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# Raising the Bar for Early Childhood Education

## Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working for Early Childhood Providers and Community Networks



**M**any children in Louisiana, one of the poorest states in the nation, enter kindergarten without important skills to help to prepare them for school success. About half start school performing below grade level on kindergarten literacy assessments (LDOE, 2016a), and more than half fail to achieve academic mastery in reading and mathematics by third grade (LDOE, 2016b). One contributing factor to the lack of school readiness skills may be the unequal access to high-quality early learning environments prior to school entry. Among publicly funded early childhood education (ECE) programs serving low-income children, families face a range of options that may differ in quality.

In light of these challenges, over the past several years, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), in partnership with the Governor’s Office and the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), has engaged in a coordinated series of extensive reforms to build a common understanding of what ECE quality entails and provide supports to move toward high-quality programs that will ensure all children start school ready to learn. The foundational

## KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of Louisiana early childhood education (ECE) site leaders and teachers were aware of the major reforms the state has undertaken since 2012 to create a unified ECE system for publicly funded centers, and most voiced support for the broad goals to increase quality and accountability for publicly funded providers.
- Some ECE stakeholders were concerned that the supports and resources provided for reform efforts were not commensurate with the comprehensive scale of the reform in actual practice.
- Several new requirements presented particular implementation challenges for a minority of ECE providers, including the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation process, Ancillary Certificate, and high-quality curriculum adoption.
- Louisiana's Type III ECE centers, in particular, faced challenges, which endanger their ability to serve low-income children receiving public subsidies.
- Some communication links seemed to be stronger than others, and ECE stakeholders were trying creative ways to overcome challenges.

### The “Raising the Bar” Series

This report is part of a four-part series on how Louisiana policy actions might be connected with teaching and learning from birth through graduation across the state. The other reports that are part of this series and are being published along with this report are

- *Raising the Bar for K–12 Academics: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working for Schools, Teachers, and Students* (Julia H. Kaufman, Elizabeth D. Steiner, and Matthew D. Baird, 2019; available at [www.rand.org/t/RR2303z2](http://www.rand.org/t/RR2303z2))
- *Raising the Bar for Teacher Preparation: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Working Across the State* (Maggie Q. Hannan, Laura S. Hamilton, and Julia H. Kaufman, 2019; available at [www.rand.org/t/RR2303z3](http://www.rand.org/t/RR2303z3))
- *Raising the Bar for Graduation Pathways to College and Work: Early Signals on How Louisiana’s Education Policy Strategies Are Affecting College and Career Readiness* (Shelly Culbertson, Matthew D. Baird, Sophie Meyers, and Julia H. Kaufman, 2019; available at [www.rand.org/t/RR2303z4](http://www.rand.org/t/RR2303z4))

legislation related to these system reforms aimed at the goal of kindergarten readiness is the 2012 Early Childhood Care and Education Act (also known as “Act 3”). This law created a broad vision for a unified ECE system for publicly funded centers, a key component of which is a unified quality rating system by which all publicly funded centers are held accountable and by which the state can assess progress toward improving ECE quality.

Following Act 3, the state initiated several other reform efforts in support of implementation toward the unified system’s goal to create a shared vision to

improve ECE quality (see Kaufman et al., 2018, for more details and a timeline), including efforts related to improving provider preparation, improving quality of instructional resources, and increasing subsidies for low-income families to receive ECE. The programs currently included in the quality rating system and subject to the other reform efforts discussed in this report operate in three types of centers:

- school-based pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds
- Head Start for three- and four-year-olds and Early Head Start for infants to three-year-olds

- child care centers serving infants to school-age children, including children eligible to receive funding through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) (referred to as “Type III centers” in Louisiana).<sup>1</sup>

The state has also placed a priority on providing clear and consistent messages about ECE reforms to stakeholders at all stages of implementation, both through regular communications from the state and community network lead agencies that are intended to support planning and coordination for ECE centers in each parish. The ECE reform efforts support the larger LDOE commitment to a birth-through-grade-12 accountability system to help promote school success for all students.

## Background and Methods

In 2018, RAND published the report *Raising the Bar: Louisiana’s Strategies for Improving Student Outcomes* (Kaufman et al., 2018), which provides an overview of recent Louisiana state policies intended to improve student outcomes in the areas of ECE, K–12 academics, teacher preparation, and graduation pathways. The current report, which is part of a four-report series, focuses on Louisiana’s strategies for early childhood education and addresses the following key questions:

- How are Louisiana’s key actions for ECE being perceived and acted upon by ECE community network lead agencies, site leaders such as center directors and principals, and site teaching staff?
- What implementation challenges have emerged?

This report aims to provide insights to inform Louisiana and other state departments of education working to support ECE systems to improve quality, as well as the educators who are responding to state

guidelines while ensuring high-quality teaching and learning in their centers.

## Louisiana’s Actions to Support and Improve Early Childhood Education

Table 1 summarizes six key actions Louisiana has undertaken to improve ECE quality since the 2012 passage of Act 3. We developed this summary from multiple data sources, including interviews with state officials, state policy documentation, and attendance at the state’s presentations to community network lead agency representatives (Kaufman et al., 2018). Each of the six key actions aligns to one of four specific policy levers, as shown in Table 1:

1. **Mandates:** Rules or requirements for individuals or organizations.
2. **Resources:** Tools or information aligned with goals and intended to support individuals or organizations in meeting those goals.
3. **Incentives:** Inducements intended to encourage individuals or organizations to follow mandates and utilize resources.
4. **Communication/planning processes:** Communication networks, messages, technical assistance and collaborative structures to inform stakeholders and gather inputs from them.

## Data Collection and Analysis

We collected data from two sources for this report, described briefly below and in detail in a technical appendix accompanying this report series (available at [www.rand.org/t/RR2303z5](http://www.rand.org/t/RR2303z5)). The technical appendix also discusses the sample and analysis approach in detail. The two data sources for this report are as follows:

- **Case study data.** We collected and analyzed May 2018 interview and focus group data from 55 ECE network lead agency representatives, site leaders (e.g., center director or principal), and teachers in four parishes across Louisiana (which are not identified in this report in the interests of confidentiality). The selected parishes were intended to vary on

<sup>1</sup> Louisiana’s Type I and Type II centers are not part of the quality rating system. Type I centers are defined as those operated by religious organizations and receiving no public funds, and Type II are defined as those receiving public funds only through the food and nutrition program.

TABLE 1

## State Actions Related to Early Childhood Education

State Action	Policy Lever
<p><b>1. Create and require a unified rating system, connected to licensure and funding for all publicly funded centers, to provide information on center quality.</b> In 2012, Act 3 required the establishment of a non-optional rating system for centers receiving public funds, and the first accountability ratings were released in 2017. The state determined, with stakeholder input, that the annual rating would be based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which provides observation ratings for teachers' classroom instruction. Overall CLASS score cut points are used to create four rating levels: Excellent, Proficient, Approaching Proficient, and Unsatisfactory. Ratings are published online annually in center Performance Profiles, which also include additional center information for families. LDOE piloted the rating process in the 2015–2016 school year, and the 2016–2017 ratings were the first to factor into licensing and funding ramifications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandate</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Strengthen lead teacher preparation requirements through a new ECE teacher credential: the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate.</b> In 2015, to ensure that lead ECE teachers are adequately prepared, the state set the goal that all lead teachers in Type III centers must meet the minimum requirement of an Ancillary Certificate by July 2019. The requirement is equivalent to the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (or higher). LDOE also provides supports for the creation of BESE-approved Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate Programs across Louisiana.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandate</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Signal to ECE staff which curricula, formative assessments, and professional development are high-quality and standards-aligned.</b> To promote a shared understanding of ECE quality, LDOE initiated an ECE curricula review process in 2016 that judges curriculum quality on a rating scale from Tier 1 (exemplifies quality) to Tier 3 (limited quality) and publicly posts the review information for each curriculum. LDOE also recommends and provides free use of Teaching Strategies GOLD for child assessment, because it is aligned with Tier 1 curricula and CLASS measures. The state also supports ECE professional development that provides classroom supports aligned with CLASS measures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Increase funding for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidies to increase parity and encourage diversity in types of centers serving publicly funded children.</b> CCAP provides financial assistance to low-income families for child care costs in Type III centers. To address funding disparities for pre-kindergarten children enrolling in different types of centers (i.e., school-based pre-kindergarten and Type III), in 2015 the state approved an increase in CCAP rates to be on par with LDOE-funded pre-kindergarten amounts and loosened family eligibility requirements to increase access. This ensured comparable funding across pre-kindergarten programs that are required to meet the same performance standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentive</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Provide funding incentives tied to higher quality ratings, teacher training, and curriculum use.</b> In 2016–2017, the state increased funding to the Louisiana School Readiness Tax Credits to reward teachers with certification who stay in the ECE field and to reward centers for higher rating levels. The state also increased CCAP provider bonuses by 3 percent to support quality improvements and higher ratings. The state provides tuition support through the Louisiana Pathways Scholarship for BESE-approved Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate Program training, with the aim to make training low-cost for teachers. In 2016–2017, LDOE initiated the Child Care Curriculum Initiative to incentivize the use of high-quality curricula by reimbursing 80 percent of the cost of Tier 1 curricula for Type III centers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentive</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Define and require community networks for administration and communication, including coordinated ECE program enrollment for families.</b> LDOE has strived to provide clear and consistent messages about ECE reform efforts as initiatives rolled out. One communication and coordination effort unique to ECE is the mandated creation and structure of a statewide early childhood network through Act 3, which currently comprises 65 lead agencies for community networks (typically serving a parish).<sup>a</sup> Beyond providing communications to centers about state efforts, lead agencies conduct administrative functions for the network; coordinate CLASS observations for every center in the rating system; and lead coordinated enrollment efforts for all centers in the network. Coordinated enrollment, which began in 2014, identifies and communicates all available ECE seats within a community network, allows families to submit one common application form for any ECE seats, and matches children to seats based on family preferences and eligibility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and planning processes</li> <li>• Mandate</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> A parish in Louisiana is a territorial division corresponding to a county in other states. One school district typically serves students in each parish, although charter school systems serve most students in New Orleans Parish and some proportion of students in some other parishes.

key dimensions (e.g., urbanicity, traditional district or charter, and student demographics) in order to represent a range of Louisiana contexts. These parishes were also included in the other reports in this series.

- **Survey data.** RAND administered a statewide online survey (the RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey) in August and September 2018 to ECE site leaders of publicly funded centers (i.e., Type III child care centers, Head Start/Early Head Start, and school-based pre-kindergarten). We report on responses received from 245 site leaders across 52 parishes. This represents about 16 percent of all potential site leaders. We calculated item response percentages and conducted statistical analysis using the Pearson chi-squared test for differences between responses for Type III center leaders compared with other site leaders (i.e., schools and Head Start/Early Head Start).<sup>2</sup> We report any statistically significant differences in responses ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Limitations

Readers should keep several data limitations in mind when considering the key findings and implications of this report. First, the sampled case study sites varied in terms of location and student demographics, but they are not representative of the full diversity of centers, staff, and students across Louisiana. Thus, case study findings should not be interpreted as being representative of the state as a whole or the full range of positive responses, negative responses, and challenges Louisiana centers and ECE systems face in relation to state actions. Second, both interview and survey data rely on the self-reports of stakeholders who voluntarily participated, and we could not independently verify the accuracy of their responses. The interview and survey data could also reflect respondents' own biases rather than reality. Third, the site

leader survey sample is relatively small, representing about 16 percent of all eligible site leaders of publicly funded sites within the rating system, and the sample may include site leaders who are more likely to engage with LDOE or ECE networks, because these entities announced the survey to eligible respondents. Despite these limitations, our data provide useful insights on how state policies are supporting change at the local level.

