Massachusetts Awarded Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant

Massachusetts, one of nine states to win a federal Race to the Top/Early Learning Challenge grant, was awarded $50 million over four years to continue to build a statewide system of high-quality early education and care.

The Early Learning Challenge is a major federal grant program designed to close the achievement gap for high-needs children and to ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Funded by the U.S. Congress in the fiscal year 2011 budget, the $500 million competition rewards states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, clearer learning standards and meaningful workforce development. The program is jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Ensuring children have the start they need to succeed in school

Funds from the Early Learning Challenge grant will support the implementation of the Massachusetts Early Learning Plan, which consists of 20 projects that build on the current system. Below are highlights of the plan:

- **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).** Expand participation in QRIS with the goal of universal participation. Increase program supports, online training and technical assistance. Provide funds to help programs advance. Validate QRIS to ensure that “program quality matches assigned tiers and leads to improved child outcomes.”

- **Early learning standards.** Analyze the alignment of the state’s early learning standards with school readiness and assessment, including a kindergarten entry assessment. “Augment the standards to better accommodate high needs populations, beginning with English language learners.”

- **Assessment, birth to third grade.** Create and implement the Massachusetts Early Learning and Development Assessment System. Purchase screening toolkits and assessment tools for implementation, including kindergarten entry assessment tools. Provide resources to Family and Community Engagement grantees, licensed and license-exempt early education and care programs and public schools.

- **Family and community engagement.** Build a “state infrastructure to support interagency collaboration on programs and services for high needs children from birth to age 5.” Also, support early literacy, family literacy and financial literacy and other programs that “promote healthy living and child development.” Increase the accessibility of materials that convey early learning and developmental standards to diverse families through multilingual brochures and translation services. Establish partnerships with libraries and children’s museums “to align informal opportunities with state standards.”

- **Workforce training and development.** Invest in the state’s six regional Readiness Centers, charged with increasing instructional effectiveness, from early childhood programs to higher education. Create and implement an evidence-based mentoring and coaching program. Validate workforce core competencies in social and emotional development, literacy and numeracy. Study best practices that support young children’s social and emotional development. Support an institution of higher education to train early educators in an innovative program for early educators who are English language learners. Develop a post-master’s degree certificate in early education and policy leadership. Create an Early Educators Fellowship, “a leadership institute for public
elementary school principals and community-based providers that supports the alignment of early childhood education with K-3 education.”

- **Kindergarten entry assessment.** Develop a common metric for the assessment tools that will serve as the basis of a kindergarten entry assessment.

- **Early Childhood Information System.** Create the next phase of ECIS. Enhance connections and the exchange of information with the Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

- **Sustaining program effects in early elementary grades.** Support communities and public schools with early education and out-of-school-time partnerships and a birth-to-age-5 strategy.

- **Alignment, pre-kindergarten to third grade.** In partnership with WGBH, create an “online curriculum hub for early educators and a ‘School Readiness’ website for parents. Expand EEC’s Brain Building in Progress public awareness campaign.

  *Like the state’s first Race to the Top award, the ELC funds cannot be used to supplant funding for existing programs.*

**Broad-based support**
The Massachusetts application included 62 letters of support from, among others:

- Senate President Therese Murray
- House Speaker Robert DeLeo
- Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education
- Associated Industries of Massachusetts
- Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership
- Massachusetts Association for Early Education and Care
- Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children
- Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
- Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education
- Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
- Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Community Colleges

**Working together**
As part of its application, 12 Massachusetts departments and agencies — including the Executive Office of Education, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Department of Higher Education — signed memoranda of understanding committing them to help implement the Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grant. Also signing MOUs are the Department of Public Health, Department of Mental Health, Department of Housing and Community Development, Office for Refugees and Immigrants, Department of Children and Families, Department of Transitional Assistance, State Advisory Council, Head Start State Collaborative Office, and Children’s Trust Fund.

**Winning states**
The nine states awarded ELC grants are California ($52,572,935), Delaware ($49,878,774), Maryland ($49,999,143), Massachusetts ($50,000,000), Minnesota ($44,858,313), North Carolina ($69,991,121), Ohio ($69,993,362), Rhode Island ($50,000,000) and Washington ($60,000,000).

For more information, contact Titus DosRemedios, director of research and policy:

(617) 330-7387 or tdosremedios@strategiesforchildren.org