



**Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for  
Young Children and Families, a BUILD E-Book**

**Build**  
INITIATIVE  
Strong Foundations For  
Our Youngest Children

# Preface

Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (ELC) is the major federal funding initiative seeking to support states in developing high quality early childhood systems, especially targeted to children with high needs. Launched in 2011 as a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, there have been three rounds of major grants under the ELC, with 20 states now participating and funding that totals just over \$1 billion.

This federal initiative had particular meaning to the BUILD Initiative and its founders, members of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative. For more than a decade, BUILD has served as a catalyst for change and a national support system for state policy leaders and early childhood systems development. Not only did BUILD’s work help shape the federal initiative, but it was also the fulfillment of the founders’ most fervent hopes—that states could create detailed blueprints for an early childhood system, with budgets to support significant infrastructure development. BUILD staff, consultants, and many colleagues in the field rose to the challenge and provided extensive support to states as they applied for, and now implement, the federal opportunity.

The Early Learning Challenge supports states in their efforts to align, coordinate, and improve the quality of existing early learning and development programs across the multiple funding streams that support children from their birth through age five. Through the ELC, states focus on foundational elements of a state system: creating high quality, accountable early learning programs through Quality Rating and Improvement Systems; supporting improved child development outcomes through health, family engagement and vigorous use of early learning state standards and assessments; strengthening the early childhood workforce; and measuring progress.

Thirty-five states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico applied for the 2011 round of the Early Learning Challenge grants with nine states initially and then five more selected from this pool for funding. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia responded to a new 2013 third round of grants; six were selected.

Round 1: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington

Round 2: Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin

Round 3: Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont

Since the launch of the ELC, grantee states have rapidly moved from concept to implementation. Through this E-Book, we share learnings from the initial implementation of the efforts, highlighting experience, trends, and reflections stemming from the significant federal investment in this strategic work. The chapters are authored by experts who have worked in tandem with state leaders to gather information. By documenting the experience of the states, captured through interviews with state leaders, *Rising to the Challenge* provides a source of learning for all fifty states and territories and puts into practice our leadership commitment to continuous learning in the best interests of the children and families to whom we are all dedicated.



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Chapter  
**2**

**Local Systems Building  
Through Coalitions**

*Karen Ponder  
2015*



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## Introduction

The overarching goal of the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (ELC)-- to help close the educational gap between children with high needs and their peers by supporting state efforts to build strong systems of early learning and development that provide increased access to high quality programs for the children who need them most--is best achieved when state systems and services, and local systems and services are aligned and working together toward that goal. This chapter examines eight states that engaged local leaders and partners, through a coalition strategy, to expand their system planning to achieve mutual outcomes for young children and their families. The eight states interviewed for this chapter represent all three rounds of ELC grants and include California, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Oregon, North Carolina, Vermont and Washington. In each of these states, the ELC has played key roles in creating, expanding and/or supporting this local focus and scope of work to the ELC state goals.



## Cross-Cutting Strategies

There is no single template for states to follow in creating local coalitions that are working in partnership with the state’s early childhood system due to the differences in each state’s starting point, context, political climate and overall goals. However, there are some commonalities across these coalitions. This section provides brief descriptions of common strategies that cut across many of the states discussed in this chapter, as summarized in the table and discussion below.

Cross-Cutting Strategies in Local Coalitions									
Strategy	Total	CA	DE	GA	MD	NC	OR	VT	WA
1. Supports state priorities	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Prioritizes children with high needs, high risk	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. All sectors involved (families, ECE, K-12, health, human services)	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Community and public engagement	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Family engagement	All	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Outreach to connect families to services	6/8	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
7. Coordinates services	7/8		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Provides quality improvement for Early Childhood Education (ECE)	5/8	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
9. Designs and/or implements Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), provides outreach	3/8	✓		✓	✓				
10. Informs state of local lessons, makes recommendations	4/8		✓	✓		✓			✓
11. Uses data for decision-making, quality improvement	3/8					✓	✓		✓
12. Special focus on early learning & K-12 linkages	2/8		✓		✓				

### 1. In all states there is a relationship between state goals and priorities and the local focus and scope of work associated with the ELC.

A significant contribution of the ELC is its bringing together of states and communities to achieve mutual goals. In all eight states, the ELC work is aligned between the state and local coalitions that are involved in that work. In Washington, for example, the local coalitions have responsibility for certain components of the state's pre-k program, WAKIDS, home visiting, and other state-administered programs. They are also required to align with statewide priorities. Maryland requires that local-approved activities are supportive of the state's priorities. Using a state and local advisory council model fosters the accomplishment of Maryland's requirement. Vermont developed a scope of services, based on the state's early childhood framework.

**2. Children with high needs and high risk factors are a major focus.** Every state focused on the goal of the ELC that children who are at high risk will be served. Some of the states used data to determine areas of the state with significant numbers of children with high needs (i.e. transformation zones). Others used the community coalitions to find, identify and refer children and families to needed services. Maryland's priority groups are children from families with low incomes and children with disabilities. Oregon's hubs are focusing on the highest risk children in their communities. The ELC is allowing Vermont to pay particular attention to screening young children early, diagnosing any issues or potential problems and providing early therapeutic interventions where needed.

**3. All sectors, including early learning, K-12, health and human services, are included in planning and implementation.** A key value associated with community work is the ability to partner with others to serve children and families better. During the development of their local coalition initiative, the eight states interviewed described building alliances and partnerships based on their specific goals. Most of them also engaged unlikely partners in the pursuit of their goals. Maryland created a particular focus on partnering with the medical community through Reach Out and Read, a literacy program that supports physicians to "prescribe" reading to families. Oregon is working to integrate across five sectors: k-12, health, human services, early childhood education and the business community.



**4. Each of the states has a focused effort on public education and building community engagement.** Several strategies emerged to build awareness and engagement. Delaware's goal is to make school readiness and the needs of young children a high priority in the greater community. Similarly, Maryland is promoting parent engagement by using social media to connect with families and through sharing information about the needs of young children and how children learn and develop. California has a particular focus on offering culturally and linguistically effective research, knowledge and opportunities within its communities. Georgia is leveraging local resources as a way to engage its communities and Vermont is convening public forums and special events in all of its local communities to highlight the importance of the early years and its local work on behalf of young children.

**5. Family engagement is an important part of the work.** All of the local coalitions have developed strategies to engage families and are using the local coalitions as a mechanism to both identify families and to find more effective ways to engage them. As a starting point, most of them include families as part of their local coalition governance and planning groups. Families are also becoming engaged in their children's learning and development, either as part of a high quality early learning program, a home visitation, or other program. Washington is specifically engaging families to enroll their children in specific programs such as WAKIDS, as well as the state's pre-k program. Oregon engages with families about quality early learning and is helping them find high quality providers.