In the next section, we consider on-the-ground perceptions of and responses to state actions. This section is organized by policy action and includes both survey and interview data related to each action. It also discusses perceptions about the funding of reforms. In the final section, we present conclusions and implications.

## Local Perceptions and Responses to State Actions

In this section, we explore the perspectives of Louisiana ECE site leaders, teachers, and network lead agency representatives in much more detail, in line with each key action initiated by the state to support and improve ECE in Louisiana. These findings are organized according to each of the six state actions discussed earlier in this report. However, because action 5 is closely related to several other state actions, we share findings for action 5 (“Provide funding incentives tied to higher quality ratings, teacher training, and curriculum use”) within discussions of the other state actions—including actions 2 and 3—instead of discussing them in a separate section.

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<sup>2</sup> We conducted these two-way comparisons because operations and resources differ between these groups of centers, and the state makes a distinction in policies aimed toward Type III centers in several reform areas. Non-Type III centers were combined for subgroup analyses because of the small number of Head Start sites in our sample.

## State Action 1: Create and require a unified rating system, connected to licensure and funding for all publicly funded centers, to provide information on center quality.

### Approach and Key Findings

#### How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We examined RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey responses about perceptions and support for the rating system for publicly funded centers.
- We asked ECE site leaders, teachers, and network lead agency representatives about their support for a rating system for accountability in Louisiana.
- We asked ECE site leaders, teachers, and network lead agency representatives about implementation of the CLASS observation tool.

#### Key findings:

- Most ECE site leaders, teachers, and network lead agency representatives supported the aims of the state's current rating system to improve quality.
- One area of frustration was with the implementation of the CLASS observation process.
- Some respondents believed that relying solely on the CLASS score for the rating may not be sufficient to measure true quality.

In 2012, as part of Act 3, Louisiana embarked on a critical, large-scale ECE reform effort to both create a common rating system for all publicly funded ECE centers and to move all those centers under the purview of LDOE for accountability (Kaufman et al., 2018, provides further details of the actions and timing to accomplish this). In this report, we focus on three types of centers affected by this rating system:

- school-based pre-kindergarten
- Head Start (including Early Head Start)
- Type III child care.

The unified rating system produces a rating level for each site based on a single measure: scores for observed classrooms using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, La Paro, and Hamre, 2008).<sup>3</sup> All publicly funded sites, regardless of public funding source, must be observed twice per year by trained CLASS observers.

<sup>3</sup> In prior interviews, LDOE officials acknowledged that a simple rating system is not a comprehensive definition of ECE quality that measures all best practices, but it can be clearly communicated to create a shared vision of classroom quality expectations for families and ECE staff (Kaufman et al., 2018).

The two scores factor into the overall annual rating. The final rating is based on cut points for the overall CLASS score (which is the average of dimension scores<sup>4</sup>) that result in four levels: Excellent, Proficient, Approaching Proficient, and Unsatisfactory.<sup>5</sup> To ensure a reliable system across programs, the state requires that sites have two types of individuals to observe a subset of classrooms at each site: a local observer through the ECE network lead agency (described under state action 6) and a third-party observer through a state contract with the Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development (referred to hereafter as Picard). If there are sizable discrepancies

<sup>4</sup> The CLASS comprises eight to ten dimensions, or measures, that are organized within domains. The three domains included in the overall CLASS score for pre-kindergarten classrooms are emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. For toddler classrooms (which use a different CLASS observation tool than the pre-kindergarten tool), the two domains are emotional and behavioral support and engaged support for learning.

<sup>5</sup> The state will be adding a fifth level, "High Proficient," between Proficient and Excellent, beginning in the 2019–2020 school year (LDOE, 2018a).

between the local and third-party CLASS scores for the same classroom, the third-party observation scores are used. Each site can access online information shortly after the observation, including notes about their highest- and lowest-scoring CLASS dimensions as scored by Picard observers (LDOE, 2018d).

The overall CLASS score and rating level, along with the individual CLASS domain scores, are presented annually for each site in a publicly available summary called the Performance Profile.<sup>6</sup> The Performance Profile also includes a few other site-level elements that are not factored into the rating but are intended to provide additional information for parents about a site's use of best practices. These other elements include self-reported information on whether the site uses a high-quality curriculum and conducts child assessments, teacher-to-child ratios, teacher education levels, and teacher certification.

The ratings process started in the 2015–2016 school year as a no-stakes practice year, and the 2016–2017 school year ratings (published in November 2017) became the first high-stakes, publicized ratings to which consequences were tied. Sites with an Unsatisfactory rating in two years during a three-year period are subject to funding and/or licensing loss, and financial incentives, such as the Louisiana School Readiness Tax Credit for sites and teachers, are tied to higher rating levels (Kaufman et al., 2018).<sup>7</sup> LDOE engaged in extensive statewide outreach to eligible sites and through the local ECE networks to explain the rating process based on the CLASS and the rationale for the unified rating system; this was to prepare ECE providers for the new requirements, and the state communicates the ratings to centers annually before they are made publicly available. Beginning in the 2018–2019 school

year, as a way to support low-performing sites to improve quality, LDOE required that sites with an overall CLASS score below a certain threshold in the Approaching Proficient level participate in formal site improvement planning with LDOE (LDOE, 2018e). The improvement planning process provides support for sites to (1) engage in self-assessment; (2) establish specific goals for the year related to the CLASS tool, use of high-quality curriculum, and/or professional development; and (3) link sites to additional resources.

This rating system represents a major accountability shift for ECE providers. As this new rating system has been implemented, we have gathered information to gauge whether there appears to be consensus among different stakeholders of the validity and fairness of the system two years into implementation. The findings below help explore the early perceptions of the first public ratings and how well ECE stakeholders perceived the rating process was being implemented.

### **The majority of Louisiana site leaders and teachers were familiar with the current rating system and supported its general aims.**

The majority of ECE staff we heard from supported the state's aim to improve quality and increase accountability across publicly supported ECE centers. The state's communication about the rating system appears to have successfully reached site leaders. In our survey, 60 percent of ECE site leaders indicated that they understood the Performance Profiles and ratings very well, 37 percent understood them somewhat well, and only 2 percent reported not understanding or not being familiar with them.

The majority (63 percent) of these respondents also indicated agreement with their site's overall 2016–2017 quality rating level, although disagreement with the rating was statistically significantly more likely for site leaders reporting an Approaching Proficient rating compared with

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<sup>6</sup> The Profiles are available on the LDOE website and through the Louisiana School Finder website, which provides information on centers and kindergarten through 12th grade schools. The School Finder is available at [www.louisianaschools.com](http://www.louisianaschools.com).

<sup>7</sup> Credits are available for several groups of participants meeting specific requirements, including ECE directors and teachers in a rated center, ECE providers who enroll CCAP children, taxpayers with a dependent under age six attending a rated center, and businesses providing support to centers in the rating system. For more detail, see Kaufman et al. (2018) or Louisiana Department of Revenue (undated).

TABLE 2  
 Survey Respondent Agreement with 2016–2017 Site Performance Rating, by Rating Level

2016–2017 Performance Rating	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither Agree or Disagree (%)	Unsure (%)	Sample Size
Excellent	88	0	13	0	8
Proficient	78	12	8	3	144
Approaching Proficient	30	33	33	3	69
All Rating Levels	63	18	16	3	221

SOURCE: RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey.

NOTE: Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding. We exclude the 23 respondents who indicated “Do not know” to the question about rating level and one respondent who did not answer that question.

the other rating levels (Table 2).<sup>8</sup> Among those sites with a Proficient or Approaching Proficient rating, almost all (96 percent) leaders reported they were actively taking steps or planning to do so to prepare to move up to a higher level in the future. A little less than one-quarter of leaders of sites with either of those two ratings indicated that moving up a level would be either difficult or very difficult: 24 percent for Proficient sites and 22 percent for Approaching Proficient sites.

We found general agreement with several statements indicating support for the rating system in general, not just for the respondent’s individual site. Over 80 percent of site leaders somewhat or strongly agreed with statements that the current rating system is a reasonable measure of site quality (83 percent), that the rating system will help improve children’s development and learning (87 percent), and that the site leader personally supports the aims of the currently structured rating system (82 percent). This support was also expressed by case study interviewees, as exemplified by the following remarks:

- What I do appreciate about [the rating system] is that it does have this way of you looking at the teacher, looking at the student, looking at the student interactions. (ECE teacher)

- [The CLASS is] a great instrument. (ECE teacher)
- It’s a good tool . . . the tool really teaches. It helps those teachers see how they need to work with those children while they’re playing. . . . And my teachers really like it. Not at first, but . . . when they see growth and they see, what, how their children are growing throughout the year using the CLASS tool. I like it. (lead agency representative)
- [Performance Profiles are] something that holds our teachers and schools accountable and everybody has to be accountable. (lead agency representative)

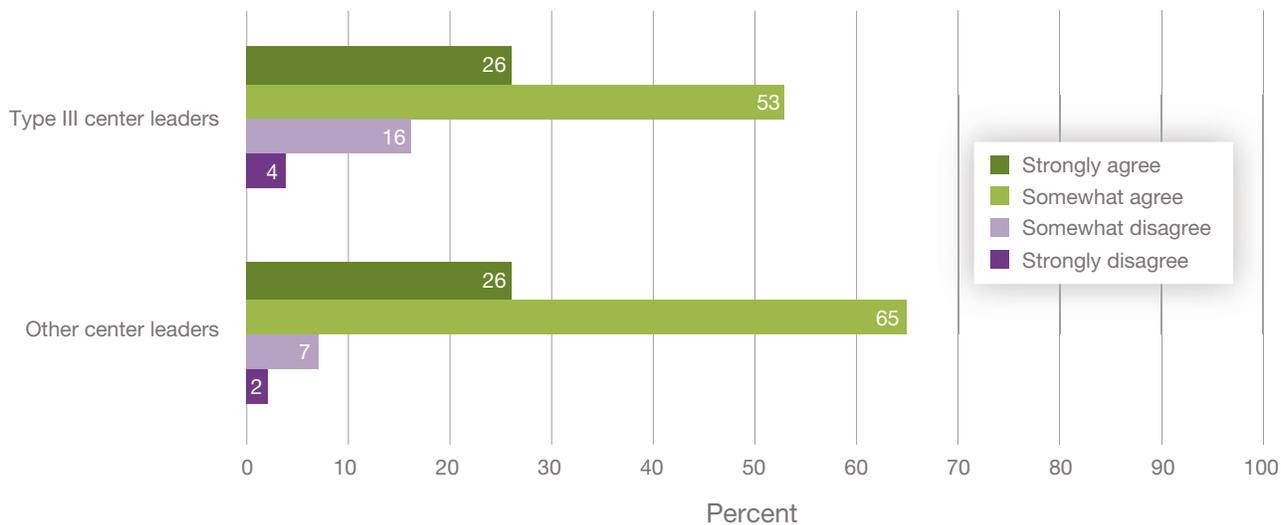
But our survey responses and interviews and focus groups in three of the four case study sites also suggested that a minority of respondents disagreed that CLASS was a reasonable measure of site quality. For instance, 17 percent of survey respondents disagreed with the statement that the rating system, as measured by CLASS, is a reasonable quality measure, and Type III center leaders were statistically significantly more likely than other site leaders to disagree with this statement (Figure 1). Type III centers were also less likely to be Proficient or Excellent in our survey sample, which may be related to the higher reported disagreement with the CLASS measure for quality, as it is the sole measure used to determine ratings.

