MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Preparing World-Class Students

Bernard J. Sadusky, Ed.D.
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD • MarylandPublicSchools.org

TO: Members of the Maryland State Board of Education

FROM: Bernard J. Sadusky, Ed.D.

DATE: January 24, 2012

SUBJECT: Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant Award

---

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this item is to provide an overview of the *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant* award.

BACKGROUND:

Maryland was notified on December 18 that it had received one of nine *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund Grant (RTTT-ELC)* awards for a total of $50 million over four years. The *Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge* program is co-managed by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Just as the first two rounds of Race to the Top were organized around four assurances, this competition is organized around five key areas of reform:

- Successful State Systems
- High-Quality, Accountable Programs
- Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children
- A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce
- Measuring Outcomes and Progress

In response to the application, which was issued formally on August 22, 2011, MSDE was designated as the lead agency to coordinate a multi-agency response to submit Maryland's State Plan. The current Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Care and Education functioned as the lead team for this project, establishing a core working group, and assigning staff at MSDE, namely the Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) and the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services (DSE/EIS), to coordinate all aspects of submitting a competitive State Plan.

Maryland developed an ambitious slate of projects in its RTTT-ELC application and submitted its State Plan on October 18, 2011 (ATTACHMENT). Since Maryland was awarded one of 12 grants in the second round of the Race to the Top competition, the Early Learning Challenge plan was designed to compliment and build on Maryland's existing efforts to strengthen and expand its early learning and development reforms. The overall approach mirrored the efforts for the K-12 reform wave by:

- Revising the current Early Learning Framework, including guidelines for children under four, and content standards for prekindergarten and kindergarten as an integral part of the Maryland State Prek-12 Curriculum based on the Common Core Standards;

- Refining the existing comprehensive set of assessments including a kindergarten entry assessment, professional development, and early intervention systems to assure that children are entering school ready to succeed;
- Implementing a tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System to improve the quality of all early care and education programs, including those serving high-need children, and erasing the skills gap prior to school entry;
- Developing a workforce prepared to engage young children and their families in promoting early learning and development that is competency-based and improves the knowledge, skills, credentials, and retention of early educators and administrators; and
- Building a statewide early childhood data system that supports the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the state's early childhood education system, including the tracking of progress and measuring outcomes to determine the extent to which children and families have benefited as a result of the reform efforts.

MSDE's development of its RTTT-ELC proposal was the result of the Division of Early Childhood Development's strong collaboration with scores of partners from state and local agencies, associations, K-12 stakeholders, foundations and businesses, as well as others interested in early childhood education.

The projects in the RTTT-ELC proposal combine with other work already taking place in the State. Maryland has a nationally recognized early childhood development program, providing unique early learning opportunities, strong oversight of child care, and other innovative programs designed to give the State's youngest learners a strong start in school. Over the past 10 years, Maryland has demonstrated that children starting their formal schooling have substantially improved their school readiness skills. In 2001, 49 percent of all children entering kindergarten were assessed as being ready for school, while 81 percent were kindergarten-ready in 2010.

ACTION:

For information only.

Attachment

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Preparing World-Class Students

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund

ATTACHMENT - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Maryland stands ready to make the maximum use of Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) funding to ensure that Maryland's young children are supported to overcome school readiness gaps. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) will be the fiscal agent and its Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) will take the lead in implementing the funds if awarded. The Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Care and Education will advise MSDE on the implementation of the RTT-ELC State Plan. The participating state agencies, including the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR), and the Governor's Office for Children (GOC), will support the State Plan through collaboration. Maryland is currently implementing a Race to the Top reform agenda for K-12 education. If awarded, Maryland would create a seamless Birth to Grade 12 reform agenda.

List of projects to enhance the early childhood infrastructure in Maryland

To fully achieve implementation of the State Plan, Maryland has designed innovative projects to build, support, and reinforce the early childhood infrastructure of a successful state system. The RTT-ELC State Plan will move the early childhood education in Maryland from a good system to a great system. The State Plan responded to the following scope of the RTT-ELC grant.

- High quality, accountable programs;
- Promoting early learning and development outcomes for children;
- A great early childhood education workforce; and
- Measuring outcomes and progress.

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund

Maryland's RTT-ELC State Plan proposes ten specific projects which address the scope of the grant. The projects are:

Project #1

Creating Local Early Childhood Councils

Project #2

Implementing a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System for all early learning and development programs, named Maryland EXCELS.