**6. Outreach to families to connect them to resources and needed services was a strong thread among the states.**

Community coalitions are best positioned to connect families with needed resources and appropriate services for their young children. Six of the eight states have a dedicated approach to outreach. Some states have it as a stated goal and include it as part of all their programs, including California, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont and Washington. Delaware's framework includes Ready Families, bringing a focus that includes outreach to families. California highlights the importance of connecting families to needed resources and uses a culturally and linguistically effective approach to serving families effectively. One of the responsibilities of the Washington coalitions is to make families aware of available resources and programs. North Carolina's goal in outreach is to support families in the ways that are needed so that their children succeed.

**7. Coordinated services provides a focal point.**

State interviewees specifically mentioned coordination as a goal of the ELC work in Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont and Washington. Georgia and Vermont's focus is to coordinate better alignment across early learning services and between early learning and the state's pre-k program. Maryland is paying particular attention to coordination for children with high needs. North Carolina and Oregon are working on coordination to improve systems and services to families. In addition, Oregon is working to coordinate across silos. Vermont is fostering better coordination as a way to get better results.

**8. Local coalitions in all the states are involved in quality improvements in early childhood education, including supporting a quality rating and improvement system.** Improving the quality of programs and services is a key theme among all the states. Local coalitions in Delaware assist local programs to increase their Star (QRIS) levels so that families have more choices of high quality programs. North Carolina made particular high quality, research-based programs available to high-risk children in its transformation zones. Some states, such as Maryland, are improving quality through their professional development activities for early childhood teachers.

” In the states, system alignment begins with having common goals at the state and local levels, which are regularly reviewed and measured, with the intention that policies be consistent at all levels.

**9. Local coalitions are part of a state's work to design, pilot and implement a tiered quality rating and improvement system.**

California's major ELC effort, associated with community coalitions, was to create a Quality Rating and Improvement System, allowing each locale to design elements of the system that best meet their local needs.

**10. Local coalitions inform states of local lessons.**

While local coalitions need state support to be successful, children are best served when there is a two-way communication loop between the state and local coalitions. Learning from the communities about what is working, as well as what the local challenges are, can assist the state to make needed changes in policies and practices. In North Carolina, a policy loop was developed in the ELC transformation zones so that communities can share with the state issues and challenges with the implementation of the state-approved programs, and exceptions can be made or problems solved.

**11. Data for planning and quality improvement.**

Using data for planning is new to some local planning groups and the ELC fostered new and better ways to help communities understand and use data for decision making about children who need services. Oregon is using data to identify needs and determine strategies so that there are continuous improvements for children and families and in Oregon's work on their behalf. Washington has a strong focus on using data to drive decision making, influencing implementation of the Early Learning Plan based on regional needs, and aligning regional efforts to statewide priorities.

**12. Some states have a particular focus on linking the early learning and K-12 sectors together.**

While all of the states include public schools and early learning settings within their planning groups, Delaware, Georgia and Maryland make a particular effort to link the two sectors more closely together.





## Finding 1: State and local systems are working to align in order to promote more effective services.

The pioneers in statewide systems building have found that a statewide early childhood system is better achieved, and young children and their families are best served, when there are direct linkages and alignment between the state and local systems, as opposed to the state and local communities working in isolation. In all of the ELC states whose work contributed to this chapter, system alignment begins with having common goals at the state and local levels, which are regularly reviewed and measured, with the intention that policies be consistent at all levels. Beyond common goals, the states are taking different approaches. Some of the states are creating local systems with administrative and implementation responsibilities; some are creating coalitions to bring together stakeholders for the purpose of community engagement and better coordination; many are building leadership capacity. There are many variations in this work to build state-local alignment, as illustrated below.

### Coordinated Data

In **Vermont**, the regional action plans must align with the state plan, Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan, in order to be approved. And local programs are required to report into the state's Early Childhood Data Reporting System, an added accountability measure to ensure that all the state's children are accounted for and have their needs met prior to school entry. This information about young children prior to school will then assist schools to better support children from the beginning of kindergarten.

### Common Outcomes

**Oregon** requires regional hubs to achieve outcomes across its early learning system and the local work and outcomes must be aligned with the state's work and plan for achieving broader outcomes for children and families. This is negotiated during the state's review and approval of local annual plans, as well as in monitoring and reporting requirements.

**Maryland's** local advisory councils are required to create an action plan consistent with the state's priorities on supporting low-income children, children with disabilities, and children who are English Language Learners.

In **Washington**, the Early Learning Regional Coalitions are fulfilling the early learning collaboration component and requirement of WaKIDS, the state's kindergarten entrance assessment, by strengthening connections and aligning standards between early learning and the K-12 system to help children make a seamless transition when they arrive at kindergarten. For example, the state is building awareness with families and early learning providers about what kindergarten readiness means and how readiness skills are developed and supported. It is using unified messaging about school readiness and providing early childhood programs and schools implementation supports. The state is making a kindergarten transition tool available that was developed in partnership with local communities and will be utilized statewide to assist children in making a successful transition into school, regardless of their early school experiences. There is an added focus on honing children's mathematics skills before they enter school since math skills were found to be deficient statewide.



## Policy Feedback and Communication Loops

Through the ELC, **North Carolina** created a practice-to-policy feedback loop between the local and state entities to better align the state's early childhood system, including mechanisms to report barriers and needs that can't be addressed locally, leading to stronger state support and potential policy changes. The communication loop is facilitated as needed between the local level and the state agency that can best address the barrier to serving young children and families. For example, counties in the transformation zone gave feedback that the length of service of one of the program strategy models did not meet the needs of parents in their communities and the state funder and the contractor that developed the model agreed to modify the model to better meet the needs of parents. In another case, counties requested additional planning time before implementing their early literacy strategies and the North Carolina Partnership for Children recognized that additional time would support their use of implementation science and set the stage for sustainability, and sought and received federal approval to delay implementation in order to better meet the local need. In many instances, the challenges that have bubbled up to the state level have been ones that include the model purveyor's assistance in addition to, or instead of, the state funder.

## Joint Meetings and Unified Policies

**Maryland** has developed direct alignment between the local councils and the state Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) through joint meetings and the duplication of by-laws at the state and local levels. In effect, the local councils are implementers of the state policies and are guided by the state to achieve key goals and strategies of the state ELAC, such as participation in EXCELS, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System and promoting community engagement.



“ The success of local coalitions rests, in part, on the individuals who lead them, including their vision and the ability to translate that vision into action.

One of **Georgia's** stated goals is to align policy and practice, using the ELC transformation zones as the grassroots, bottoms-up system. People who are affected by practices in communities will have input about them, and those who develop state policies will understand the impact of those policies on children and families. While this work is still in the foundational stage, the current zones will become pilots for the state's future work in testing successful early learning models and creating clusters of support for local communities.

In **Delaware**, system alignment is demonstrated through its adherence, at both the state and local levels, to the ELC main goals and related strategies in the state's early childhood strategic plan. Having a single plan that is embraced by all the partners in all sectors and organizations is the basis for alignment and for reaching the state's early childhood goals.

