

News Release

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OBAMA ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES \$500 MILLION FOR RACE TO THE TOP-EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE

New State Competition to Establish and Expand High Quality Early Learning Programs

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius today announced a new \$500 million state-level grant competition, the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. Joining Duncan and Sebelius at the announcement were business, law enforcement and military leaders who have advocated for increased investments in early learning to reduce crime, strengthen national security, and boost U.S. competitiveness.

"For kids, high quality early learning programs mean they will enter school better prepared with a greater chance of finishing high school and college," said Vice President Joe Biden, Chairman of the Administration's Middle Class Task Force. "Expanding access to such early education and child care programs will also make it easier for working parents to hold down a job – a key priority of the Middle Class Task Force – giving them peace of mind that their children are in a high quality learning environment while they are at work."

"To win the future, our children need a strong start," said Secretary Duncan. "The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge encourages states to develop bold and comprehensive plans for raising the quality of early learning programs across America."

"This Challenge represents the Obama Administration's commitment to helping vulnerable children and families reach their full potential," said Secretary Sebelius. "Our collective health and financial security as a nation will depend on high quality investments during the critical early years of a child's life."

The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development. Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius also challenged the broader innovation community – leading researchers, high-tech entrepreneurs, foundations, non-profits and others – to engage with the early learning community and to close the school readiness gap.

States applying for challenge grants will be encouraged to increase access to quality early learning programs for low income and disadvantaged children, design integrated and transparent systems that align their early care and education programs, bolster training and support for the early learning workforce, create robust evaluation systems to document and share effective practices and successful programs, and help parents make informed decisions about care for their children.

Research shows that high-quality early learning programs lead to long-lasting positive outcomes for children, including increased rates of high school graduation, college attendance and college completion. Yet, just 40 percent of 4-year olds in America are currently enrolled in preschool programs. The most recent report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) indicates that, for the first time in a decade, states are reducing some of their key investments in early learning.

The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants will encourage states to make the best possible use of current federal and state investments in child care and early learning. The Obama Administration has sought and secured increased investments in Head Start and child care so that more families have access to quality, affordable care, while also pursuing important reforms such as

requiring Head Start grantees to compete for continued funding. The administration has also steered resources towards evidence-based, cost-effective home visiting programs.

In his remarks today, Duncan also thanked Congress for supporting Race to the Top saying, "We are deeply grateful to Congress for supporting these programs. Congress understands the value of investing in education reform, particularly early learning, even in these economic times."

The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will be administered jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. Starting today, the public may provide input, including data and relevant research, by visiting <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2011/05/watch-live-duncan-and-sebelius-make-major-announcement-about-race-to-the-top-and-early-learning/>.

Guidance, eligibility, range of awards and number of grants will be announced in coming weeks. The application will be released later this summer with grants awarded to states no later than December 31, 2011.