Although we heard from several types of respondents about concerns that the CLASS score does not capture all the elements of site quality, there was no firm opinion on what other elements should be

<sup>8</sup>Type III centers were significantly more likely to be rated as Approaching Proficient in our sample, which is consistent with the patterns observed in statewide ratings data. In our survey data, only eight centers were rated Excellent and none were rated Unsatisfactory; thus, for analysis, we compared Approaching Proficient with Proficient or above.

FIGURE 1

## Survey Respondent Agreement That Rating System Is a Reasonable Measure of Site Quality



SOURCE: RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey.

NOTE: Sample includes 148 Type III centers and 82 other centers. Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding. The statement in the survey was “The rating system, as measured by CLASS scores, is a reasonable measure of site quality.”

included in the rating calculation. As examples, we heard the following comments:

- It is just a snapshot and not everything that you actually do each and every day to support some of this growth. (ECE teacher)
- I don’t know what the thing should be. And that’s probably been the biggest problem for me right now, what it should be. We just don’t know, we’re not happy with it, we just don’t know what it should be. (ECE teacher)
- [The] level of lead teacher and director education and training should be part of the rating of the center. (ECE site leader)
- Curriculum and all that is included on the Performance Profile, but it’s not taken into account as the grade. . . . You have the [curriculum] tiering, that’s another thing. You could make up a point system for that really easily. (lead agency representative)

The concern that a single measure does not adequately capture all the elements of quality mirrors a concern among K–12 stakeholders for the school rating letter grades, as discussed in the report on K–12 academics in this four-part series (Kaufman et al., 2019).

A final concern we heard is that parents may not understand and use the current rating system as intended. While some case study interviewees indicated that they had discussed ratings with parents or believed that some parents paid attention to ratings, other interviewees expressed skepticism about how well parents knew what the ratings meant. As one ECE teacher commented, “I do have parents going ‘I don’t really know what this is.’” Another ECE teacher told us “A lot of [parents] do not understand the word *proficient*, like ‘Approaching Proficient’; some of them do, a lot of them don’t.”

## ECE staff mentioned several challenges with the CLASS observation process and the perceived fairness of scores.

Although the majority of site leaders reported in the survey they understood the CLASS observation process clearly, and most at least somewhat supported the way it was conducted, over one-third of survey respondents indicated the CLASS observation process presented some logistical challenges for site staff (Figure 2).

Several areas of concern with the CLASS process also emerged in interviews and survey open-ended comments. One common concern noted was the timing of observations, such as new staff being observed too soon or classrooms being observed too early in the year. For example, one site leader commented:

One of our teachers was observed on her 13th day of working with us. She had not even completed the introductory period of one month, let alone understand what CLASS is or organizing, setting up her room, procedures, and behavior expectations.

Another site leader commented:

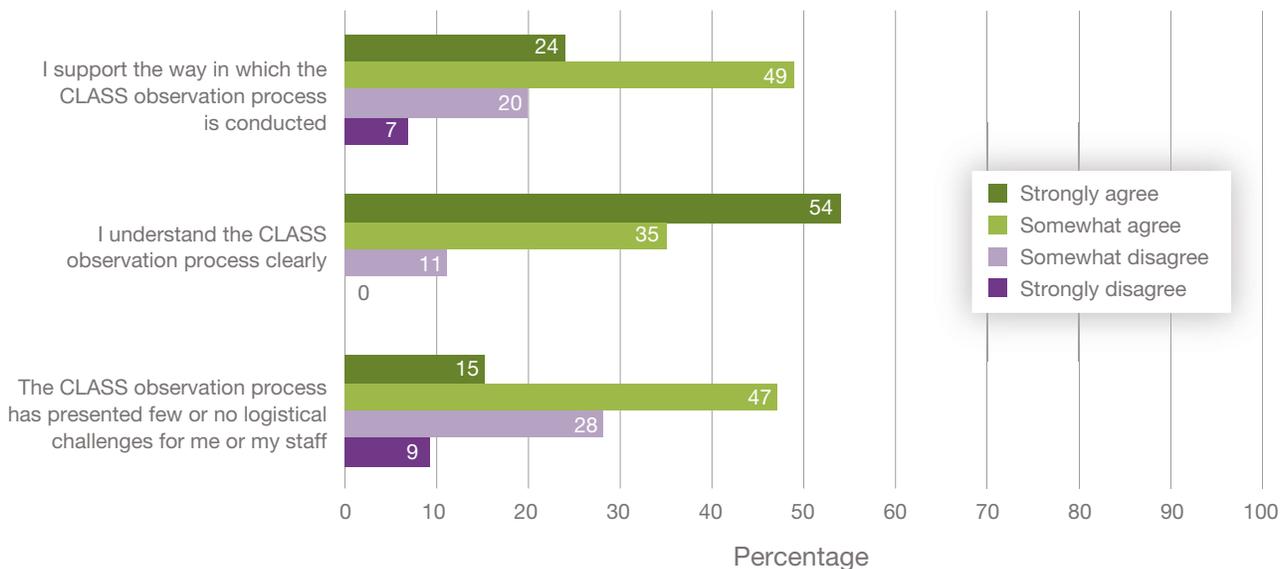
Because it's about teacher child interaction. If I'm still learning your name, you're still screaming because you're having separation anxiety, it could definitely affect the teacher's activity, it could affect the whole score. Then I will say this year [external observers] did move it back a little bit. I think they started in October. . . . I know our scores were better for it.

Several others commented that the assessment process may be subjective and unclear and can depend on the number of observations and who is observed (e.g., new teachers, substitutes). For example, another site leader said,

To be absolutely frank with you, it's catch as you can. It depends on the evaluator who comes in and evaluates you with CLASS, what's key in their mind, what they stress, what they are looking for. . . . It depends on that observer as to how your staff scores.

Still others commented on the potential discrepancy in scores between different observers and the lack of detailed feedback from the external observer

FIGURE 2  
Survey Respondent Agreement with Statements About the CLASS Observation Process



SOURCE: RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey.  
NOTES: n = 230. Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

about reasons for lower scores. For example, we heard the following from one site leader: “There’s a sense of unfairness because there might be different observers who are giving different scores and that doesn’t feel like it’s right.” Another site leader said, “For me, the expectations [of the external observer] are not clear as to what they’re looking for,” and a third stressed that “We want teachers to learn, and how can they learn if there’s no feedback?”

Additionally, in interviews, a few ECE teachers in two case study sites brought up special education as a particular type of classroom that might not be assessed well via CLASS and the current rating system. They noted that the CLASS instrument might be used well in one class but not apply as well to classrooms with developmentally delayed or nonverbal children. One teacher stated,

I also think there’s a lot of value in how we are accommodating those students who have various needs, because that’s what early childhood is. If that’s not being reflected in the tool, being considered in those observations, then you’re really not getting a true picture of what you’re doing as a teacher.

Two suggestions for improvements to the observation process emerged from case study interviews. The first was the belief that CLASS observations should start later in the school year than they currently do, which can be as early as two weeks after the start of the school year. Later observations would allow teachers to get to know students and establish regular routines for the class. The second was to have the Picard third-party observers provide more-immediate feedback on scores, and, when needed, to have someone explain to teachers why scores may differ between Picard and local network observers. This would help teachers to understand and trust in the process.

## State Action 2: Strengthen lead teacher preparation requirements through a new ECE teacher credential: the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate.

### Approach and Key Findings

#### How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We examined RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey responses from Type III center leaders about perceptions of the upcoming Ancillary Certificate requirement.
- We asked Type III center leaders and teachers and network lead agency representatives about awareness and support for the new requirement.

#### Key findings:

- Teachers, site leaders, and lead agency representatives supported the Ancillary Certificate requirement.
- Some centers may see staff turnover because of the new requirement, or they may move out of Type III status because their teachers will not have completed the requirement in the allotted time frame.

In 2015, the state mandated that, by July 2019, all lead teachers in publicly funded centers must have, at a minimum, preparation levels that meet the standards of a new ECE credential, the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate.<sup>9</sup> The objective is to raise the minimum lead teacher qualifications across all publicly funded centers to foster a professionalized workforce and improve classroom quality and child outcomes. The Ancillary Certificate is based on the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential,<sup>10</sup> plus applied practice experiences as part of the teacher preparation program. This new requirement was primarily aimed at Type III centers because Head Start, Early Head Start, and school-based pre-kindergarten programs already had lead teacher requirements meeting or exceeding the Ancillary Certificate requirements, whereas many Type III centers did not.

To help teachers meet the requirement, the state currently supports 22 BESE-approved Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate Programs across the

state (LDOE, 2019). Furthermore, starting in 2018, the state initiated a pilot for a statewide Ancillary Certificate program available online, in partnership with a vendor, to help provide greater access and flexibility for teachers working to meet the requirement (LDOE, 2018b).

As of July 2018, teachers beginning to pursue the Ancillary Certificate are required to earn it through a BESE-approved program. The state also provides tuition support for Type III center teachers to earn the Ancillary Certificate through BESE-approved programs, with the intention of making it no or low cost to teachers (LDOE, undated-b),<sup>11</sup> and School Readiness Tax Credits are linked to Ancillary Certificate obtainment (listed as state action 5 in Table 1) (LDOE, 2018b). An implementation challenge will be to train all eligible Type III lead teachers in time for the July 2019 deadline (Kaufman et al., 2018). Below, we discuss perceptions of the new training requirement and anticipated challenges for meeting the 2019 deadline.

<sup>9</sup> Or within 24 months of start date as a lead teacher.

<sup>10</sup> The credential requires 120 hours of training (see LDOE [undated-a] for further details).

<sup>11</sup> The state set a maximum scholarship amount for the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate Program Scholarship of \$4,085 in 2018 and \$3,880 in 2019.

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## Survey respondents indicated familiarity and general agreement with the new Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate requirement for lead teachers.

