

## The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge: Building Up Quality Early Childhood Education in America, Step by Step

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The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) is a cornerstone of the Obama Administration's vision for early childhood learning. This initiative, designed to spur innovation in building early childhood systems, will be critical to the implementation of a bold new early care and education framework aimed at improving the quality of- and increasing access to high quality early childhood education for children birth to five, as announced by the President earlier this month in his State of the Union address.

In the first year of the RTT-ELC competition, 35 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico submitted ambitious plans to improve the system of early care and education in their states in order to prepare more children for kindergarten. Of these, nine states received funding (CA, DE, MA, MD, MN, NC, OH, RI, and WA). In 2012, the Administration announced an additional investment to fund five more states (CO, IL, NM, OR, and WI). Now that two rounds of RTT-ELC funding have occurred, it is time to see where states stand and what can be expected in the months ahead.

Since being funded one year ago, States have been laying the groundwork and making progress toward various early learning priorities including,

- developing state systems that support an ambitious early learning and reform agenda;
- building high-quality, accountable programs that align and raise standards for existing early learning programs and provide information to parents about the quality of programs;
- promoting early learning and development outcomes for children, measured by comprehensive assessment systems;
- building a high quality early childhood education workforce; and
- measuring outcomes and progress, including the development of tools like comprehensive data systems and kindergarten entry assessments.

During their first year, Phase 1 states have taken important steps forward on these goals, drawing on innovative and creative ideas. They have developed detailed scopes of work identifying how each of their projects will advance throughout the four years of the grant, hired needed staff, obtained legislative support where needed, and built more effective relationships and practices among their participating state agencies. Phase 2 grantees received their awards on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 and have begun to develop their own detailed scopes of work. All 14 grantees will come together in April 2013 to share progress and lessons learned.

Later this month, the detailed scopes of work developed by each of the nine Phase 1 RTT-ELC grantees will be publicly available. By April, documents summarizing each grantee's progress during year 1 will also be publicly available. These documents and all future updates will be accessible via the Departments of Health & Human Services and Education web sites:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/eecd>

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/awards.html>

Excitement continues to grow as Phase One grantees race into the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Early Learning Challenge and Phase Two grantees charge out from the starting line. As more states begin working together with one another we anticipate collaborative results from their sharing of resources and innovative ideas. Ultimately, through encouraging all states to “race to the top”, children around the country will benefit from higher quality standards and increased access to programs that will help prepare them for- and excel in school and life.

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