critical in promoting quality in early learning centers because they did not
have the resources to purchase these items. The costs associated with providing quality early education pose a barrier to meeting All STARS standards and ensuring quality care.

**Intensive Professional Development and Coaching**

Quality instruction and interactions are tied to being able to fully implement screenings, assessments and curricula with fidelity. While sites and professionals were offered professional development training, ongoing and intensive support is needed to be able to implement these high-quality practices.

Teachers and administrators that participated in the Super Stars Leadership Academy indicated that their most preferred methods of support to improve quality were coaching, modeling and peer groups, however those were often not readily available to them. The most frequently identified barriers to accessing the preferred methods of professional support were ‘Cost or affordability’ and ‘Time or substitutes so I can attend.’

**Fostering and supporting collaboration at the local level**

Collaboration at the local level has been a critical strategy to improving quality, supporting professionals, providing early education access to families and fostering community awareness and outreach with families. State agency partners must seek to identify the best ways to support and enhance these collaborative strategies through state level policy, guidance and funding.

**Community Early Childhood Councils and School Readiness Summits**

In some communities, the Community Early Childhood Councils (CECC) have provided key collaborative structures to help support professionals as well as families based on that community’s unique needs and contexts. Through the RTT-ELC and GOEC, communities were invited to participate in School Readiness Summits which provided an opportunity for superintendents and administrators and the early care and education community to collaborate and develop action plans. Qualifying community teams could apply for quality improvement grants and quality incentive kits to support and implement the local action plans. These Summits and grants provided a key support for local communities and CECCs to further their collaboration to connect with the school system and foster school readiness in innovative ways. This type of support for local collaboration could serve as an initial step, with follow-up strategies, to deepen the collaborations the already are occurring and to meet emerging needs.

**Blended pre-kindergarten models**

Another prevalent way that local communities collaborate to provide services to families is through blended pre-kindergarten models: Private child care, public preschool and Head Start sites partner with one another to offer quality early education to children in their communities. Blended programming may mean different things. For many survey respondents (responding to a survey about their blended model), blending means the

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Top barriers to accessing professional support: ‘Cost or Affordability’ and ‘Time or Substitutes’.

Community Early Childhood Councils help foster and support local community support for school readiness.

Blended models leverage resources but there are challenges working across operational models.
integrating of funding sources for children and sharing tangible resources such as buses or learning materials.

Blending allows for the leveraging of resources to efficiently and effectively serve as many children as possible. Further, the unified All STARS standards allow for one set of standards for all programs to adhere to-- but there are many challenges to operating a blended model, with each program having separate state and federal monitoring and additional program standards to meet. Moving forward, it may be helpful for state partners to seek ways to reduce barriers and support these blended models to ensure services are uniformly high-quality and the number of children served in any of the operational models is maximized.

**Data informed programming and decision making**
Through project #7, considerable progress was made integrating early childhood data from state agencies into the longitudinal data system. This has enabled the development of meaningful data tools like the interactive early childhood profiles and data analysis using the kindergarten screen and 3rd grade testing results to look at longitudinal data. There is an opportunity to develop an intentional data plan with identified research questions to be able to further enhance the use of data for early childhood program improvement and for informed decision making. The existing Data Subcommittee of ECAC could provide the expertise and support to develop a data plan. In addition, further support of local partners through trainings and technical assistance on how to use early childhood data could provide local stakeholders with the tools they need to inform their work at the local level.

**Vulnerable Populations**
Through the sustainability and validation studies, barriers to working with vulnerable populations of children and families were identified. Further, 73% of universal survey respondents reported working with children who have two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and over a half of respondents (57.5%) reported no formal professional development or training specific to ACES. The most frequently identified reasons for not having formal training in ACES were ‘just learning about ACES’ or this is new information for me or that there had not been a training opportunity convenient to them.
Sustaining Quality through Ongoing Quality Improvement and Strategic Financing

The Cost of High Quality Early Education in Kentucky

All STARS provides quality standards and supports, the development of which were financed through the RTT-ELC. With the RTT-ELC ending, one question that remains is how early education programs will be able to sustain their quality each and every day and continue to meet and advance within the All STARS standards over time. There are two notable challenges for sustained high-quality practices:

(1) The 2017 Cost of Quality study estimated the costs at different quality levels for the Kentucky Preschool Program and the Child Care Assistance Programs and found that the reimbursement rates for both programs were significantly lower than the cost of care and the disparity is particularly dramatic for infants and toddlers. One of the primary concerns is that early education programs face cost barriers associated with the hiring and retaining of qualified teachers as well as the costs of research-based curricula and classroom materials to ensure a stimulating environment.

