

Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge is part of the President's Commitment to Early Childhood Education

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No one can doubt that high quality early childhood education is part of the Obama Administration's comprehensive learning agenda. There is much discussion and enthusiasm in communities and states around the President's Birth to Five Initiative that builds the country's early learning system so that every child in every community is ready for school and a better life. Never before has early childhood education realized this national level of support, support that recognizes that young children's success is bi-partisan.

President Obama's commitment to early childhood education is not new. It began with support to build an infrastructure for early childhood systems with support for State Advisory Councils and the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTTT ELC). These were bold actions, ones clearly designed to improve early learning and development systems. These systems across the states raise the quality of early learning and development programs so that all children receive the support they need to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

At the end of April, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education (DOE) held its Annual RTTT ELG Grantee Meeting in Washington, DC. The two-day meeting offered opportunities to meet and work with other grantees from across the nation. It was also a chance to meet with Linda Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development, Deb Delisle, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, George Sheldon, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families, HHS and DOE Program Officers and reflect on the year passed and the work ahead.

The U.S. Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services spent a morning with the grantees on Day Two, sharing their perspectives on the President's Budget Initiatives, on the status of the Early Learning Challenge implementation and what we can all look forward to as the nation continues its commitment. This commitment by the White House, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education is focused on developing and sustaining strong, high quality early learning systems for our youngest citizens that will help to prepare them for school and life. Look for pictures of the state teams with Secretary Sebelius and Secretary Duncan on our site!

The nine states who just completed year one (DE, MN, MA, CA, RI, OH, WA, NC and MD) shared important highlights of their year with each other and the five new RTTT ELC states (OR, WI, IL, NV, and CO). Fully recognizing that this meeting was a unique opportunity to be able to talk candidly and strategically about this work, states talked about the challenges and successes in building the system across the country and spent time in problem-solving sessions on a myriad of topics.

We look forward to this rich work continuing in the future.