



October 15, 2011

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius:

Minnesota's best hope for the future rests on the promises we make to our children today. We are proud to submit a bold Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application that represents our state's strong commitment to ensuring equitable opportunities for high quality early learning for every child.

For decades Minnesota has been an education leader. Sustaining our future competitive edge will rely on investments we make in early learning now, especially for those children who have been historically underserved. Minnesota's Race to the Top application embodies our state's collective sense of urgency to provide expanded opportunities for high quality early learning experiences that will improve outcomes for children, especially those with the highest needs.

Our path forward does not stop today. In the months leading up to this application, Governor Dayton demonstrated his unwavering commitment to align public and private efforts to close achievement gaps and opportunity gaps. He created a Children's Cabinet comprised of Commissioner of Health Ed Ehlinger, Commissioner of Human Services Lucinda Jesson and myself, charged with coordinating state agency work that impacts Minnesota children. Simultaneously, he appointed 22 citizens and early childhood advocates to the Early Learning Council, responsible for advising the Governor, the Children's Cabinet and the Legislature on strategies for increasing access to high quality state and federal early childhood care and preschool educational programs. Additionally, the Minnesota Department of Education recently opened a new Office of Early Learning to provide better support, coordination and direction to the educators and child care providers vital to the lives of our children.

Minnesotans are known for their common sense approach to problem solving, for working together to get things done and for emerging from adversity to shape a stronger future for all who call the North Star State home. The vision put forth in this document reflects the input of

thousands of passionate stakeholders who helped forge a clear path to accelerate our efforts, measure our progress and share proven best practices that will improve outcomes by providing more children with access to high quality early learning opportunities.

We know - and research has proven - that dollar for dollar, early childhood investments give us the greatest return on investment. Beyond the valuable economic returns, access to high quality early care and education opens the door to the possibility that every child in Minnesota, regardless of geography, race or economic circumstance, can reach their highest potential. That vision - for our children, our schools and our state - is one we can all stand proudly behind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Cassellius". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner

**Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge
Application for Initial Funding
CFDA Number: 84.412**



U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202
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**APPLICATION FOR INITIAL FUNDING UNDER
RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE**

Note to Reviewers: Extraneous text was removed from the application file for the ease of the reader.

Table of Contents

IV. APPLICATION ASSURANCES AND CERTIFICATIONS	3
V. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS	6
VI. SELECTION CRITERIA	8
VII. COMPETITION PRIORITIES	216
VIII. BUDGET	236
XVII. APPENDIX TABLE OF CONTENTS	277
REFERENCES	281