(2) Families experience cost barriers associated with finding and selecting high-quality care—higher quality care is more expensive and many families require subsidies to afford this level of care.

According to the 2018 National Academy of Sciences report, Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education (see side bar), governments should develop financing mechanisms that reflect the total cost of early care and education, which includes a

Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education

The National Academy of Sciences convened a group of experts “to study how to fund early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry that is accessible, affordable for families, and of high quality, including a well-qualified and adequately supported workforce.”

In Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education, the Committee describes a child-centered financing strategy that includes:

- Consistent standards for high quality across all programs
- Reflect the total cost of high quality early education including teacher compensation
- Access to affordable high-quality early education for all children without parental requirements
- Both institutional support to providers who meet quality standards and assistance directly to families
- State level coordinating entity to process state and federal funding streams
- Governments increase funding and revise tax preferences to provide adequate, equitable and sustainable funding
- A coalition of public and private funders develop plans to guide transitions toward reformed financing structures
- Financial assistance to increase professionals’ knowledge and competencies to achieve required qualifications
- Grants to institutions and systems of post-secondary education to develop ECE programs and align curricula with the science of child development and high-quality professional practice
- Research and evaluation to ensure efforts to improve ECE system are resulting in positive outcomes for children and in the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce


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highly qualified and appropriately compensated workforce. These mechanisms should consist of components that are Provider Oriented, Family Oriented, Workforce Oriented and System Oriented (see figure below).

![ECE Funding Mechanisms](image)

**Strategic**

Some of the major system elements for ensuring a high-quality early childhood system that were not part of the RTT-ELC but that are critical in sustaining quality moving forward include:

- Teacher scholarships to support teachers in completing degrees and credentials,
- Teacher compensation to sustain a highly qualified workforce,
- Professional development that is ongoing and intensive to support quality instruction,
- Subsidy reimbursement rates that reflect the full cost of care including qualified staff, and
- Specialized supports and services for children with high needs such as those that have experienced trauma.

Without ensuring the appropriate financing levels and structure, we are limiting the ability of early education programs to meet and improve in the All STARS program. Sustaining a high-quality early education system will require further planning and development of a strategic financing model utilizing state and federal funding opportunities such as the increase in funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program and the upcoming Preschool Development Grant and Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership expansion.

**All STARS Theory of Change**

On the next page is a Theory of Change vision for All STARS that incorporates lessons learned and a vision for the program gained throughout the sustainability planning process. The purpose of the All STARS Theory of Change is for discussion and to guide the next steps of sustainability planning and strategic financing of All STARS.
**State vision for successful, high quality, highly rated programs**

- Elected leaders support early education
- Coordinated state offices (Child Care, Education, Head Start, Early Intervention) with shared vision
- Directors and administrators are trained and invested in high quality practices*

**Primary drivers:**

- Low turnover among educated, experienced, and qualified educators
- Required education and credentials align with best practices*
- Ongoing training and coaching for educators*

**Investments:**

- Free or low-cost professional development (PD), training, and technical assistance (TA)
- Individualized, intensive, coaching or mentoring
- Scholarships for credentials and two- and four-year early childhood programs
- Compensation supports

**Experienced, qualified and consistent workforce**

- Required regulatory standards*
- Developmentally appropriate learning environments*
- Family engagement and outreach*
- Facilitated connections to specialists and community partners (Early Intervention, trauma-based practitioners, health care specialists) *

**Primary drivers:**

- Responsive families and caregivers with skills and resources to support each child’s learning and development needs
- Community support and engagement that convenes resources and energy to support young children and their caregivers

**Investments:**

- Tiered reimbursements to offset costs of quality
- Free or low-cost PD, training, TA
- Free or low-cost resources for classrooms
- Coordinated care with specialized and supplemental services

**High quality, highly rated, early learning program**

- Responsive families and caregivers with skills and resources to support each child’s learning and development needs
- Community support and engagement that convenes resources and energy to support young children and their caregivers

**Primary drivers:**

- Free or low-cost early learning opportunities, which are responsive to developmental needs*
- Sites and community agencies conduct screenings and assessments to determine needs*
- Families enroll and engage in appropriate services for child (and family)

**Responsive families and communities**

*Note: This aligns with an existing All STARS standard.