Among ECE teachers, site leaders, and lead agencies, we generally heard support for the move to require all lead teachers to have, at minimum, an Ancillary Certificate to work in Type III centers. Most expressed agreement that lead teachers should have this minimum level of training if their sites receive public funds. Among survey respondents, almost all (96 percent) Type III site leaders were aware of the Ancillary Certificate. However, this high awareness rate may not be the case for all ECE teachers across the state. One lead agency representative told us:

I don't think everybody knows about it. . . . We see a handful of Type III centers that don't read their emails, don't sign up for the newsletters, don't come to the meetings. . . . I think there are a few Type III centers out there that just don't even really know . . . what the timeline and expectation is. . . . I think that they're [LDOE] going to find that they have more than they expected who do not have the CDA [Ancillary Certificate].

Four-fifths (81 percent) of survey respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that the Ancillary Certificate requirement as a minimum lead teacher credential will improve teaching quality across Louisiana. Nine percent somewhat disagreed and 9 percent strongly disagreed with that statement, however.

Several case study interviewees across networks also said that the Ancillary Certificate requirement is useful for improving teaching quality. One ECE site leader said, "It improves the ratings, for real," and another concurred, saying "It makes you understand more about what you're doing." An ECE teacher noted how it helps the site, saying,

Requiring them [teachers] to kind of step their game up a little bit, I think that's better for us as teachers, because whenever they come here they are more prepared and it's better for the community, too.

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Four-fifths of survey respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that the Ancillary Certificate requirement as a minimum lead teacher credential will improve teaching quality across Louisiana.

A lead agency representative told us:

I think there have to be consequences for programs that don't have teachers who meet the minimums. You have to start somewhere. . . . I am very much on board with the state's initiatives, and I'm one of those professionals who believe there's not been sufficient consequences fast enough.

In one focus group, ECE site leaders suggested that the minimum requirements should extend to all teachers, not just leads, because, as one leader put it, "If the teacher is out, they have to step in, so they should be performing at the standard that the teacher is." A lead agency representative also made this point in relation to thinking ahead about the teaching pipeline:

You've got your lead teacher who already has her credential, but if your assistant teacher doesn't have a credential and [the] lead teacher leaves, and now [the] assistant teacher has had two years as an assistant under that teacher, she could move into [the] lead teacher position. But now she doesn't have a CDA because she was never eligible. . . . So [the state] being a little more proactive about that.

**It was expected that most lead teachers would be ready to meet the requirement, but a potential consequence for some sites may be staff turnover and/or moving out of Type III status if those requirements are not met.**

Half of the 149 Type III site leaders we surveyed reported that not all lead teachers at their site currently (as of September 2018) met the minimum Ancillary Certificate requirement. However, of those sites that didn't currently meet the requirement ( $n = 75$ ), two-thirds of leaders (67 percent) indicated they would meet the requirement by July 2019 or within 24 months of the lead teacher's start date. ECE teachers and leaders in focus groups expressed the belief the certification should be attainable. One teacher noted, "Because they have classes available, so you can't say 'Oh, no, you can't,' because [the state has] to have [Ancillary Certificate classes] available." A lead agency representative commented that they had "some child care centers that are really working hard to get their teachers ready."

Although some centers were preparing to help teachers attain the Ancillary Certificate, at least one approved Ancillary Certificate program provider noted that it was struggling to fill all its open slots for the 2018–2019 cohort. This provider highlighted the difference between the required capacity to provide the Ancillary Certificate training to all those who need it and current enrollment: "Do we have the capacity to fill the need? No, because the need is huge. Do we have the capacity to fill the need for those who are stepping up? We do." The reasons for enrollment struggles were not clear.

Some site leaders also expressed uncertainty about whether their currently uncertified lead teachers would attain the Ancillary Certificate by the required date, and 9 percent ( $n = 7$ ) reported that their teachers would not meet the requirements by the assigned date. While the number of respondents reporting that they did not expect site teachers to meet the requirement is relatively small, it is illustrative to examine the most commonly reported reasons for not meeting the requirements: lead teacher time

constraints to attend the credential program (five of seven respondents) and the high cost of attending (four of seven respondents). Furthermore, five of seven site leaders reported that not meeting this lead teacher requirement would result in them relinquishing their Type III center designation unless a waiver was granted. One potential option for centers not meeting the Ancillary Certificate requirement as of July 1, 2019, would be to enter into a corrective action plan with LDOE to maintain Type III status while establishing a plan to reach the required certification levels (Louisiana Administrative Code, 2018). If a center moves out of Type III status (e.g., moves to Type II status), it also moves out of the publicly funded system that requires the center to participate in the annual ratings, and the center would no longer be able to serve children receiving CCAP subsidies.

Thus, one consequence of the new Ancillary Certificate requirement may be the loss of some Type III providers, which means that some children may not have access to subsidized ECE or will have to enroll in a different center accepting CCAP subsidies. As of February 2019, there were about 3,600 families on the CCAP waitlist, demonstrating that demand for CCAP subsidies is high (LDOE, undated-e). This concern was also brought up in several of our interviews across networks. For example, one lead agency representative mentioned that "there are a couple of centers that have recently gone to a Type II because they just don't want to deal anymore with the state requirement." Another lead agency representative asserted that sites without lead teachers meeting requirements were

going to go to Type II. . . . It will [be a loss of CCAP spaces], and I don't know what the answer is. I understand that there has to be something. We can't just give out CCAP money to anybody. And a Type III center with the requirements that they have to have I would imagine that's the lesser of two evils, I guess. Because we don't want them not to offer the CCAP seats because then our children that are most in need are not going to have a place to go.

Another concern about the Ancillary Certificate requirement we frequently heard in case study

interviews and saw in survey comments was the lack of funding to pay teachers higher wages upon attaining the credential, which teachers may expect. Also mentioned was the potential for staff turnover, as newly credentialed staff may move to higher-paying sites such as Head Starts or school-based pre-kindergarten. One lead agency representative stated, “I think once they get the CDA [Ancillary Certificate], that’s a bargaining chip for them to move to another center that pays more for them to have it.” Another lead agency representative supported this concern: “When these child care people are getting these Ancillary Certificates, they’re then leaving that child care and then going to get a teaching assistant job in the public schools because we pay them more.” This being the case, this representative was not convinced that requiring the Ancillary Certificate would accomplish the goal of improving the quality of Type III center teachers. At the same time, site leaders expressed concerns that some staff, especially the more experienced teachers, were not willing to pursue the Ancillary Certificate. This would put a site in a position of letting uncertified teachers go or losing Type III status. One site leader survey respondent summed up these concerns when asked about the site’s top challenges:

The CDA [Ancillary Certificate] requirement . . . hands down has caused me to lose some of my best teachers. If they have the credentials they leave us because the public schools can pay more, offer insurance, and offer lighter work schedules with increased holiday schedules. For my amazing teachers that have been in this business for 20+ years (specifically my infant workers) they will be pushed out because they do not want to “go to school.” You can’t replace a gift of empathy and love for a child with a degree and for that our centers loose [sic]. I find it a double edged sword. At the very least fund us so that the playing field is equal and we can offer higher pay and

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## Newly credentialed Type III center staff may move to higher-paying sites such as Head Starts or school-based pre-kindergarten.

benefits so that we have a better chance at employee retention.

We also heard in case study interviews that obstacles to attaining the certificate include cost and distance to the teacher preparation program. It may be that not all teachers are knowledgeable about or taking advantage of the state’s tuition support for obtaining the Ancillary Certificate (see state action 5 in Table 1). Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of 126 Type III site leaders responding in our survey reported that staff who attended a BESE-approved preparation program for their Ancillary Certificate received a state-supported tuition scholarship to attend. The travel distance obstacle might be ameliorated by the state’s recent efforts to provide Ancillary Certification training online. However, one teacher preparation program interviewee cautioned that the online Ancillary Certificate training may be challenging for older teachers, who may not be as comfortable with technology as younger teachers.

Overall, the discussion about the Ancillary Certificate appeared to mainly focus on the mandate to complete the training as required, rather than the perceived quality of the training programs. A few teachers and site leaders alluded to the fact that getting the Ancillary Certificate required a lot of effort.

## State Action 3: Signal to ECE staff which curricula, formative assessments, and professional development are high-quality and standards-aligned.

### Approach and Key Findings

#### How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We examined RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey responses about curricula, formative assessments, and professional development used in ECE sites.
- We examined case study interviews and focus groups with ECE teachers, site leaders, and network lead agency representatives about use of curricula, formative assessment, and professional development in their programs.

#### Key findings:

- The majority of respondents at case study sites reported using a high-quality curriculum, but survey respondents in Type III centers were less likely than other ECE providers to report using a high-quality curriculum regularly.
- State incentives to purchase high-quality curricula were used by many Type III centers, though some site leaders and lead agencies reported challenges with the cost reimbursement mechanism.
- Formative assessment data were generally considered useful by survey respondents, but the data entry requirements challenged several Type III centers.
- Many survey respondents participated in a range of professional development opportunities related to CLASS, curricula, and formative assessment in the past year (2017–2018), though Type III center teachers were less likely to report participation than other teachers.

Louisiana has used its unified rating system based on the CLASS measure as a way to establish a common definition of program quality. Quality is in turn supported through coordinated curricula, formative child assessments, and aligned professional development (Kaufman et al., 2018). In 2016, the state initiated an ECE curriculum review process, similar to that used for grades K–12, resulting in three tier levels; Tier 1 represents curricula that are considered to be aligned with the Louisiana Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards (Kaufman et al., 2018).<sup>12</sup> All reviews are posted on an LDOE website so that the information is readily available. Furthermore, as an incentive, the state established the Child Care Curriculum Initiative in 2016 to provide reimbursement equal to 80 percent of the cost to

purchase a Tier 1 curriculum for a site (state action 5 in Table 1).

For formative assessments, Louisiana encourages the use of the Teaching Strategies GOLD in centers, and it pays for GOLD use with all publicly funded children (e.g., funded through CCAP). Moreover, the state encourages ECE stakeholders to align professional development opportunities for ECE staff with these efforts to promote knowledge and implementation of high-quality curricula and formative assessments, as well as classroom teaching practices aligned with the CLASS assessment. These coordinated activities are expected to help sites improve quality and ratings over time to the extent that providers engage in them. Below, we examine ECE providers' use of high-quality curricula, GOLD, and professional development opportunities.

<sup>12</sup>Tier 2 curricula are judged to be “approaching quality,” and Tier 3 do not represent quality (LDOE, undated-f).

## Curricula

The majority of survey respondents indicated their site regularly used a Tier I curriculum, though Type III centers were less likely to report this.

The state's signals about what is regarded as a high-quality curriculum appear to be reaching ECE educators. Among site leaders, awareness of the state's online ECE curriculum reviews and adoption of Tier 1 curricula (the highest rated) was high. Only 16 percent of survey respondents reported they had not seen these curriculum reviews. The majority of site leaders reported using a Tier 1 curriculum (79 percent), while 11 percent reported they did not and 10 percent were unsure. Creative Curriculum and Frog Street were the most commonly reported curricula used across sites, for different age groups. We heard similar accounts of Tier 1 curriculum adoption in our case study interviews.

