

**Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge
Summary of Minnesota's Application
October 19, 2011**

Overview

Minnesota has applied for a federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. The RTT-ELC program is designed to help highly committed states provide more children with high needs, including children in poverty, from birth to age five from low-income families with access to high-quality early learning and development programs.

Through RTT-ELC, the federal government will award a total of \$500 million to four to six states which demonstrate a significant commitment to dramatically improving the quality of early learning and development programs serving high-need children. Minnesota is eligible for up to \$50 million and is among the states that are competitive to be selected as a RTT-ELC recipient. Final guidelines were released August 23; grants are due October 19; awards announced in December; funds obligated by December 31; and the grant period is January 1, 2012 - December 31, 2015.

Plan Development Process

The development of the plan was a collaborative effort between the Minnesota Departments of Education, Human Services and Health and supported by a team of knowledgeable and passionate experts in early learning and development.

- The process was led by Commissioner Cassellius and the Minnesota Children's Cabinet.
- MDE (Office of Early Learning Director and Early Learning Council Chair) led content development with significant input from the MDH and DHS. Work included about 50 different state agency staff.
- Hennepin County lent a senior staff person
- The national Build Initiative provided technical support & external reviewers.

The group solicited feedback from early childhood stakeholders across the state via a website (unitedfrontmn.org) and through in-person and virtual learning sessions on September 9. This feedback was used to help drive decisions and shape the final plan.

According to the RTT-ELC Guidelines, Minnesota's plan was developed to:

- Be ambitious and achievable
- Focus on system building, aligning, coordinating,
- Be sustainable; not supplant existing funds or activities
- Highlight the absolute priority of improving school readiness for children with high needs

Minnesota's application prioritized/focused on elements including:

- Functional, accountable, efficient and aligned state systems
- Evidence-based activities
- Building infrastructure and investing in human capital
- Activities that are sustainable; things we only have to do once
- Activities that build on best practices and braid existing programs and functions for local needs
- Immediate, strategic investments that increase the quality of children's early experiences

The RTT-ELC grant will focus investment in Minnesota's:

- Accountability and decision-making structure by improved governance, assessment & data system
- Great Workforce by supporting professional/career development of early childhood professionals
- High Quality Accountable Programs by using Parent Aware, scholarships, & Title I PreK match
- Local, flexible, and accountable best practices by targeting four communities that have both persistent high rates of early childhood poverty and significant community infrastructure on which to build: White Earth, Itasca County, St. Paul's Promise Neighborhood, Minneapolis' Northside Achievement Zone

Content of our Race to Top Request and Scoring (total of 300 points)

(A) Successful state system (65 points)

Show Minnesota's demonstrated past commitment to early childhood, articulate state's rationale for early learning reform agenda, define governance, and describe appropriate budget.

(B) High-quality, accountable programs (85 points)

Continue and expand Parent Aware, our voluntary Tiered Quality Rating System by supporting gradual expansion of licensed child care centers & licensed family child care through 2015 and provide accelerated ratings for Head Start, public school-based pre-kindergarten, and accredited child care programs to ensure rapid penetration statewide.

Increase access to quality in four target communities: launch School Readiness Scholarships (\$4000 per year per eligible child) and eligible for 1:1 matching grants for using Title I funding to support PreK programs.

Include all types of early learning programs in Parent Aware by creating a network for new American immigrants to learn about becoming a licensed child care provider, assisting family friend and neighbor caregivers who receive Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) in improving their quality

(C) Promoting early learning and development outcomes for children (60 points)

Improve usage and cycle review of the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress by teachers and providers in all Early Learning and Development (ELD) programs.

Improve delivery of developmental screening, by implementing online instead of paper versions.

Improve the ability of ELD programs and Early Childhood Educators to choose, use, and interpret assessment data.

Implement a public, system-wide School Readiness Report Card with indicators of how our system is doing in partnership with Wilder Research.

(D) A great early childhood education workforce (40 points)

Establish the Core Competencies as the shared framework for professional development in Minnesota and align pre-service and in-service instruction on the same goals.

Increase the number and percentage of Early Childhood Educators who advance on Career Lattice.

Enable decision-makers to track progress in increasing the education of all Early Childhood Educators.

(E) Measuring outcomes and progress (50 points)

Maintain the School Readiness/Kindergarten Entry Study snapshot to inform policy and system decisions and link existing data to Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System.

Improve tools for and use of Kindergarten Entry Assessment to inform schools being ready for kids, elementary instruction and curriculum.

Create a linkable Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) and analytic tools to synthesize cross-agency data for early childhood research and evaluation to provide timely and relevant information.

Expand and enhance Minnesota's current ELD-related data collection.