**Investments:**

- Subsidized child care
- Coordinated care with specialized and supplemental services

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**All STARS Vision:** A comprehensive quality improvement system in which all early learning programs and professionals are encouraged and supported to ensure children are healthy and ready to start school.
## Sustainability Recommendations

The following table summarizes sustainability recommendations with a description of the associated sustainability funds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainability Recommendation</th>
<th>Sustainability Funding Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Focus on Implementation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Coordinating Office or Officer - Continued need for a role to foster and support ongoing</td>
<td>GOEC will continue oversight of All STARS with funding built into GOEC budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>cross-agency collaboration and coordination</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. All STARS continuous quality improvement process-cross agency process to monitor progress</td>
<td>None; Included in Recommendation 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>and align with best practices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Model Fidelity and Best Practices</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intensive professional development and coaching - Increase access to ongoing, on site</td>
<td>On site coaching: $TBD; Leadership Academy= $225,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustaining Quality through Strategic Financing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop strategic financing mechanisms to ensure a high quality and accessible early care</td>
<td>Funding needs TBD through strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and education system that includes a well qualified and supported workforce</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration at the Local Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Community Early Childhood Councils and School Readiness Summits - Support and continue/</td>
<td>CECCs will continue with support through the General Fund. Support for continuing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expand summits, action planning and grants</td>
<td>School Readiness Summits with Quality Awards is TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Blended pre-kindergarten models - Support blended models, identify best practices and</td>
<td>None at this time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduce administrative burdens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data informed programming and decision making</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ongoing data support and development of data plan with research questions</td>
<td>$225,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting vulnerable families</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Increase awareness and support for parents and professionals in responding to adverse</td>
<td>TBD; Funding for Strengthening Families will be determined through ECAC strategic planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childhood experiences and trauma.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Another view of the sustainability funding recommendations by RTT-ELC project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Total RTT-ELC project funding (5-year grant)</th>
<th>Project Activities Requiring Sustaining Funding</th>
<th>Sustainability Funding Required (Annual)</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grants management</td>
<td>$5,000,999</td>
<td>All STARS oversight, coordination and communications</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>General Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School Readiness Summits with Quality Improvement Grants and Quality Incentive Kits</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. All STARS</td>
<td>$35,269,314</td>
<td>Technical assistance and professional development to support implementation</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strengthening Families</td>
<td>$14,992</td>
<td>Align with trauma/ACES work</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Professional Development</td>
<td>$1,766,127</td>
<td>Super Star Leadership Academy</td>
<td>$225,000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Integrated ec data</td>
<td>$1,000,153</td>
<td>Integrate early childhood data into LDS; Data analysis; Data plan</td>
<td>$225,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$450,000</strong></td>
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**RTT Project Activities Not Requiring Additional Sustainability Funding**

These activities have either been completed and will not continue or they have been absorbed into existing agency budgets as ongoing functions.

- **Project 1:** All STARS oversight, coordination and communication will continue through GOEC and is built into the GOEC budget.
- **Project 2:** Staffing for monitoring, rating, technical assistance is absorbed by existing agency budgets. Non-monetary awards activity complete and will not be continued.
- **Project 2:** Financial Awards to providers - Absorbed by Tobacco Settlement funds
- **Project 3:** Early Childhood Standards - Online training modules complete
- **Project 4:** Born Learning - Local communities are tasked with determining how to continue the BL academies and identifying local funds
- **Project 6:** ECE TRIS (Unified Registry) - Current work supported through DCC contract.

**Next Steps**

- Review, prioritize and finalize sustainability recommendations.
- Final sustainability plan to be developed.
- Identify action steps and plan for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of sustainability recommendations.