Although leaders at most sites with a Tier 1 curriculum ( $n = 178$ ) reported using it on a regular basis (87 percent), Type III center leaders were less likely than leaders of other site types to report using a Tier 1 curriculum (76 percent versus 95 percent). Additionally, Type III center leaders who did report using Tier 1 curricula ( $n = 109$ ) were less likely than others ( $n = 69$ ) to report that the site used it on a regular basis—i.e., daily or weekly (81 percent versus 97 percent). A few leaders mentioned that teachers tried making at least some adaptations to whatever curricula they used to better address children's needs, but leaders did not discuss these in any detail.

The Child Care Curriculum Initiative was used by many Type III centers to obtain a Tier I curriculum, though cost may still be a challenge for some (state action 5).

The incentive offered by the state to encourage adoption of Tier 1 curricula appears to be working. Almost three-quarters (74 percent) of Type III center leader survey respondents ( $n = 109$ ) said they participated in the Child Care Curriculum Initiative to receive reimbursement for purchasing a Tier 1 curriculum. Several survey respondents commented positively on the reimbursement program, and some also commented positively on the quality of the

curriculum. Among the Type III center leaders who did not participate ( $n = 20$ ), the majority ( $n = 12$ ) indicated that this was because they already had a Tier 1 curriculum when the incentive began or received a Tier 1 curriculum through other means (e.g., another source purchased it for them); four sites planned to apply for the incentive in the next year; and another four indicated that they did not participate because of the cost or inability to pay up front before reimbursement.

We also heard similar cost and reimbursement concerns in several of our case study interviews. For example, one Type III site leader said, "It took me almost two to three months to get [the reimbursement] back," and an ECE teacher said it can take two months "or longer for [providers] to get reimbursed that \$5,000." A lead agency representative told us, "That's a lot of money for a child care center to put out there [prior to getting reimbursed]." Another network lead agency representative also suggested it is a hardship for centers in her network to pay the full cost up front rather than just paying up front the much smaller portion of the cost the center is responsible for covering themselves: "They would have bought it if the State of Louisiana would have made them pay 20 percent of it instead of [the center] buying it and [the state] reimbursing them." These funding constraints help explain why some interviewees told us some sites do not purchase a curriculum set for each classroom and instead share across classrooms.

## Formative Assessment

Most survey respondents reported that GOLD data were useful, but this was less likely for Type III centers, which also experienced data entry challenges.

The state requires children who receive public funding to be assessed using the GOLD formative assessment, and thus interviewees and survey respondents in our sample reported using this assessment. We asked ECE teachers and site leaders about the perceived usefulness of the GOLD assessment, and we learned about some challenges with its use, as well.

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## Type III center respondents mentioned GOLD data entry as a particular challenge.

Among site leaders who responded to the survey, most (87 percent) felt that GOLD data were at least somewhat useful in guiding classroom instruction; over one-third (38 percent) felt they were very useful. However, 13 percent of leaders felt that the GOLD data were not that useful, and leaders of Type III centers were statistically significantly more likely than others to report this. Moreover, almost half (49 percent) of leaders reported using a formative assessment other than GOLD, and response patterns for the perceived usefulness of those assessments were similar to perceived usefulness of GOLD (though we found no statistically significant differences by center type).

In case study site interviews and focus groups and survey open-ended comments, we heard mixed perceptions of GOLD. Several survey respondents commented that GOLD was challenging or a time burden. For example, one Type III site leader stated, “GOLD is a lot of work for my teachers who have no assistant or planning period to enter information and is [sic] expected to complete on their own time.” We also heard this theme from several case study interviewees across parishes. Type III center respondents mentioned GOLD data entry as a particular challenge. One Type III teacher said, “It’s a challenge for me. . . . I have to plan to do it daily and if you don’t do it daily, you get behind.” Another said, “I try to do it when they’re napping. It takes so much time. . . . So now I don’t have time to prepare for when they wake up because I’m busy doing this.” Yet another noted, “Sometimes I do it at 10 o’clock at night at my house.”

A few interviewees expressed doubt about the effectiveness of GOLD to improve classroom quality,

and one network lead agency representative noted this concern more for Type III centers than other sites: “GOLD is probably not realistic for the child care centers. If you just put data in, data out, then what good is it?” Other survey respondents and interviewees expressed a more positive view, however, noting that GOLD helps them communicate about children’s progress to parents and can improve classroom quality. They also received helpful support for using GOLD in their classroom. One Type III teacher stated GOLD “helps, it shows their improvements, their weaknesses” and can be shared with parents: “They can see it straight there, they can see my notes from the day. It’s a portal they go to.” A Type III center leader survey respondent commented, “Gold is a great guide to use.”

The state also expects that providers use formative assessment data to communicate between preschool and kindergarten teachers when children transition to kindergarten (LDOE, undated-c). In survey data, among site leaders serving preschool-age children ( $n = 204$ ), 37 percent reported that their center scheduled time for preschool teachers to meet with any kindergarten teachers to discuss children’s assessment data during the transition to kindergarten. Sixty percent said they did not, and 3 percent were unsure. Leaders at Type III centers were statistically significantly less likely to report scheduling this time. A likely explanation for the differences is that school-based pre-kindergarten sites and some co-located Head Start classrooms have easier access to kindergarten teachers if the children attend the same school than do Type III centers not affiliated with a school.

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## Professional Development

Many site leaders reported staff participation in professional development related to Tier 1 curricula, the CLASS observation tool, and GOLD assessments, but Type III center teachers were less likely to access some of these opportunities.

Professional development that is aligned with Tier 1 curricula, GOLD formative assessment use, and CLASS observations is encouraged by the state as quality improvement support in conjunction with the site rating system. Many ECE staff reported participating in this type of professional development, and survey respondents indicated different patterns of professional development opportunities depending on site role (i.e., leader or teachers) and site type (i.e., Type III child care center or non-Type III site, including schools, Head Start, and Early Head Start).

Over half of site leaders reported having received training in the past year on the CLASS observation tool and to become a CLASS observer, and just under half reported receiving training related to Teaching Strategies GOLD and training on special topics (Table 3). Fewer site leaders reported participating in other types of training. In general, site leaders reported lower rates of professional development participation for themselves than they did for their center teachers.

Over half of site leaders reported that teachers at their site participated in the past year in training and individualized coaching on the Tier 1 curriculum and the CLASS observation tool, as well as training related to Teaching Strategies GOLD and on special topics. About half of leaders also reported their teachers received individualized coaching on special topics and participated in an online training course. On the other hand, less than half of leaders said teachers participated in the other types of professional development listed in Table 3, and only about one-quarter said teachers participated in the Teacher Leader Summit, which is an annual statewide professional development conference sponsored by LDOE.

Survey data also revealed differences in professional development participation by type of center. In some cases, *leaders* of Type III centers were statistically significantly more likely to report participating

Most site leaders somewhat or strongly agreed that their teaching staff received adequate professional development to improve teaching practices.

in a specific professional development activity than non-Type III center leaders (Table 3). Conversely, as reported by site leaders, Type III center *teachers* were less likely to participate than non-Type III center teachers where statistically significant differences were found (with online training for teachers being an exception).

The differences by site type for leader professional development may be related in part to reports in one network that local training had been focused on directors in Type III centers in a train-the-trainer model, in which center leaders were expected to pass on knowledge learned to teachers. This could have resulted in Type III leaders being more likely to receive some forms of targeted professional development than site leaders at schools or Head Start. Center type is a possible explanation for differences in training on use of Tier 1 curricula—a Type III center was not likely to receive training on a Tier 1 curriculum if it was not using a Tier 1 curriculum—and likewise, for training related to non-GOLD assessments, which Type III centers were less likely to use.

Overall, survey responses suggest that the level of professional development met staff needs for improving classroom quality to some extent. Most site leaders agreed (somewhat or strongly) with statements indicating their teaching staff received adequate professional development to improve teaching practices aligned with CLASS measures or that they personally received adequate professional development to guide their teachers to improve teaching practices

TABLE 3  
Professional Development Participation Among Site Leaders and Teachers

Professional Development Opportunities, by Staff Role	Percentage of Sites with Participation in Past Year		
	Type III Child Care Centers	Schools, Head Start, Early Head Start	All Sites
<b>Training on use of Tier 1 curriculum</b>			
Leader	43*	28	38
Teachers	50*	73	58
<b>Training on use of other curriculum (not Tier 1)</b>			
Leader	14	9	12
Teachers	18	19	18
<b>Individualized coaching on a site's curriculum</b>			
Leader	38*	25	33
Teachers	49*	65	55
<b>Training on CLASS observation tool</b>			
Leader	66	57	62
Teachers	64	70	66
<b>Individualized coaching on CLASS tool</b>			
Leader	46*	31	40
Teachers	54	57	55
<b>Training to become CLASS observer</b>			
Leader	57	54	56
Teachers	23	26	24
<b>Training on use of Teaching Strategies GOLD</b>			
Leader	56*	36	49
Teachers	61*	78	67
<b>Training on online data entry of GOLD data</b>			
Leader	51*	31	44
Teachers	53*	78	62
<b>Individualized coaching on GOLD use or data entry</b>			
Leader	31	21	28
Teachers	41*	58	47
<b>Training on use of another formative assessment tool</b>			
Leader	14	11	13
Teachers	14*	34	21
<b>Individualized coaching on use of another formative assessment tool</b>			
Leader	14	13	13
Teachers	14*	29	19
<b>Training on special topics<sup>a</sup></b>			
Leader	46	41	45
Teachers	52*	79	62
<b>Individualized coaching on special topics<sup>a</sup></b>			
Leader	36	30	34
Teachers	42*	62	49
<b>Teacher Leader Summit</b>			
Leader	29*	51	37
Teachers	16*	37	24
<b>Online training course</b>			
Leader	49*	25	40
Teachers	59*	42	52

SOURCE: RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey.

NOTE: The survey question asked, "In the past year, have you and/or teachers at your site participated in any of the following formal professional development opportunities offered by a Resource and Referral Agency, school district, state, or other vendor?" The survey was administered in August–September 2018. A case was excluded from calculations in the few instances where a respondent answered both "no one has participated" and another response option for a given professional development activity. Total sample size ranges from 219 to 222, depending on professional development activity and number of exclusions made;  $n = 139$ – $140$  for Type III child care centers;  $n = 80$ – $81$  for combined group of schools, Head Start, and Early Head Start.

<sup>a</sup> = special topics such as early literacy, mathematics, child behavior management, etc.

\* = percentages for child care centers are significantly different than for non-child care centers at  $p < 0.05$ .

(86 percent and 88 percent, respectively). However, over 40 percent indicated agreeing only “somewhat” with these statements, and over 10 percent of site leaders disagreed with these statements, indicating there may be room for improvement in the quality or intensity of professional development. There were no statistically significant differences by site type. Interviewees confirmed that more professional development was needed, including a desire for more coaching and training on Tier I curricula and GOLD.

Survey respondents provided additional comments about professional development, and positively referenced the network, lead agency, or Resource and Referral Agency support for professional development. Coaching was mentioned as a key support. For example, one site leader wrote, “I find that the support from our technical assistant has helped us become a better site, and they help us with learning the new things we need to know such as [Teaching Strategies GOLD] and getting ready for our class observations.”