**California** aligns its state and local work by developing local action plans that are designed to reflect the ELC priority areas. In the ELC work, for example, the local consortia wrote their action plans to include tasks and timelines, similar to the state's ELC scope of work. A specific example is the coordination of local reporting requirements. Local ELC liaisons are working with First 5 CA and the CA Department of Education program staff to better align reporting requirements for ELC and First 5 CA's Child Signature Program.

## Finding 2: In order to achieve successful local coalitions that are aligned with state goals, states are investing in leadership development for local coalitions.

Almost all states are developing initiatives that support strong local leadership. The success of local coalitions rests, in part, on the individuals who lead them, including their vision and the ability to translate that vision into action. They must also be skilled at bringing together a diverse group of individuals to work toward common goals. States are putting in place professional development and training opportunities to support building strong local leadership. Examples follow.

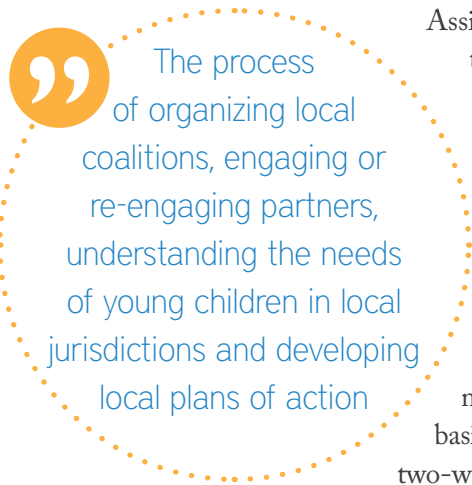
## Leadership Skill Building

**Maryland** worked in partnership with a private foundation to build leadership capacity in the start-up phase of the new local early learning councils, including 10 days of in-depth training for 5 to 6 people from each local council's steering committee. This leadership opportunity included training on results-based facilitation and accountability. The state is now considering ways to continue this support after the grant period ends.

Some states are assisting the coalitions with specific training and leadership development in a formal, ongoing way as they support building capacity one community at a time. **North Carolina** invests in an intensive Leaders Collaborative that is available statewide to its local coalition leaders. The Collaborative includes specialized training in three areas: driving results-based accountability; closing the gap on disparities and leading for equity; and, building collaborative leadership. The outside evaluation results of this work show that the Leaders Collaborative met or exceeded nearly all expected results and outcomes. Based on the goals of the Collaborative, the leaders who participated are addressing disparities, based on data and planning; they have increased their understanding of their community and increased their commitment to early childhood issues; they have built new relationships with community partners; and, they have enhanced positioning of their local coalition's capacity to measurably improve the lives and outcomes of young children. North Carolina already has in place a system for measuring the capacity of each county partnership to serve children in high quality programs, to serve vulnerable children in the highest star-rated programs, and other important early learning, health and family partnering outcomes.

## Professional Development and Training

**Vermont** is putting in place new development opportunities and trainings for its coalition leaders in order to reenergize its work. One of its strategies is the creation of a Technical Assistance Bank, with the goal to provide technical assistance, training and support to more fully develop and diversify its 12 regional councils to act as neutral non-partisan conveners, connectors, collaborators and communicators regarding early childhood systems, resources and activities in their regions. The Technical



Assistance Bank includes nine entities that will support the local work with information and best practices.

## Ongoing Networks for Support

**Oregon** and **North Carolina** have created formal, ongoing ways to stay connected to and to provide support and training for the leadership of their community partnerships. Both states meet with their local entities on a regular basis, allowing time for skill building and two-way communications.

## Finding 3: Time and a variety of strategies are needed to construct a successful state and local model that demonstrates results for young children and their families and there are early wins.

All of the states are deliberately supporting a variety of strategies that build local capacity, help create an environment where they will be successful, and ideally help them to be understood and valued as a critical part of the state's early childhood system, both from the state and local perspectives. Building these foundational, partnership-based, locally accountable systems requires significant time. And an infrastructure and capacity to deliver evidence-based program strategies must be in place before outcomes can be achieved and reported. Within this context, it remains critical to identify their results.

All of the states that are using ELC funds to build and support local coalitions report that the structural development of these coalitions is one of their biggest wins to date. The process of organizing local coalitions, engaging or re-engaging partners, understanding the needs of young children in local jurisdictions and developing local plans of action, based on the state's goals, all take time, tailored attention and strong support at the state level. And each state is finding different ways to embed this work into its early childhood system, as shown below.

## Codification

Some states have achieved specific outcomes related to the structure building process of their local coalitions and all states are considering ways to legitimize and protect this structure for the future. **Washington** was able to codify its

coalitions as part of the State Advisory Council. **Oregon**, **North Carolina** and **Vermont** have legislation in place that legitimizes and empowers their local structure.

### Linkages Between Early Learning and K-3

All states consider the linkages between early learning and K-3 important for young children and families and are working to create those linkages. **Delaware** and **Maryland** view their ELC work as building an intentional foundation between early learning and K to 3 education systems. While strong linkages are already emerging, in an effort to improve and sustain their work, Delaware is having an independent evaluation of each of its local readiness teams that will measure the progress of each team in meeting the goals of individual work and action plans, including linkages between early learning and K-3.

### Finding 4: Sustainability requires thoughtful planning.

All states are concerned about what will happen to their local work after the grant period ends.

The ELC funding provided a significant opportunity to create and support a local early childhood structure in states. On the other hand, it is challenging to use one-time funding, such as the ELC, to support local work because even while developing the work, leaders must move quickly to develop a plan to sustain the work and the infrastructure that has been put in place when the funding source ends.

Each of the states has considered this challenge from the beginning of the ELC grant period, highly values their local work, and is working on specific strategies to assure its continuation. Examples follow.

### Engaging a Broad Constituency

One of the most important strategies to achieve sustainability is to build and support the local coalitions in a way that engages the larger community to value and support them. States with formal local structures that have been in place for a number of years have seen that the interest and engagement of the broader community, including business leadership, foundations, faith communities and others, can lead to joint investments, joint funding and local responsibility for the coalitions'

long term success. The hope expressed by many is that the coalitions are now viewed as a necessary and integral part of the infrastructure and equitable, comprehensive early learning systems within their states.

### Incorporating Aspects of Sustainability Planning into Their Operating Structure

As mentioned earlier, a key sustainability strategy is to codify the structure of this work in state law so that it is viewed as an integral part of the state's mission and work. The local coalitions are specified in law in four of the eight states interviewed: **California**, **North Carolina**, **Oregon** and **Vermont**. **Washington** has codified its coalitions as part of the State Advisory Council.

**Delaware** has already garnered private funding and is working to increase private funding to the local readiness teams as well as to increase its collaborative partnerships with the public school system, which could potentially result in joint funding. **Georgia** is encouraging private support by helping businesses and foundations view the

work of the coalitions through an economic development lens. **Maryland** is putting the needed local systems in place and providing booster sessions to help its local councils embed their work even deeper into their communities as a way to get local buy-in and private support in order to ground the work for the future.