Project #3

Establishing an Early Childhood Breakthrough Center that provides quality capacity building for programs participating in Maryland EXCELS and expands models of excellence to attendance areas of Title 1 schools in school improvement.

Project #4

Revising the early learning standards to align with Common Core Standards.

Project #5

Professional Development to promote the use of the early learning standards by all early learning and development programs.

Project #6

Refining Maryland's comprehensive assessment system in early childhood, including the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) Kindergarten Assessment.

Project #7

Addressing the health and behavioral needs of children through a coherent set of early intervention and prevention programs.

Project #8

Creating a Coalition of Family Engagement and three statewide outreach efforts to promote family engagement in being their children's first teacher.

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund

Project #9

Establishing Leadership in Early Learning Academies for educators from school and early childhood programs to promote rigorous, yet developmentally appropriate, teaching practices for prekindergarten through grade 2.

Project #10

Enhancing the existing early childhood data system to link with the Maryland Longitudinal Data System.

Supplemental Information

PROJECT #1– LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS

Local Early Childhood Councils – Create 24 local early childhood councils to support the implementation of the State Advisory Council on Early Care and Education. Annie E. Casey Foundation will invest in and partner with Maryland to coordinate implementation over 12 months with the goal of developing local plans that assist in the implementation of Maryland's RTT-ELC state plan. The Casey Foundation will provide leadership facilitation to the councils.

PROJECT #2- MARYLAND EXCELS

Enhancement of Maryland EXCELS: Field test, maintain, enhance, and administer a full-scale implementation of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (of Maryland EXCELS) through a qualified vendor. Proposed funding is requested for:

- Field testing, a training institute, online professional development, program coordination, hosting of program data in a secure environment, and interface with the Maryland Longitudinal Data System. The Maryland EXCELS web-site was designed to operate as a fully online, web-based system. There are two sides to the web-based system: the public portal and the internal management system.

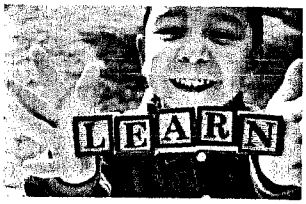
- Stipends for reviewers for the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), Program Administration Scales (PAS) for child care centers, and the Business Administration Scales (BAS) for family child care homes. Funding detail is included in Budget Narrative Part II.
- Program Coordinators to review documentation for early learning and development programs in order to meet Maryland EXCELS standards.

Promoting Maryland EXCELS: Support public and private early learning and development programs, including community programs to participate in Maryland EXCELS. Funding for a qualified vendor is requested to:

- Bring Maryland EXCELS to full scale following field tests and finalization of standards and processes;
- Develop program specialty endorsement standards in the areas of: Asthma and Allergy Awareness and Practices, Health and Wellness Initiatives, Inclusive Programming Practices, and Dual Language. Provide bonuses for providers meeting those standards and professional development for providers seeking to meet those standards;
- Ensure technical data integration amongst systems sharing child level data;
- Recruit programs for participation;
- Develop and conduct a family/public awareness marketing campaign;

Validating/Evaluation: To evaluate the effectiveness of the Maryland EXCELS model, Maryland proposes a study, to be conducted by a qualified vendor, which will focus on project implementation and:

- Validate whether the check levels of Maryland EXCELS differentiate levels of program quality, and



- Assess the relationship between the quality ratings and children's learning and school readiness.

PROJECT #3 – QUALITY CAPACITY BUILDING:

Early Childhood Breakthrough Center Approach: Implementation of quality capacity building support for early learning and development participating in Maryland EXCELS, with a special focus on those programs located in Title 1 attendance areas, and in particular, in the schools in school improvement, i.e., areas with the highest concentration of children with high needs.

Community Hubs: Establish two (2) Community Hubs to provide and coordinate existing services in the community for families with children, birth-5, in two highly under-resourced communities in Baltimore City through an Early Learning Intermediary Organization.

Preschool for All: Establish five (5) Preschool for All sites, where prekindergarten programs that are integrated in child care or Head Start settings, in Title 1 attendance areas. The site selection will be selected through competitive procurement process.