While comments about CLASS training were generally positive, several respondents wished there were fewer time constraints or greater availability of the training. We also heard about time constraints

and scheduling issues for professional development from case study interviewees in all four case study parishes. This was most often reported by Type III center staff, and these staff also perceived that schools and Head Start sites had more time set aside for professional development in their regular schedules. This might also help explain why Type III center teachers were less likely to attend the Teacher Leader Summit, which required travel to attend and possibly substitute staff. Another reported issue with attending the summit was that it reached maximum capacity, so not all interested teachers could enroll. Some interviewees also mentioned the financial cost of attending as a barrier.

Interviewees in three of the four case study sites mentioned that teacher turnover posed a particular challenge for professional development—namely, the need to continually train new staff when previously trained staff left the site. Another related issue mentioned by some interviewees was that training was often geared more toward new teachers than experienced teachers, and the training could become repetitive for experienced teachers who had already received similar training.

## State Action 4: Increase funding for Child Care Assistance Program subsidies to increase parity and encourage diversity in types of centers serving publicly funded children.

### Approach and Key Findings

#### How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We examined the RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey responses of Type III center leaders about how changes to the CCAP subsidy amount affected their sites.
- We asked Type III center teachers and leaders about how changes in CCAP funding affected their sites.

#### Key findings:

- According to site leader survey responses, the change in CCAP subsidy amounts has resulted in a mix of positive and negative effects across sites, including a bigger CCAP waitlist.
- The CCAP waitlist has posed challenges both for sites that are assisting with more paperwork and, particularly, waitlisted families that cannot afford care.

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial assistance for child care to low-income families. The subsidies are intended to cover most of the Type III center fees that parents would otherwise have to pay out of pocket, and some families could not afford an ECE center without this assistance. In 2016, Louisiana increased the CCAP subsidy amount to increase parity with child funding for public pre-kindergarten programs, because Type III centers enrolling children funded through CCAP are required to meet the same performance standards as a school-based pre-kindergarten program (Kaufman et al., 2018). Additionally, according to LDOE officials, LDOE recognized that the previous subsidy amount was so low that many low-income families were not utilizing CCAP because it was insufficient

to meet their needs; they could not afford to pay the difference in center fees not covered by the subsidy. Low subsidy rates were also perceived as contributing to low teacher pay (LDOE, 2016c). As a result of these subsidy increases and in conjunction with changes in CCAP eligibility requirements, the state enacted to increase family access to subsidies, demand for CCAP jumped, and more families applied than state funding could support. A CCAP waitlist began in July 2017 (LDOE, 2017). State officials said that they believed it was better to increase the subsidy and face a waitlist than to provide subsidies that were too low to be useful to families they were trying to support. To understand how the CCAP increases affected the local level, we examined whether and how CCAP funding level changes affected Type III centers.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The state also uses federal Preschool Development Expansion Grant funds and Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development program funds to offer pre-kindergarten slots for four-year-olds in child care centers (rather than school settings) as a way diversify the pre-kindergarten delivery settings (Kaufman et al., 2018). We did not include those in our survey or our case study analysis, as very few providers we spoke with were participating in those programs.

## Survey respondents and interviewees offered mixed perceptions of how recent CCAP changes have affected centers' enrollment, but mainly had negative views about the waitlist.

Survey respondents had both positive and negative views on the effect of the CCAP increase on Type III center enrollment. We asked respondents about different ways the increase might have potentially affected their site, either positively (e.g., higher subsidy rates allowing providers to recoup higher fees or to accept more CCAP families) or negatively (e.g., losing some families who do not complete enrollment paperwork on time, are placed on the waitlist, and are unable to afford the regular out-of-pocket parent fee). In answer to the survey question “Has the recent increase in CCAP subsidy that families receive affected your center enrollment or operating practices?” half (50 percent) of Type III center leaders indicated that the increased subsidy caused some families to be placed on waitlist and leave the center because they could not pay fees,<sup>14</sup> but only 13 percent indicated that the increased subsidy decreased the number of CCAP families enrolled. Together, these responses, alongside focus group participant comments, suggest that perhaps the net CCAP enrollment at a given center may not have decreased dramatically because slots vacated by waitlisted families were filled with different CCAP families.

Moreover, 20 percent of site leaders indicated that the changes increased the amount of time they spent assisting families with CCAP paperwork. Case study interviewees supported this finding, as several stakeholders across networks highlighted that center staff stepped in to help with applications given the challenges for families in completing CCAP paperwork and that noncompletion could lead to loss of subsidy and placement on the CCAP waitlist. According to LDOE officials we spoke with, the state encourages site staff to help families with the CCAP enrollment process, and this may also be a factor in increased time spent assisting families.

Almost one-third of respondents (31 percent) indicated that the CCAP change increased the number of CCAP families enrolled. A small portion (15 percent) of survey respondents reported that the change allowed their site to increase teacher wages or program spending. Another 23 percent reported no changes at their centers since the increase went into effect, which we also heard from several case study interviewees.

By far, the CCAP waitlist was the most common challenge site leaders voiced across the board. When asked to write in the top challenges faced by their site in meeting state requirements, several survey respondents noted the challenges created by a waitlist, including the difficulties experienced by parents and the loss of enrolled families who cannot pay the center fees without the subsidy. One site leader wrote, “We are a small facility in poverty area [sic]. Everyone around here almost depend on cap, we are losing families off cap and state not replacing. Causing fund problems and some parents to quit jobs or not work.” Another site leader commented, “CCAP is at a stand still, which has made it very difficult to sign new children. Families cannot afford to pay out of pocket for child care which decreases enrollment therefore prevents the hiring of qualified staff to implement policies.” Additionally, we heard similar concerns in our case study interviews. For example, one interviewee stated, “I believe there were some families that had subsidies and then maybe missed paperwork on something, and so automatically are put on the waitlist, and so it’s sort of a shock to them.”

In September 2018, the state removed approximately 4,500 families from the waitlist for the 2018–2019 school year using one-time federal funding to address this problem (LDOE, 2018c). However, not all families were able to be removed, and it is unclear whether additional funding will be available in subsequent years.

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<sup>14</sup> Percentages are calculated among Type III respondents who did not select “does not apply to my center” for this question ( $n = 7$ ).

## State Action 6: Define and require community networks for administration and communication, including coordinated ECE program enrollment for families.

### Approach and Key Findings

#### How did we explore early signals for how this state action is working?

- We examined RAND Louisiana Early Childhood Site Leader Survey responses about how leaders receive communications about the state's policies, requirements, and supports.
- We examined site leader survey responses about how coordinated enrollment has affected their enrollment processes or parent knowledge of site options.
- We asked ECE network lead agency representatives, site leaders, and teachers about the content and quality of communication on ECE policies.
- We asked ECE network lead agency representatives, site leaders, and teachers about their understanding of and experience with coordinated enrollment.

#### Key findings:

- Most respondents received frequent communication from either the state or their network that informed them about state policies.
- There is more work to be done in communicating the importance of ECE to families.
- LDOE and network lead agencies sometimes struggled to find the best means of communication to reach center directors and teachers.
- Respondents reported a range of changes with the implementation of coordinated enrollment, including impact on enrollment processes, with some networks seeing very minimal change.
- Stakeholders suggested that the state coordinate the funding mechanisms alongside enrollment to ensure smoother processes.

The 2012 Act 3 policy changes led to the creation of 65 ECE community networks across the state to act as a primary communication link between LDOE and local centers. Network lead agencies, which are contracted by LDOE to manage network requirements, can pass LDOE information to center directors and other ECE stakeholders in their regions, as well as provide LDOE with feedback from providers about different policies and challenges. While facilitating communication between various ECE stakeholders is a network function, lead agencies have other key roles, including implementing CLASS observations, as noted in the discussion of state action 1; executing administrative functions; and facilitating their network's coordinated enrollment system.

Legislation enacted in 2014 required network lead agencies to implement coordinated enrollment to provide access to quality ECE within a unified ECE system of publicly funded programs in a given network's region. Local coordinated enrollment is intended to serve four main functions: (1) coordinating information about ECE, specifically seat availability and funding sources; (2) coordinating eligibility so that families could clearly understand what they qualify for; (3) coordinating applications so that families fill out a single application for all programs; and (4) matching children with programs based on family preference (LDOE, undated-d). The state, recognizing that networks have differing local needs depending on their size and other factors, is allowing lead agencies to determine the specifics of coordinated enrollment implementation. According

to our data, the coordinated enrollment process remains a work in progress locally. To understand the successes and challenges of ECE communication efforts and coordinated enrollment implementation, we examined the experiences and perceptions in our case study sites and the site leader survey responses to provide a snapshot of local implementation three years into the initiative.

### **Most respondents were positive about the regular communication they received from the state or their lead agency about policies and requirements.**

While one intention for the development of network lead agencies in Louisiana was to streamline communication and create a primary source of information for individuals in each network, center staff and families frequently received ECE information from many sources. Most (81 percent) survey respondents reported that their most common source of information was newsletters or emails from either the state or their network, and 53 percent of respondents reported getting information from the LDOE website. A smaller proportion of respondents, between 19 and 25 percent, also reported Teacher Leader Summits, LDOE guidebooks, and their network's website as sources of information. Survey respondents also reported receiving frequent ECE communications from their lead agency or the state: 81 percent reported receiving information about once a month or more, while only 13 percent reported receiving communication every few months, and 6 percent reported two times a year or fewer. However, because the survey respondents received the survey link via email from their lead agency or LDOE, these results

may be positively biased: Respondents may be more likely than nonrespondents to check email from their lead agency or the state.

When asked about the current supports from the state or network that have helped their site the most, respondents praised the communications for keeping people up to date on state policy and increasing their understanding of the state's expectations. Focus group and interview participants in three of the four case study sites also had positive views about communication from the state department of education. One lead agency administrator we spoke with said people at LDOE are "very responsive, so I always have a million questions and they answer them right away, and they send me [to] the right person. I find from my end it's really good." Several survey respondents named email newsletters as one of the most helpful communications they received.

While communication links from the state to lead agencies and center staff appeared strong, case study interviewees noted that communication with parents was one of the biggest challenges they faced. In particular, email communications to families, while easy for centers to send out, seemed to not always be read by families as the sender had intended, according to network lead agency representatives. Some interviewees described other media used to try to reach parents, such as posters and fliers; newspaper, television, and radio commercials; and hosting open houses. Many of these communication efforts were aimed at informing families, including some who might not be informed about ECE financial opportunities, that they qualify for ECE financial assistance.

Lead agencies also had to find ways to communicate in addition to email, if they wanted to reach all centers in their networks. One lead agency representative described, "[The centers] all have an

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Survey respondents praised the communications for keeping people up to date on state policy and increasing their understanding of the state's expectations.

email address . . . but they do not check their emails, so I make phone calls or visits.” To work around this issue, lead agency representatives said they visited the centers to provide information in person.

Focus group participants saw room for improvement in LDOE and lead agency messaging about the importance of ECE for child development and to counteract misconceptions about centers’ services on a day-to-day basis. Respondents thought many people saw the ECE centers as babysitters, rather than facilitators of child development. One director felt that “The state needs to do something to promote early childhood. . . . People think this is still a babysitting service; parents do, people who come to apply do.”