Some states are actively pursuing ongoing funding lines within their state's budget as well. **Vermont** has developed a budget request that includes staff for local coordination. **Washington** has a budget line item for the local coalition work and leaders are proposing additional funding in future budgets. A partnership of support from the state level is in place that includes Thrive WA, a public-private partner; the Department of Early Learning; and, the Office of State Public Instruction. These three entities are supporting the local work in a variety of ways and each is sharing in their success.

**California** has a stable funding source for ongoing support, created through Proposition 10. **North Carolina**, **Oregon**, and **Vermont** have budget line items in their state budgets that support the work of their local coalitions and are seeking ways to expand the funding in the future.



## Creating Intentional Communication and Support Systems

States have learned that it is important to create ongoing learning opportunities and structures that keep local communities well-informed, continue to improve knowledge and performance, and foster strong, successful partnerships with the state to achieve important outcomes for children and families. This can best be demonstrated in states where a system of local coalitions has been in place over some period of time. In **North Carolina**, having the local partnerships already in place and partnering with them to implement the state's prekindergarten program, allowed for a timely and successful implementation and further supported the building of a statewide comprehensive local early childhood system. And the local partnerships are also playing key roles in the ELC transformation zones.

**Washington's** coalitions are playing an important role in the Early Learning Collaboration component of WAKIDS, their state's kindergarten entrance assessment.

Even though **Maryland's** local councils and **Delaware's** readiness teams are in the early developmental stages, they have each developed a central website as part of their communications plans. In addition, Maryland has identified a need for broader communications about young children and early learning throughout its communities, through the use of social media, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, as part of its strategy to get messages to the general public about the importance of quality and early learning.

## Using Data to Demonstrate Progress

Identifying and compiling data to make decisions about young children and their families is a critical element needed within a successful state and local early childhood system. The ELC states are all working to create better data collection and analysis systems and more effective ways for local communities to report into these systems and to use the data for decision making.

In terms of making data readily accessible, **Delaware** developed a monthly data dashboard as a tool for its state inter-agency Early Learning Leadership Team, which provides current information on the "health" of critical strategic initiatives that are part of the ELC. The dashboard provides easy, quick access to information drawn from data sets across the three departments and five divisions participating in the ELC. Indicators are directly linked to and directly aligned with the ELC goals and strategies. As

Delaware moves to the development of an integrated early childhood database, the dashboard will be a tool that is populated and regularly updated directly from that database.

**Vermont** is considering the full landscape of data and is identifying gaps in data. The state currently is building the relationships and data governance structures in order to create a single statewide longitudinal data system, prenatal to college, by the end of the ELC grant.

## Engaging and Building Alliances with Partners

A goal of all local coalitions on behalf of young children is to build alliances with other partners such as early learning, family support and health systems. Most states require that the planning or governance body involved in their local coalitions include diverse partners. In a recent report to the state legislature, the **Oregon** Hub leaders reported that "the success of the Early Learning Hubs will largely depend upon their ability to forge new forms of collaboration and partnership across sectors, and the willingness of other sectors to engage" and that the Hubs are demonstrating the ability to forge these collaborations, particularly with K-12 education and health.<sup>1</sup>

Even states that are early in their organizational stages have achieved some significant successes in engaging and building new partnerships, such as **Delaware** and **Maryland**. For example in Maryland, a strong relationship is being forged between the birth to 5 early learning systems and public schools. Delaware is working to engage early learning teachers and kindergarten teachers in order to better link services and create good transitions for children.

**North Carolina** created a partnership with the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill to to strengthen the understanding and integration of implementation science in planning and execution of strategies within their transformation zone. Implementation science expertise that NIRN has brought to the project is a key piece of the zones' success and connects strongly to North Carolina's ongoing focus on systems change.

<sup>1</sup> "Early Learning Hub Report to Legislature, February 4, 2015," accessed April 19, 2015 at <https://earlylearningcouncil.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/early-learning-hub-report-to-legislature-february-4-2015.pdf>.

## Conclusion

While the states present distinctly different ways to design and execute a commitment to local-state systems building, the Early Learning Challenge is providing states with new opportunities in this area. Having funding to dedicate to this area of work to get it started or further expanded, as well as a limited time period, pushed states to move more deliberately toward building this local component of their early childhood systems. States without a previous history of an organized approach to the local aspects of their state systems approach are embracing this new opportunity, and states with a long history are further leveraging and developing their work in this critical area.



## Appendix: Structure, Development and Scope of States' Coalitions

Each of the states used a coalition strategy as a way to focus on local systems building. A short overview of each of the local coalitions follows, including how the local work relates to the state system and how the local work addresses issues of equity. We begin with states that created new, formal local connections or partnerships through the ELC opportunity. These states are Delaware, Georgia, and Maryland. The remaining states had a formal local coalition structure in place prior to the ELC; the ELC provided the opportunity to expand or improve the local structure and/or to further the goals of the ELC. These include California, North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.

### DELAWARE

**Name of State's Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Delaware Readiness Teams

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** 2013

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** Twenty cross sector teams from across Delaware's three counties were selected, with priority given to eight Priority Zones. Priority Zones were identified through the mapping of multiple data sources and they have the highest populations of children and families who are at-risk. These teams are geographically located across the state. Each team determined its own geographic boundaries, either within a portion of a Priority Zone or outside of those defined areas where there are areas that have families and children with risk factors.

**Process for Selecting Local Coalition:** Local groups applied to become teams by initially submitting letters of intent. The review process included a focus on communities with disproportionate numbers of children with high needs, communities with high numbers and concentration of low-income African American and Latino families with young children. The community teams then submitted an application that included a list of members and a series of questions to provide insight into the purpose and initial plans for needing a Delaware Readiness Team in their community.

**Mission:** To build strong and reciprocal linkages between early learning and K-12 schools and to support young children's (birth to 8) readiness for school and life, using Delaware's Readiness Equation, Ready Families + Ready Schools + Ready Early Learning Providers + Ready Communities = Ready Children.

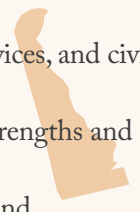
**Action Plan:** Yes



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## Goals:

- To bring together partnerships of families, early childhood and K-12 educators, health care, human services, and civic leaders to make school readiness and the needs of young children a high priority.
- Both the K-12 schools and the early care and education programs will understand their community's strengths and needs to better design environments and instruction that support their students' readiness and success.
- Communities will determine local needs, within the context of the state's overall priorities, and design and implement meaningful, impactful local action plans. Through the completion of a Community Profile process (needs assessment) the individual teams are working towards these broad goals and determining and carrying out actions leading to positive change.
- *Ready Families*: Adults who care for children are offered resources and support to become empowered in their parenting and to build safe and nurturing environments for their children.
- *Ready Schools*: Elementary schools are community resources that are responsive to the needs of all children and their families.
- *Ready Early Learning Providers*: Delaware Stars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System, is the context by which all families can access high quality care for their children.
- *Ready Communities*: Children are a priority within the community and are supported through cross-sector values and policies that promote their well-being and success.



