

Massachusetts Submits Race to The Top - Early Learning Challenge Proposal

Plan outlines comprehensive strategies to ensure all children have access to high quality early education services

BOSTON – Wednesday, October 19, 2011 - Massachusetts Education Secretary Paul Reville and Department of Early Education and Care Commissioner Sherri Killins today announced that the Commonwealth has submitted its application for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge, a \$500 million national competition sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to encourage states to develop bold and comprehensive plans for improving the quality of early learning programs across the nation.

The Commonwealth's proposal, *From Birth to School Readiness: Massachusetts Early Learning Plan, 2012-1015*, will advance the Patrick-Murray Administration's goal of ensuring that all children, particularly high-needs children, have access to quality pre-K education that will put them on an early path to success; and builds on the Administration's efforts to build a more aligned, statewide early learning and development system. Massachusetts is eligible for \$50 million in federal funding under the Early Learning Challenge.

"We are deeply committed to providing our pre-K children with access to the types of high-quality, educational and developmental experiences they will need to succeed in school and beyond," said Secretary Reville. "Our application lays out some exciting new strategies to achieve that goal, and continues our efforts to remain a national leader in student achievement and education reform."

The plan includes bold, comprehensive and creative strategies that will improve child outcomes in Massachusetts. Key strategies include:

- Enhance the quality of all early education programs in the state by securing universal participation in the Massachusetts tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), a definition of quality and standards designed to elevate the quality of care in state early care and education systems and to ensure growth as children develop.

- Implement early learning and development standards, including the creation of English Language Development standards for birth to age five.

- Create the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development Assessment System (MELD) from

birth to grade three by expanding screening for children and developing a common tool for a kindergarten entry assessment (in its first year, 17,500 kindergarten students or 26% of statewide enrollment could be assessed by an estimated 874 teachers or 29% of the kindergarten workforce)

Increase culturally and linguistically appropriate engagement with parents, families, and community members regarding literacy, universal child screening, and other statewide priorities.

Provide essential support to early educators and enhance their effectiveness (especially for educators whose home language is not English) by providing educational opportunities and targeted professional development opportunities.

Create greater alignment between early education and grades K-3 to promote healthy child development.

The Massachusetts Early Learning Plan supports the Administration's commitment to creating a comprehensive, child-centered education system extending from birth to post-secondary studies, one that is necessary for students to be ready for success in the 21st century. This proposal serves as a blueprint for the next phase of early learning and development efforts across the state.

"Massachusetts' Early Learning Plan is an aggressive action agenda that builds upon the strong foundation of our statewide early education and care system and will result in greater integration of state and local resources that supports the growth of high needs children starting at birth through age five," said Department of Early Education and Care Commissioner Sherri Killins. "By strengthening successful activities including workforce development and scaling up new promising initiatives such as the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development Assessment System, we will help to build a more prosperous future for the Commonwealth and our nation. Massachusetts has made significant progress so far, and the RTTT-ELC program will give us the chance to expand and accelerate our work."

State applications for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge were due today, and grant awardees are expected to be announced no later than December 31, 2011.