### **Coordinated enrollment has been implemented differently by networks, leading to variation in both influence and perception of the policy change.**

When LDOE designed the coordinated enrollment system, it intended to give lead agencies the flexibility to implement the system in the ways they felt would work best locally. This intention was reflected in respondents’ descriptions of coordinated enrollment systems that differed from network to network. Specifically, our interviews suggested variability in practices, understanding, and perceptions of coordinated enrollment among parishes we visited and mixed perceptions of benefits from the new system.

Of the four functions of coordinated enrollment discussed above, stakeholders reported most consistently about efforts related to the first function: coordinating information to families about seat availability and funding sources. Stakeholders in three of our case study sites reported that the implementation of coordinated enrollment led to additional advertising and communication that may have provided families with more information about their ECE options. Among site leaders completing the survey, 65 percent either somewhat (43 percent) or strongly (22 percent) agreed with the statement that coordinated enrollment efforts have made it easier for parents to learn about different site options.

The effects of increased advertising are difficult to quantify, and the majority of survey respondents

also reported that coordinated enrollment had not really affected how parents find an ECE center and enroll their children. One lead agency representative reported that they would not continue coordinated enrollment if it was not mandated: “I don’t think the other centers are using it. I know Head Start doesn’t. Yeah, I know they’ll take the form, then the parents have to fill out their [Head Start] forms.” Interviewees and focus group participants similarly felt that the biggest determinants of ECE center selection—location and word of mouth—had not changed. However, one lead agency suggested that the effects coordinated enrollment had on families’ ability to find centers for their children might be underappreciated by some stakeholders because they are less visible. One lead agency representative believed that families who struggled to find centers were now more informed, and credited the communication families received because of coordinated enrollment with an increase in some centers’ application numbers.

In some parishes, it was not clear whether the implementation of the third and fourth functions of coordinated enrollment—a single application for families and matching families to programs based on family preferences—was extensive or changed enrollment processes in a meaningful way. In other parishes, ECE survey respondents, focus group participants, and interviewees felt that more had changed. Over a third (35 percent) of surveyed site leaders who responded to the ECE survey reported that the network lead agency’s efforts to create a coordinated enrollment system for parents changed their site enrollment processes a lot, while 28 percent reported that it changed processes a little. However, 30 percent of leaders said it did not change their enrollment processes at all. Seven percent were not even aware of coordinated enrollment. Some center staff felt that little had changed, because families continued to come to centers to fill out forms, similar to what would have happened prior to coordinated enrollment.

Interviewees and focus group participants detailed some features of coordinated enrollment that were similar across case study sites. For example, some described online interfaces through which families could input their information and choices all in one place and the system would sort children

into centers. Others described the forms that families fill out as part of the process: Parents rank their top three ECE center choices and answer questions to determine their level of need, such as single-parent status and whether the child has a parent in prison. Interviewees also described coordinated enrollment systems that, once per year, typically in spring, would match students to centers based on preferences, using multiple rounds of sorting as additional families turned in forms for their children during the enrollment window. However, some stakeholders pointed out that families continued to enroll their children in ECE throughout the rest of the year by going directly to centers, regardless of the timing of the coordinated enrollment window. One lead agency said, “I mean if there is a two-year-old out there, that two-year-old is already going to have found a place. They don’t have to wait for the coordinated enrollment event.” These families had minimal interaction with coordinated enrollment processes.

Some people voiced negative perceptions about the introduction of coordinated enrollment and the changes it may have induced in their centers. Some respondents felt that coordinated enrollment had hurt enrollment at their centers or caused confusion. Two lead agency representatives said that centers are not required to provide some information, especially related to ECE funding mechanisms, that lead agencies felt was necessary to implement the second function of the coordinated enrollment, coordinating eligibility. One had strong feelings about these challenges: “Until funding is completely coordinated, enrollment cannot be coordinated. Different eligibility requirements and funding are too confusing for parents and for providers to communicate to parents.” This representative also felt that there was room to improve the tracking of student data so that it would be easier to share and use to more effectively implement coordinated enrollment. As a result of poor tracking, “Children sometimes registered at multiple schools, and schools were not always informed of parental choice.”

## Funding of Reforms

Beyond perceptions and challenges related to specific state actions, many respondents felt that state ECE reforms have not been accompanied by the funding needed for them to be carried out as intended. In particular, although the state provided funding for materials or to pay CLASS observers, lead agency representatives reported that the state did not sufficiently fund the salaries of key network lead agency staff, given the effort level required. Multiple lead agency representatives referred to the reforms as an “unfunded mandate.” One said:

The state is not paying me anything. They’re paying for my paper clips and my ink pens and any materials that I need to provide [professional development] or to do CLASS observations. They pay for all of that stuff, but they don’t pay any of my salary.

As a result, network lead agencies adopted ways to shift funds to accomplish what the state had mandated. Some supplemented state funds with district funds when the school district was the lead agency and network staff were district employees. Respondents also noted that challenges around funding and capacity, such as staff time, might differ depending on the size of the district. A lead agency representative whose role has “grown exponentially” explained how in bigger districts, educators might be able to “absorb [the new mandates] within an entity” or spread the new responsibilities among existing

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Many respondents felt that state ECE reforms have not been accompanied by the funding needed for them to be carried out as intended.

employees, rather than creating a new role or assigning all the tasks to an individual person.

Network lead agency interviewees were also asked which new network initiatives they would be able to sustain, as well as whether or not they would continue with the changes they had made, if given the choice. One lead agency representative said:

I would think [that I would keep the Performance Profiles,] yeah, because it's something that holds our teachers and schools accountable and everybody has to be accountable, and it keeps me on my toes because if I have a school that—I mean every time a teacher is observed, I look at her scores. And so if they're not proficient, I immediately know that.

Another said they would continue CLASS observations because “the tool really teaches” and “helps those teachers see how they need to work with those children while they're playing.” One lead agency representative even felt that teachers had grown to appreciate the benefits of CLASS observations. However, this same lead agency did not see a need to continue coordinated enrollment because it is not used as intended. Rather, families just fill out an extra form with the center of their choice when they enroll their children.

In addition, others working in ECE felt funding was lacking in the centers themselves. One teacher told us: “I did all these requirements that you [state] require me, but how am I reaping the benefits? I want my class to be perfect, but I can't spend all of my personal money to make it perfect.” A survey respondent wrote: “I do not wish to be negative but I believe the State of Louisiana currently expects a Rolls Royce Education on a Toyota Corolla Budget.” Several survey respondents and interviewees across parishes expressed dissatisfaction with having similar state requirements for all publicly funded sites yet having

unequal access to funding and support. For example, in response to open-ended survey prompts, site leaders noted:

I do NOT think that daycare and public schools should be created equal. Public schools have more money and resources available and have college graduates as the lead teacher and most have an aide present at all times.

I just feel as if we have been ask [sic] to do something and thrown into something without the means to do it. Headstart [sic] and school always seems to get grants to pay for training, supplies, etc., but us here in childcare are expected to do the same but can't get the same resources. If we are all coming together then my teachers should get as much resources as theirs and an aid like theirs and be just as important as they are.

Finally, while funding mechanisms such as CCAP and School Readiness Tax Credits are of some help to families and centers, challenges remain. Respondents described difficulties explaining to families that CCAP does not always cover all ECE fees and that the families have to pay for what CCAP does not cover. One lead agency representative described how “There was so much push back from the centers about the CCAP funding and how they're not paying what they're supposed to.” A colleague agreed, adding “And then the parents are supposed to make up the difference. But parents don't have any money and so the centers end up eating a bit.” Moreover, while School Readiness tax credits were appreciated, respondents suggested that those credits were not sufficient to fully support costs for high-quality centers, including adequate wages for their staff. More specific policies would be needed to raise Type III center funding to support the quality changes required by state mandates.

## Conclusions and Implications

This report examined two key questions:

- How are Louisiana’s key actions for ECE being perceived and acted on by ECE community network lead agencies; site leaders, such as center directors and principals; and site teaching staff?
- What implementation challenges have emerged?

We examined on-the-ground responses to six key state strategies intended to support ECE in four case study sites and a survey of site leaders of publicly funded ECE centers. In this section, we summarize the key findings and then consider the implications for state policies in Louisiana and across the United States.

### Key Findings

**The majority of Louisiana ECE site leaders and teachers were aware of the major reforms the state has undertaken since 2012 to create a unified ECE system, and most voiced support for the broad goals to increase quality and accountability for publicly funded providers.** Given the major scale and relatively fast pace of reform efforts, we were unsure how much stakeholders knew about and supported those efforts. According to survey data, the goals of the rating system were supported by more than four-fifths of ECE site leaders, and case study interviews supported this finding. As might be expected, at least some stakeholders disagreed that the rating system, based on CLASS observations, was a reasonable quality measure, stating that it did not capture all elements of site quality. Similarly, most survey respondents and interviewees in Type III centers generally agreed that the Ancillary Certificate requirement for lead teachers will improve teaching quality across all publicly funded classrooms, and the majority indicated that their sites were on track to meet the requirement for their teachers. But a minority disagreed with this requirement and commented that it would be a struggle to raise the bar for the training of all existing lead teachers, given such factors as teacher age, time and cost of training, and

lack of funding to pay teachers higher wages once certified. In addition, the state’s curriculum recommendations and incentives appeared to increase Tier 1 curriculum adoption for many Type III centers, and the Child Care Curriculum Initiative incentive has helped support curriculum purchases.

**Some ECE stakeholders were concerned that the supports and resources provided for reform efforts were not commensurate with the comprehensive scale of the reform in actual practice.** Stakeholders expressed concern about the ability to get all lead teachers trained as required, the increase in administration time associated with the network lead agency role, assisting families with CCAP enrollment, and participating in coordinated enrollment efforts. This lack of capacity could affect successful implementation of the requirements as intended by the state. A general impression we heard from case study respondents and survey respondents was that if sites or lead agencies lacked sufficient capacity before the reforms began, the state funding or incentives were not sufficient to cover all the major changes in processes and training required. Some perceived having uniform expectations for all centers as unfair, given widely varying resources and staffing configurations (e.g., presence of an aide). The expectations might be especially difficult for Type III centers to successfully meet.

**Several new requirements presented particular implementation challenges for a minority of ECE providers, including the CLASS observation process, Ancillary Certificate, and high-quality curriculum adoption.** Some specific implementation challenges may undermine the general support for ECE efforts. CLASS observations, as currently structured, were not fully supported by all providers. Over one-third of survey respondents indicated they faced logistical challenges with the CLASS observation process. Survey respondents and interviewees most commonly noted concerns related to the timing and number of observations, which teachers were observed, the discrepancy in scores between observers, and the lack of detailed feedback about scores. These challenges could amplify in the 2019–2020 school year when—for the first time—infant classrooms will be observed and factored into the site ratings (LDOE, 2018a). About one-quarter

of site leaders at sites currently rated Proficient who responded to our survey also indicated that moving up to the Excellent level would be difficult. A rating policy change effective in the 2019 Performance Profile release will introduce a fifth rating level, “High Proficient,” between Proficient and Excellent levels (LDOE, 2018a), which may enable more sites to demonstrate quality improvements even though they cannot attain the top rating.