## Roles and Responsibilities of Local Coalitions:

- Recruit and engage members to the Readiness Teams.
- Complete a community readiness profile, which includes meetings with parents, with a special outreach to fathers, to get input for their action plans and identify needs of families.
- Design an action plan (e.g., with a focus on literacy, one Team piloted a community bookmobile during 6 weeks in the summer, distributing 3102 books and other resources to families.)
- Implement strategies based on the action plan (e.g., hosting a Kindergarten Academy for all children entering kindergarten in one zone).
- Work in cooperation with other Readiness Teams from around the state, and share learning with other Teams and state-wide policymakers.

**Composition:** The local Readiness Teams select their own members, based on state guidelines for inclusion; there are no limitations on the total number of participants and each Team selects a chair. Readiness Teams are made up of required representatives from elementary schools, Delaware Stars programs, Head Start, home visiting, early intervention, social services, families with young children, as well as child care providers and civic and business leaders. In addition, they may include representatives from philanthropy, after-school programs, higher education, faith communities, libraries, health and educational agencies.

**Authorization:** By policy.

**Funding/Sources:** Funding for the Delaware Readiness Teams comes from the ELC and some from private partners—PNC Bank, United Way of Delaware, and Nemours. Each team receives \$20,000 from the private partners to implement its plan. An additional \$50,000 from private partners is used to support statewide meetings with the team leads. The purpose of these monthly, facilitated, statewide meetings is for teams to learn from each other. The total investment over a 3-year period is \$1.5 million.

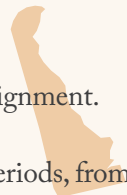
## Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:

- Systems alignment is demonstrated in Delaware through its adherence, at both the state and local levels, to the ELC main goals and related strategies in the state's early childhood strategic plan. This

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single plan that is embraced by all the partners in all sectors and organizations supports alignment as well as achievement of the state's early childhood goals.

- Readiness Team Applications as well as Action Plans are reviewed by a state committee to help assure alignment.
- Ongoing reporting of performance measures and expenditures are monitored by the state.
- A formative evaluation is being conducted by REL at ICF International. There are two data collection periods, from September 2014 – December of 2015, with two reports of progress to help inform ongoing decision-making.



**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** The focus is on race, culture and class. Priority areas for the Readiness Teams includes communities with the highest concentration of children with high needs, which disproportionately includes low-income children as well as children from Delaware's Latino and African-American populations. Readiness Teams are expected to address issues of equity in their Community Needs Assessment and Action Plans.

## GEORGIA

**Name of State's Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Georgia Early Education Empowerment Zones (E<sup>3</sup>Zs)

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** 2014

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** Four coalitions in E<sup>3</sup>Zs (geographically identified zones with large numbers of children with high needs). The zones are made up of counties or a conglomeration of counties serving approximately 10,000 children.



**Process for Selecting Local Coalition:** Counties, and clusters of counties (in rural areas), competed to become empowerment zones. Potential E3Zs were identified using a quantitative selection methodology, and the field of applicants was narrowed to four using a community application and community presentation process.

**Mission:** The overall mission is to expand access to high quality early care and education throughout areas of high need in the state, and to increase reading proficiency of children by third grade.

**Action Plan:** Yes

### Goals:

- Increase the quantity and quality of early learning and support services offered to children and families in these geographic areas.
- Facilitate infrastructure development that will expand access to high quality early learning environments for children in families in these areas.
- Coordinate better alignment across early learning services and between early learning and K-12.
- Create and sustain feedback loops between consumers of the ECE System and the state's Department of Early Care and Learning.

### Roles and Responsibilities of Local Coalitions:

- Share information to support program delivery (e.g., educating providers about quality).
- Mentor local providers to improve quality through Quality Rated, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (e.g., recruiting 5 star providers to mentor 2 or 3 star providers to move to higher quality).
- Support ELC implementation strategies in the community.
- Determine the best strategies locally that work to increase quality programs and provide those strategies such as mentors.
- Leverage community resources by engaging local leaders in supporting early childhood education.

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**Composition:** Each E3Z has a birth-to-eight team which will actively look for opportunities to connect and strengthen the early childhood system within its community. At a minimum, the teams include infant through third grade teachers; early intervention and preschool special education teachers; principals; early education program administrators; families and other community partners; business representatives; and the local Family Connection Collaboratives. Some of them also include: court appointed advocates; representatives from birthing hospitals, family support organizations, and family and children services; quality providers; mayors; and, elected officials.

**Authorization:** By policy.

**Funding/Sources:** \$4 to \$5 million from ELC grant over the three-year grant period; approximately \$3M in tiered reimbursement bonuses.

**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** GA is developing feedback loops between the state and local empowerment zones to help inform each other and stay on the same page. Local recipients of services will inform state policies.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** As part of selection criteria, a qualitative matrix is used, with points for diversity assigned, making sure that all races, cultures and classes are represented in each E<sup>3</sup>Z.



## MARYLAND

**Name of State's Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Local Advisory Council (LECAC)

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** 2012

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** 24 councils (23 councils and Baltimore City), covering the entire state.

**Process for Selecting Local Coalition:** All counties, plus the city of Baltimore were included from the beginning.

**Mission:** Long range, to improve the school readiness skills of incoming kindergarteners from the current baseline in 2010 of 81% fully ready, to 92% fully ready in 2015. The mission of the local coalitions is to help unify the local county council, the local county executive and the local school board to accept an integrated, mixed delivery system for early childhood that is connected to and has continuity with the K-12 system.

**Action Plan:** Yes

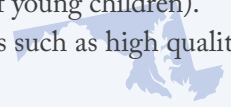
### Goals:

- Create an action plan consistent with state priorities to support low-income children, children with disabilities, and children who are English Language Learners.
- Support professional development of early childhood professionals (e.g., providing professional development around the state's early learning standards and assessments).
- Encourage family engagement and support (e.g., through local early learning programs).
- Work with pediatricians/medical providers who promote early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by integrating into well-child visits children's books and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud (e.g., Reach Out and Read).
- Support early childhood participation in EXCELS, the Maryland Quality Rating and Improvement System (e.g., outreach and engagement with early childhood programs to encourage participation in EXCELS).

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- Promote overall community engagement (e.g., public education about needs and learning of young children).
- Coordinate services for children with high needs (e.g., connect families to needed services such as high quality child care).



**Roles and Responsibilities of Local Coalitions:**

- To implement activities in support of state priorities, specifically in the areas of professional development for early childhood professionals, outreach and participation in the QRIS, MD EXCELS, and Reach out and Read (ROAR), an evidence-based nonprofit organization of medical providers who promote early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide.
- To encourage family engagement and support (e.g., using social media to connect with families).
- To promote community engagement (e.g., through education and creating partnerships).

**Composition:**

The local councils were encouraged to have both a Chair and Co-Chair, one representing the local education agency and one representing local government. The determination is made by each local council. Within each council, there is a core team, made up of four to six members, that acts as a steering committee. The councils include the local superintendent of schools; representatives of local government and local education agencies’ early childhood general and special education; representatives of Early Intervention, Head Start, licensed family and center-based child care programs, child care resource and referral agencies, Judy Center Partnerships, local libraries, family support centers, local departments of social services, child care licensing, and early childhood non-profit agencies; parents; providers of services to families; and, partners customized to the resources in that local jurisdiction.