Judy Center Partnership Expansion: Establish two (2) Judy Center satellite sites at Title 1 schools in school improvement in Baltimore City and Prince George's County and expand comprehensive services for children, birth to six, from the existing Judy Center Partnership sites to other Title 1 schools.

Extended option - Individualized Family Service Plan project: Implement a coaching and mentoring program for early learning and development programs serving children from three to five years old who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or an

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) under the extended option provisions of IDEA.

PROJECT #4 – PROMOTING THE USE OF STATEWIDE, HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Guide to Early Childhood Pedagogy: Development of an instructional guide for early learning and development programs to support the use of early learning standards and assessment. Costs pertain to printing and web-based resources only.

Promoting Use of early learning standards

- Implement two (2) field tests of the Preschool STEM program to 150 classrooms (Maryland EXCELS participants).
- Expand of the language program, Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment Through Stories (VIOLETS), to 150 classrooms (Maryland EXCELS participants).

PROJECT #5 – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR DEVELOPING EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) professional development: Conduct on-going professional development for a total of 3,100 early education educators on early learning practices to support the early learning standards.

PROJECT #6– COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Formative assessment, birth to 72 months, Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA), and Professional Development to Support Developmental Screening: Revision of the existing formative assessments (36-72 months), development of new formative assessments (birth to 36 months), and the revision of the existing KEA to align with the State adopted Common Core Standards. Assessment program will feature a transmedia

technology platform for assessment administration, including linkage to reporting data base and to on-line resources for early learning. Also included will be the development of training modules and professional development for the administration of state-recommended developmental screening instruments. This project will be done in collaboration with the State of Ohio.

PROJECT #7 - CHILD DEVELOPMENT INNOVATIONS

Best Beginnings Developmental Screen: Field test and reporting on screening instrument for children, birth to three, developed by the University of Maryland.

Developmental Screenings: As included in Project #6 above, Maryland will introduce the use of four state-recommended valid developmental screening instruments for children birth-five years. Additionally, a qualified vendor will conduct training of pediatricians on state- recommended developmental screening instruments.

Maryland Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Pediatric Care: Build mental health capacity in primary care (pediatrics and family practice), including early childhood mental health detection and intervention. In the first year, 20 primary care providers will participate in a pilot in two counties, and gradual uptake over the life of the grant to expand participation statewide.

The Social and Emotional Foundation of Learning (SEFEL): Development and implementation of an on-line data collection and analysis system for SEFEL training participation and outcomes. The system is designed to interface with Maryland's Longitudinal Data System/Early Childhood Data Warehouse.

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund

PROJECT #8– FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

The Coalition for Family Engagement: Creation of a Coalition from all family engagement organizations to develop a Maryland-specific Family, Parent, and Community Engagement Framework and to implement strategies for evidence-based practices and training for all early learning and development programs and family engagement organizations.

Family Engagement in Libraries: Creation of Family Advisory Councils in all local libraries located in or near Title1 attendance areas, including the establishment of Family Information Centers and resource kits for families of young children.

Parent-Child Learning Parties:– Expand existing project to 25 percent of all early learning and development programs at Title 1 attendance areas. Learning Parties are interactive, hands-on, parent/child events that promote the development of school readiness skills of young children.

Expand Statewide the Reach Out and Read Project of the American Academy of Pediatrics: Primary care physicians/pediatricians will work with families around family literacy, child development, and school readiness through Reach out and Read. Pledges will be solicited from corporations and foundations by the State Advisory Council on Early Care and Education for books. Over the four years of the grant, it is estimated that over 46,100 children will receive books and their parents will receive direction from primary care physicians/pediatricians.

PROJECT #9 – LEADERSHIP IN EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY

Leadership Learning Academies: Academies would enable early childhood educators working with children ages 4 to 7 (prekindergarten, including Head Start and child care, through 2nd grade) in sixty (60) Title I schools with a significant high needs population, to

learn rigorous, yet developmentally appropriate instructional practices that support the Common Core Standards. The Academies will provide one-day sessions, with a half-day follow-up session each year, to be held throughout the state regionally in Title I schools with high need populations.

PROJECT #10 – EARLY LEARNING DATA SYSTEM

Professional Development: With funding from this grant, the Child Care Automated Tracking System (CCATS) portal will be expanded with services for early education educators. This will include professional development plans and applications for grants and incentives. Additionally, an online application for training approval will be provided to the early care and development community.