Another key implementation challenge faced by Type III sites was the ability of lead teachers to earn the Ancillary Certificate. Most Type III site leaders taking our survey believed their lead teachers either met or were on track to meet the Ancillary Certificate requirement by June 2019, but a minority of site leaders did not expect all their teachers to meet the requirement in time. These sites will face tough decisions about whether to maintain their Type III status (i.e., replace teachers) and receive public funds for CCAP children and financial incentives tied to the rating system or change status if teacher requirements are judged as unattainable or too burdensome. Fewer centers with Type III status will result in a decrease in available CCAP spaces, unless other Type III centers can accept more CCAP children.

Finally, improvements can be made in the regular use of Tier 1 curricula and curriculum-aligned professional development opportunities, especially among Type III providers. A minority of Type III providers noted difficulty associated with the purchasing of Tier 1 curricula, as they had to pay upfront and wait for reimbursement.

**Type III centers faced challenges that endanger their ability to serve low-income children receiving public subsidies.** The Ancillary Certificate requirement and the CCAP waitlist only affected Type III centers, and both created challenges for maintaining staff requirements and program funding. Type III centers are more likely to serve infants and toddlers, so state requirements that may influence their ability

to maintain Type III status can potentially limit the number of infants and toddlers with CCAP subsidies who can be served in these settings. In addition, Type III center teachers were less likely to receive professional development aligned with state reforms than teachers at other types of centers, which may limit their capacity to engage in the substantial demands of state reforms.

**Some communication links appeared stronger than others, and ECE stakeholders had creative ways to overcome challenges.** Communications from the state were generally reaching network lead agencies and many sites. Our above findings regarding the awareness and support for the state’s comprehensive reform efforts provide further confirmation that state communications are reaching key stakeholders. Network lead agency representatives had positive perceptions of state communication, and some noted that LDOE staff were responsive to questions. Lead agencies effectively passed information from the state to their sites, but could still improve communication efforts, particularly to Type III centers. While many site leader respondents praised email communication and the ECE newsletters they received as helpful supports, lead agency representatives reported that a significant number of ECE staff did not check email frequently enough for it to be an effective means of communication. To overcome this obstacle, network leaders have adopted other means of communication, including visiting the centers for in-person outreach. Communication with families presented a similar challenge, and ECE network lead agencies and providers turned to various forms of outreach, including holding open houses and advertising in newspapers, on television, and on the radio. Stakeholders also felt that state-level ECE communication to parents could improve, to better convey the importance of high-quality ECE to child development and family eligibility for different funding sources.

## Implications

These findings have implications for Louisiana as these state-wide reforms mature, and they have implications for other states seeking to effect state-wide policy change using similar levers. In particular:

**Support for Louisiana’s large-scale reforms to unify the ECE system for publicly funded centers suggests that the state’s larger role in ECE is welcomed and a step in the right direction.** Louisiana’s ambitious efforts to unify and strengthen their ECE system include a new ECE center rating system, additional teacher preparation requirements, moves to improve the quality of curriculum and assessments, and increases in funding supports for low-income families. It was unknown whether ECE stakeholders would be in favor of these shifts. However, the site leaders we surveyed and most of the ECE stakeholders with whom we spoke—including network lead agency representatives, site leaders directing centers, and site teaching staff—supported the overarching aims of Louisiana’s ECE reforms to date. The general support for the state’s growing role in ECE suggests that Louisiana’s work to define ECE quality is a step in the right direction, and that the state is applying useful policy levers—including communication mechanisms—to help create a common understanding of ECE quality expectations. That said, there remain several challenges with the implementation of reform efforts. With some changes to implementation and continued systems modifications, Louisiana may be able to provide more support to providers serving diverse groups of children, especially younger age groups, to ensure that more high-quality seats are available for low-income families. The current evidence thus suggests that these reforms aimed at improving ECE quality have stakeholder support, increasing the potential to build on the work that has

already been done as the state moves forward with ECE reforms.

**Modifications to the CLASS observation process could make it less burdensome and more meaningful to providers.** To increase meaningful feedback, the state could reassess the timing of observations to respond to provider concerns about observations taking place too early in the year. Further, observers could be asked to provide clearer notes and more specific feedback to sites about observation scores and how to improve, and to explain any discrepancies between raters. Although some of the Picard observation notes are posted online for site staff to see, not all dimension scoring notes are available, and some staff may be unaware of this online feedback, especially teaching staff. Modifications in these areas could help sites improve quality and engender greater trust and buy-in to the rating system. Attention to the CLASS observation process and potential modifications to that process are particularly important as the rating system expands to include infant classrooms. In addition, LDOE could consider alternative means to assess special education classrooms, such as a younger-age CLASS assessment, as appropriate, or a different tool that might better assess special populations. These modifications to the CLASS processes could provide more meaningful feedback about classroom quality and areas for improvement. However, Louisiana and other states might reconsider whether reliance on a single measure for a rating system is sufficient to achieve quality associated with improved child outcomes.

**Modifications to the funding mechanisms, as well as the level of funding for reform efforts, could better support implementation.** For instance, some Type III centers participating in the Child Care Curriculum Initiative found it difficult to front the

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Attention to the CLASS observation process and potential modifications to that process are particularly important as the rating system expands to include infant classrooms.

cost of curricula and wait to be reimbursed later, and even decided to buy fewer sets of curricula as a result. The state might consider changing the reimbursement mechanism, such as requiring centers to pay a lower percentage of the curriculum cost up front and speeding up the reimbursement process.

Reimbursement mechanisms in general may place an undue burden on low-resourced providers if initial outlays are large and reimbursement takes a while to complete. States that reduce the burden on providers might be more likely to see an uptake in incentives aimed at quality improvement. Additionally, tax credits—a popular state incentive viewed as an income support—might be a mechanism that could be used to further supplement wages in Type III centers to help prevent certified staff from leaving for higher-paying positions. Consideration should also be given to the variation in implementation challenges across ECE networks of different sizes. Some networks seemed to have greater capacity than others to implement reforms such as CLASS observations and coordinated enrollment. Some networks may require more support and capacity-building to successfully work with all centers.

In general, Louisiana and other states should be realistic about the resources needed to carry out reforms as intended; otherwise, they may face a host of problems associated with unfunded mandates. Furthermore, one size does not fit all: Enforcing the same requirements for centers that have different funding levels, supports, and staffing levels may not be sustainable in the long run. It also raises a question of equity across providers that must strive for and be held accountable for quality but have unequal starting points.

**Type III centers are experiencing reforms differently in several key ways, and continued state efforts are needed to ensure they receive the supports and resources they need to implement required changes and make expected quality improvements.** If one quality improvement goal is for coordinated professional development to support implementation of high-quality curricula and GOLD assessments and to understand and meet CLASS standards, then a focus on making sure that Type III centers get the same level of professional development as non-Type III centers would improve equity and chances of overall quality improvement. Professional development in the form of coaching, for both teachers and directors, was perceived positively and may be a way to provide additional support to Type III centers. The state might consider subsidizing attendance at Teacher Leader Summits through travel stipends or substitute teacher pay. LDOE officials told us that beginning in 2019 the summit will charge a registration fee, and LDOE plans to offer Type III center staff scholarships to attend. Additionally, network lead agencies may use their funds to support travel to the summit and can be encouraged to do so for more staff. As the system matures, the state should gather more information about the quality and dosage of professional development for these centers to understand how different providers are benefiting or where additional investments might be targeted.

Moreover, in the push to increase training for all lead teachers, which is widely supported, the state might consider additional wage supports to prevent turnover of teachers—and particularly those who obtain their Ancillary Certificate but do not see a wage increase. The state might also consider further supports to facilitate getting all teachers to attain the Ancillary Certificate, especially in areas that may

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Making sure that Type III centers get the same level of professional development as non-Type III centers would improve equity and chances of overall quality improvement.

experience shortages of trained teachers for Type III centers. States considering similar teaching requirement changes can learn from Louisiana's experiences about where challenges may lie.

**Louisiana should expand communication efforts to families to convey why ECE is important for children, what quality means in the rating system, and how to access different funding sources.**

The state has a key role alongside network lead agencies to help continue educating families about the meaning of ratings and how to find them. LDOE provides resources to help facilitate conversations between sites and families; for example, the state provides a video aimed at families to explain how the performance profiles are created. However, sites and lead agencies might not be making full use of existing state resources. The state can also help with reaching families about their enrollment options and ECE funding eligibility to support the work of communities' coordinated enrollment. These messages coming from multiple levels, including the state, will help provide consistent messaging to families in support of local efforts. Louisiana could do as network lead agencies have done and expand the pathways of communication LDOE uses to include TV, radio, and print advertising, and also consider online advertising. LDOE has also created "guidebooks" to support other reform areas, including a guidebook for early childhood community network lead agencies (LDOE,

2016b). It could consider developing a guidebook specifically for Louisiana families to guide them through the process of choosing and enrolling in an early childhood center.

**States should consider a trial period for any new enrollment processes and collecting data to understand whether those processes are supporting low-income families to enroll in ECE.** In Louisiana, further work is needed to effectively run coordinated enrollment and serve all sites and families equally. In particular, the state needs to articulate to networks and providers how the system should operate, given that families enroll their children year-round, not just during the specified coordinated application and enrollment periods. In larger networks with more center choice and competition for spaces, it might be worthwhile to create a formal enrollment system, perhaps with an online platform; but in smaller networks, resources might be better spent on increasing outreach to families in general to provide them with more information on center options and funding sources. While Louisiana's vision for coordinated enrollment could lead to greater access and equity in ECE, other states looking to implement a similar system may want to consider a trial period in a small number of communities to assess effects on family selection and enrollment before instituting a state-wide coordinated enrollment system.

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## **About This Report**

This report is part of a four-part series on how policy actions intended to support students from birth through graduation from high school in the state of Louisiana are being implemented by educators and the organizations within which they work, and how those policy actions are related to successful student outcomes. Each of the four reports focuses on a different topic that has been the focus of Louisiana's education policy reforms: early childhood education, K–12 academics, teacher preparation, and graduation pathways. The report series follows up on *Raising the Bar: Louisiana's Strategies for Improving Student Outcomes* (Kaufman et al., 2018), which provided an in-depth description of the key actions that the state has been taking in each of these four areas to support and improve outcomes for all students in Louisiana. Taken together, these reports provide an overview of how an ambitious set of interconnected state policies, introduced in 2012, are making their mark on teaching and learning in early childhood centers, schools, and teacher preparation institutions across the state.

This report focuses on early childhood education (ECE). It specifically examines the implementation of key state actions—described in Kaufman et al. (2018)—intended to support and improve ECE and what implementation challenges have emerged. Findings suggest broad awareness and support of the state's new requirements intended to increase quality and accountability for publicly funded providers of ECE, as well as strong communication between the state and ECE stakeholders. However, our interviews and surveys with ECE stakeholders revealed some implementation challenges, including challenges particularly affecting Type III ECE centers, which are the centers that serve low-income children receiving public subsidies.

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