**Authorization:** By policy; includes a memorandum of understanding between the local councils and their Local School System (LSS) and Local Management Board (LMB).

**Funding/Sources:** \$1,080,000 from ELC funds, plus an additional \$120,000 from the Annie E. Casey foundation, to conduct all leadership training.

**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** Some LECAC chairs are on the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). LECAC’s are invited to every other State ECAC meeting. By-laws mimic the State ECAC by-laws. State and counties share the same goals. Ongoing reporting of performance measures and expenditures are monitored by the state.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** Each county’s action plan must demonstrate support for low-income children, children with disabilities, and children who are English Language Learners to help them succeed.



## CALIFORNIA

**Name of State’s Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** First 5 County Commissions

**Name of Local Initiatives Associated with ELC:** California Power of Preschool (PoP), Child Signature Programs (CSP) 1 and 2, and Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards (CARES) Plus

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** 1998

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** The county approach to ELC was originally selected because California’s strong system of county government for much of its human services work is coordinated and operated through county government. California has a state First 5 CA Commission and a coalition (called a commission) in each of its 58 counties, with statewide coverage. First 5 CA sponsored several initiatives related to program quality and teacher professional development, the first of which was its Power of Preschool (PoP). For the ELC, it was not a requirement that the local QRIS consortium and its associated TQRIS work be managed by a county First 5 Commission, although most of the grantees were First 5 County Commissions. In cases where the First 5 County Commission is not the lead agency for the ELC work, the local commission is involved in planning and coordination.

**Process for Selecting Local Coalitions:** All 58 California counties were selected to participate when the state passed Proposition 10 and created First 5 CA County Commissions. For the purposes of the ELC grant, 16 counties were selected as “consortia counties” to participate in the ELC QRIS work, based on their existing QRIS that may have leveraged PoP, CSP, CARES Plus, or recommendations by the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee. (There are actually 17 consortia since Los Angeles includes two consortia.) These 17 consortia include 65% of the state’s population of children under five years old.

**Mission:** For First Five overall, the mission is to convene, partner, support, and help lead the movement to create and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated system for California’s children prenatal through five and their families. The mission of the first two initiatives associated with ELC is to promote, support, and optimize early childhood development with the PoP focusing on preschool classrooms and CSP extending the reach to programs serving infants and toddlers. The mission of CARES Plus is to increase teacher effectiveness by improving the quality of interactions with children and to raise their academic attainment. These missions are supported by California’s ELC work and its objective: to improve the quality of early learning programs and close the achievement gap for children with high needs.

**Action Plan:** Yes

### Goals:

- Support children prenatal through age five and their families by providing culturally and linguistically effective resources, knowledge, and opportunities for them to develop the skills needed to achieve their optimal potential in school and life.
- Provide leadership to the First 5 movement and the development of a support system that results in sustainable and collective impact.
- Build public engagement, investment in and support the optimal well-being and development of children, prenatal through age five, their families and communities.
- Strengthen internal capacity to realize the mission and achieve greater impact.



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## Roles and Responsibilities (associated with the ELC):

- ELC provided the opportunity and leadership to create a TQRIS in multiple counties in California. The roles and responsibilities of the consortia counties, related to the grant, include:

Following the CA RTT-ELC Action Plan (developed by the CA DOE)

Developing a local TQRIS plan that includes common tiers

Engaging and enrolling sites into the TQRIS

Supporting continuous quality improvement

Promoting workforce development

Rating and monitoring sites

Building partnerships around TQRIS

Mentoring other counties

Engaging families and communities



**Composition:** The commissions are made up of 5 to 9 commissioners who are appointed by the county board of supervisors and include representation from children’s services, public health, behavioral health, social services, and tobacco and other substance abuse prevention and treatment services. In addition, they work with a broad array of stakeholders and partners in carrying out their work.

The composition of each local consortium associated with the ELC varies. Most of the consortia are made up of representatives from their local First 5 County Commission, the County Office of Education, the Local Child Care Planning Council, and the local child care resource and referral agency. Several include an ECE faculty representative from the local community college, a representative from the county human services, and provider representatives.

**Authorization:** Statutory

**Funding/Sources:** During the entire grant period, the local Consortia will receive approximately 77% of ELC grant funds, or about \$57.6 million. In 2012, a total of \$77,000,000 funded ELC activities, including leveraged funding from the First 5 CA local commissions and funding from other sources. This amount included \$12,000,000 from city and county government funds, and \$2,900,000 from foundation, grants and business donations. The annual funding from First 5 CA for both CSP and CARES is approximately \$40 million.

**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** When local action plans were developed, they were designed to reflect the state’s ELC priority areas. Action plans were reviewed by state liaisons to assure that the goals and plans are in line with the state’s requirements and ELC application. Ongoing reporting of performance measures and expenditures are monitored by the state. First 5 CA has worked to better align its existing programs to the tiers of California’s TQRIS and is working to better align reporting requirements for ELC and First 5 CA’s Child Signature Program.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** The TQRIS plans, developed through ELC, included an equity lens.

## NORTH CAROLINA

**Name of State's Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Smart Start

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** 1993

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** Smart Start is statewide, made up of 72 local coalitions (called partnerships), which are either county or multi-county, depending on local determination. Counties were chosen as the local coalition unit because of North Carolina's strong county-based system and services.

**Process for Selecting Local Coalition:** Local coalitions were selected through an application process that assured statewide coverage and diversity of counties from the beginning (congressional districts, high and low resources, high and low needs, etc.). All counties were included within five years of implementation, beginning in 1994.

**Mission:** To advance a high quality, comprehensive, accountable system of care and education for every child beginning with a healthy birth; administrative oversight and support of county/regional Smart Start nonprofits in all 100 NC counties; partner with and support public efforts on behalf of young children.

**Action Plan:** Yes, with state approval bi-annually.

### Goals:

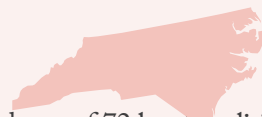
- To raise the quality of care and education for young children.
- To support families so that their children succeed.
- To advance child health outcomes.
- To build strong state and local networks.
- To promote early literacy.

### Roles and Responsibilities of Local Coalitions:

- Cross-county planning, the development of a plan of action for young children, and setting priorities. To facilitate planning, a cross sector planning group considers the needs and all services already available and determines what is needed for the future.
- Coordinating services and making services available for children and families (e.g., focused outreach to children and families that are at-risk and are hard to reach with already existing services).
- Determining how to allocate annual allocation of Smart Start funds and private funds, based on determined priorities. Priorities are based, in part, on the local partnership's performance goals and progress.
- Achieving outcomes, based on Smart Start's statewide standards and the Performance-based Incentive System (PBIS). Progress is measured annually and new goals are set.
- Monitoring local services where Smart Start funding is allocated, for fiscal and programmatic outcomes.

**Composition:** Local partnerships operate through a local board and there are two alternate structures with built-in flexibility that local partnerships may choose between. One requires equal numbers of members from three groups: business sector; early learning, health and family support; and the community. The other is more prescriptive about membership and requires individuals from a variety of child and family agencies, faith communities, business leaders and parents. Many local partnerships involve many community members in broader planning and problem solving through a committee structure that reports to the board.

**Authorization:** Statutory



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**Funding/Sources:** Local partnerships are funded through an annual allocation on an ongoing basis. Through ELC, the four transformation zones (four counties) received \$2.8 million for coaching, professional development and support for the four host agencies. An additional \$2.9 million supported the expansion of a Leaders Collaborative statewide. The ELC funds are available for the grant period.

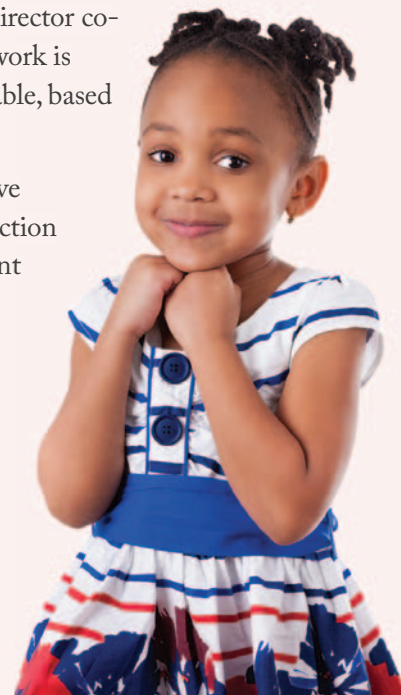
**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** The bi-annual planning process, by which the state reviews and approves local plans, provides an opportunity for discussions and negotiations to better align local and state strategies. Local government agency leaders are part of the local partnership planning groups and help assure alignment with state programs. Outcomes are measured through the Smart Start statewide performance standards (PBIS) that are directly aligned with the state's goals.

The local system itself is a practice network, with ongoing learning and innovation; the North Carolina Partnership for Children (state level non-profit that administers Smart Start) responds to local needs. For example, a Data Advisory Group of local representatives works in partnership with the state when local problems with data arise. Through ELC, a formal practice-to-policy feedback loop was developed. Local barriers or needs that can't be addressed locally are shared with a leadership team and the local coach serves as a liaison between the state and locals to find answers and address issues. This ongoing loop between the local partnerships and state agencies assists locals to better serve children and families and assists the state in developing stronger policies and better procedures.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** Local councils are encouraged to create boards that are representative of their communities. One of the major strategies and the primary focus of the Leaders Collaborative, funded by ELC, is its leading for equity work. Expert consultants lead equity training with all members of the Leaders Collaborative who are local Smart Start directors. Then, together with a key expert and equity trainer, each director co-leads a local equity retreat in his/her community. One of the observations about this work is that the first step to positive change is an awareness of who is and who is not at the table, based on community disaggregated data.

Each transformation zone is working to increasing diverse leadership through intensive training, particularly focused on families. This training has brought together a cross section of people from each county and has resulted in forming cross sector family engagement committees that are focused on equity. They are developing effective processes for hearing from parents, such as the use of surveys and focus groups, and considering where to embed the surveys so that the process is ongoing, for example, within home visiting programs, during NC PreK registration, etc. This work led to one partnership developing a committee for coordination and awareness, which resulted in changing the ways it is planning to meet family needs.

Another strategy is to look more closely at the Performance Based Incentive System (PBIS) data and help local communities learn to use it better for planning and decision-making. The disaggregated data is objective and changes discussions and results.



## OREGON

**Name of State’s Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Oregon Early Learning Hubs

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** In 2011, the hubs were first defined in legislation and the final pieces of statutory structure, as well as timing and process requirements for establishing the Early Learning Hubs, were put in place in 2013.

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** There are currently 14 regional hubs, with a maximum of 16 at full, statewide implementation in a state with 36 counties.

**Process for Selecting Local Coalition:** Hubs were selected through an application process that requires cross-sector engagement. Hubs defined their own geographic area and demonstrated certain governance and partnership requirements in their applications.

**Mission:** Hubs are designed to coordinate existing community services in a more direct, effective, and family-centric way. Hubs are not intended to become direct service providers but they do manage public sector financial resources, allocate them, and manage programs and contracts.

**Action Plan:** Yes

### Goals:

- The long-term goals are that all children are ready for kindergarten; all children are raised in stable and attached families; and systems are integrated and aligned into one early learning system.
- The local hubs work to achieve a shared set of outcomes. (Progress metrics are defined by the Early Learning Council. The hubs set their targets and those targets are part of their contract with the Early Learning Council.) Shared outcomes focus on these areas: Improve results for the highest-risk children; Focus on families and meaningful relationships with the people who are being served; Integrate across the five sectors: K-12 education, health, social/human services, early childhood education, and business; Use data for continuous improvement; Coordinate effective systems and funds.

### Roles and Responsibilities:

- Identifying the population of children in their coverage area that are most at-risk of entering school unprepared.
- Working across traditional program and sector silos for collective community accountability.
- Working with families to identify their unique and specific needs.
- Linking families with services and providers who can best address their needs, e.g., helping a family find a high quality early learning setting for their child.
- Coordinating and aligning services across silos, based on outcomes.

**Composition:** Each hub has a governing body or community advisory body that has the authority to initiate audits, recommend the terms of a contract and provide reports to the public and to the Early Learning Council on the outcomes of the provision of early learning services to the community. The governing body’s members, who are selected through a transparent process and include both public and private entities, locally-based parents and service recipients, human social service providers, child care providers, health care providers and representatives of local governments.

**Authorization:** Statutory

**Funding/Sources:** Hubs are funded at approximately \$4.4 million annually through the state’s General Fund to provide base funding for local coordination. An additional \$1 million from ELC supports coordination within the hubs. Approximately \$1.29 million was also allocated to the hubs from the ELC to develop focused child care networks through the hubs. This work includes workforce development, increasing the supply of quality care, educating families

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about quality, increasing access of families to high quality care, and implementing developmental screening. The total amount of ELC funds allocated to the hubs is \$2.29 million.

**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** It is the required role of the hubs to coordinate and align services across silos and this requires coordinating and aligning based on state identified outcomes.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** One of the goals of the hubs is to improve results for the highest-risk children, which includes children from all races, cultures and classes who live in Oregon. The state is currently looking at the makeup of hubs to be sure that board members are reflective of the community, based on demographics. Current program service levels are being compared to community demographics. Some additional family support dollars have also recently been directed to the hubs with an expectation that they would be used to serve traditionally underrepresented populations. There has also been strong encouragement to partner with local culturally-specific, community-based organizations.

## VERMONT

**Name of Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Vermont Building Bright Futures Councils

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** Created by Executive Order in 2006; put in statute in 2010 (Act 104)

**Statewide Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** Established as part of Act 104, Building Bright Futures has a State Advisory Council and 12 Regional Councils, strategically located throughout Vermont, that are part of the state's infrastructure to support the creation of an integrated system of early care, health, and education services.

**Process for selecting local coalitions:** Act 104 specifies composition of Building Bright Futures councils

**Mission:** Building Bright Futures harnesses the power of communities to improve family well-being because it believes Vermont should be the best place to raise a child and that all children deserve to have the best start in life. Building Bright Futures serves as a conduit between local communities and the state to improve the quality of early care, health, and education of young children and families in Vermont.

**Action Plan:** Yes

### Goals:

- Lead a regional, diverse and cross-sector collaborative change process aligned with Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan.
- Strengthen Building Bright Futures Regional Councils' ability to collaborate with other entities to leverage regional and high quality programming impact.
- Promote the objectives of Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan.
- Develop and engage parents and other caregivers as equal partners in decisions that affect their children.
- Develop and formalize Regional Council meetings, policies and procedures.
- Manage grants, contracts, data collection and reporting.

### Roles and Responsibilities of Local Coalitions:

- Convening diverse partners by hosting community meetings, legislative forums, and public events.
- Collaborating with all public/private agencies and organizations that impact the lives of young families for greater results.
- Connecting people and resources by hosting a planning table for the community's work on behalf of young children and their families.

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- Communicating the importance of quality early childhood experiences and the responsibility of the community to ensure these happen.
- Catalyzing early childhood system improvements.
- Developing a scope of work based on the state's Early Childhood Action Plan.
- Using a Theory of Change process to develop effective state and regional action plans.



**Composition:** Regional Council membership is guided by Act 104 and best practices to develop robust and diverse public/private partnerships working on behalf of young children. Each Regional Council is currently reviewing its composition to ensure membership is inclusive of educators, providers, parents/other caregivers, business people, medical professionals, public safety officials, and representatives of the interfaith, public libraries, arts, and other sectors.

**Authorization:** Statutory

**Funding/Sources:** A total of \$3.2 million over four years from ELC is used to fund and support the 12 Regional Councils, including funding full-time staff in each of the 11 regions, technical assistance and professional development. The remaining region is supported by Project LAUNCH. All Regional Councils receive support from a team of external and internal partners through a Technical Assistance Bank. Regional Coordinators receive ongoing professional development trainings and briefings.

**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** Building Bright Futures is a single state-wide network, which uses the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan to guide its work. Building Bright Futures' state and regional plans are aligned with the Action Plan using a Theory of Change process. This process is also informed by data collected by Vermont Insights, the state's early childhood data reporting system.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** Regional Councils address a range of economic, health, gender, and ethnic disparities that are reflective of the communities they serve through cultural competency trainings, facilitative leadership, and Results-Based Accountability.

## WASHINGTON

**Name of Network of Community-Based Coalitions:** Washington Early Learning Regional Coalitions

**Year Network of Community-Based Coalitions Initiated:** Began pilot work with community coalitions in 2008 and formalized its local system through ELC.



**State Reach or Selected Geography and Rationale:** Washington created 10 regional coalitions, covering the entire state, closely aligned with the state's Educational Service District boundaries. Historically, some regions have been made up of several smaller coalitions, which were consolidated into a statewide unit.

**Process for Selecting Local Coalition:** The goal was to align the boundaries of the coalitions with the infant-toddler regions based on the state's Birth to Three plan. The infant-toddler regions were developed earlier based on the Educational Service Districts (ESDs) for ease of administration and funding flow. Although there are 9 ESDs, they split into 10 regions to better respond to two large counties, Pierce County and King County. Based on the boundaries, Thrive, the public private partnership that organized the coalitions, considered the strength of each smaller coalition in each of those 10 regions. It looked at administrative capacity, leadership, and other key factors and selected one learning regional coalition for each of the 10 regions.

**Mission:** Committed to connecting local efforts with the state's Early Learning Plan, strengthening partnerships, building local capacity and reaching more children and families.

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**Action Plan:** Yes

**Goals:**



- Coordinate the early learning system in their regions through partnerships.
- Utilize data to drive decision making, influencing implementation of the Early Learning Plan based on regional needs, and aligning regional efforts to statewide priorities.
- Serve as a platform for outreach and/or implementation of regional components of WaKIDS Kindergarten Inventory, Home Visiting, Early Achievers, and “Love. Talk. Play” parent campaign.
- Build public awareness of the importance of and increased investment in early learning by connecting to a variety of stakeholders such as parents, local legislators, and business leaders.

**Roles and Responsibilities of Local Coalition:**

- Advise the state through the WA Early Learning Council (ELC) (i.e. local representative from each council attends ELC meetings to learn and provide input).
- Connect local efforts to achieve the state’s Early Learning Plan (i.e. influencing implementation with local providers).
- Utilize data to drive decision making (e.g., finding the children who are most in need of services).
- Build and strengthen partnerships (e.g., working with partners to implement the state’s Early Learning Plan; serving as a bridge between public schools and early learning sites; outreach to family, friend and neighbor care).
- Build local capacity and provide outreach to children and families (e.g., connecting children to WaKIDS, the state preK program and making intersections of strategies such as TQRIS and WaKids).
- Align regional efforts to statewide priorities (e.g., focusing local efforts in alignment with state’s major programs such as WaKIDS and TQRIS).
- Build public awareness of the importance of and need for increased investment in early learning (e.g., connecting to parents, local legislators and business leaders).

**Composition:** Local coalitions are broad-based and locally determined, including child-serving systems and agencies such as early education, health, mental health, family support, early intervention, child welfare, and many others.

**Authorization:** By policy

**Funding/Sources:** \$200,000 of ELC funding per year during the ELC grant period is provided to the coalitions to support the development of their local infrastructure; in addition, \$875,000 is provided per year in ongoing support from Thrive WA, with grant awards ranging from \$80,000 to \$95,000. Additional programmatic funding from state agencies may also be granted to the coalitions for local implementation to support the state’s Early Learning Plan.

**Strategies to Create State-Local System Alignment:** The local plan is required to be aligned with the state’s Early Learning Plan. In statewide implementation of TQRIS, the local coalitions support the implementation through advocacy for increasing quality with the local programs and the community.

The coalitions strengthen connections between early learning and the K-12 system to ease the transition to kindergarten. Building awareness with families and early learning providers about what kindergarten readiness means by making available a kindergarten transition tool.

**Addressing Disparities and Equity:** Racial equity is a driving force in Washington’s community work, with the coalitions being implemented as change agents. Diversity is a value that is held high and embraced as a priority for both policy and programmatic intervention. All of the coalitions participated in equity training.



## About the Author

**Karen W. Ponder** is an early childhood consultant whose work focuses on building comprehensive state early childhood systems. She is the former President and CEO of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. She helped to create Smart Start and administered it at the state level and provided guidance to community partnerships for 15 years. Karen has been involved in all aspects of early care and education, as a teacher, center director, board member, teacher educator and government policy maker. She graduated summa cum laude from North Carolina State University and also studied at Anderson University and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

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