



Market Intelligence – Education News

Universal Pre-School Initiative Announced

A Major New U.S. Federal Program (“Early Learning Challenge” Grants) Envisions Holistic Approach to Pre-School Education while Stimulating Competition btw States

May 2011

Official U.S. Government Web Resources:

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2011/05/rtt-early-learning-challenge/>

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

BACKGROUND:

UNITED STATES: Campaigning for the presidency in 2008, Barack Obama pledged to help states implement taxpayer-funded universal preschool— “*preschool for all*”. The President's early education plan, for which he has advocated federal spending of up to \$10 billion annually, encourages the states to provide preschool for every child. As President, Obama reinforced his commitment to early education when he signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which provided \$5 billion in funding for early childhood programs. Furthermore, the President's “Early Learning Challenge” Grants program pledges additional support for early education initiatives, with the ultimate goal of supporting states' efforts to implement universal preschool for every 3 and 4 year old child in the country, regardless of family income.

CHINA: In 2010 *for the first time ever* the Chinese government issued a “National Education Reform Plan” which provided both the overall blueprint and detailed agenda for education in China over the next 10 years. Also in 2010 for the first time every the Chinese State Department set its own mandate for education in China. The Department acknowledged that “pre-school education is the weakest link in the Chinese education system because in the past not enough resources had provided but that in the future pre-school education would be mandated. It is in the self interest of every parent and also in the interest of the nation as a whole.” China has set 3 ambitious goals for its pre-school programs: (1) to use scientific methods to develop a holistic program that provides a basic foundation for learning and health and that reaches 100% of the age 6 group in 10 years (by 2020!) while also servicing segments of the 5-6 and 4-6 age groups; (2) to use the central government to provide coordinated leadership and integrate resources from the provinces, cities and towns; and (3) to develop a creative approach to advance pre-school education in poor (agricultural) regions. The specific strategies for helping the poor will include for example having the cities help their outlying rural regions. And in the important area of teacher training, China plans to build a network of 5-year vocational schools that prepare middle school graduates to specialize in pre-school education. In support of its overall pre-school program China has earmarked 40b RMB focusing on 11 poor provinces – 8 in the west and 3 in the northeast.

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DETAIL:

A “GAME CHANGING” EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM:

The Obama administration today announced that it plans to hand out \$500 million in state education grants aimed at helping young children. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced the “Early

Learning Challenge” Wednesday. It’s the latest incarnation of the administration’s Race to the Top competition, in which states compete for education money. Duncan called early learning a critical issue for the country. Sebelius said that the health and financial security of the U.S. will depend on investments made in the first years of a child’s life. She said that kids who fall behind by age 5 won’t be able to compete for future jobs. Sebelius says that the administration is taking a “holistic” approach, focusing on kids’ health as well as their education.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/government-offers-500-million-in-education-grants-to-push-states-to-improve-preschools/2011/05/25/AGx7PGBH_story.html

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\$500 million will fund the Early Learning Challenge competition. According to the department, this competition will reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with **better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development**. Starting today, the public can find out more about this competition, which also involves the Department of Health and Human Services, and give input on the Education Department's [website](#). The rules, eligibility, and size of the grants will be announced in the coming weeks. It's important to keep in mind that the original Race to the Top was \$4 billion, so even though \$500 million sounds like a lot, it's still a much smaller state competition. And already, HHS spends about \$12 billion a year on early childhood programs such as Head Start. Still, Duncan said today he wants this early ed competition to be a "game changer" just like Race to the Top was for more general education reform. Early education advocates who gathered at today's event literally cheered about the new money, which will help expand the quality of and access to early childhood programs in states, especially for at-risk children. Advocates continue to emphasize that research shows that quality early childhood programs can have significant effects in terms of lower crime, improved educational outcomes and other quality-of-life factors. The money will help ensure "that we expand the availability of this life-changing experience," said George Kaiser, founder of George Kaiser Family Foundation, who spoke at today's event.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/05/race_to_top_500m_for_early_ed.html

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Education Secretary [Arne Duncan](#) is expected to announce Wednesday morning the third round of Race to the Top, which will include new rewards for states that improve their pre-kindergarten education programs. [Mr. Duncan](#) will make the announcement at 10 a.m. at a press conference with Health and Human Services Secretary [Kathleen Sebelius](#). A joint press release from the Education and HHS departments says only that a “major announcement” regarding Race to the Top and “early learning” is forthcoming. But documents from the [National Governors Association](#) obtained by The Washington Times on Tuesday state that, in addition to the K-12 competitions held twice before, states can now also compete for grant money by strengthening efforts to educate 3- and 4-year-olds.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/may/24/feds-ready-3rd-round-of-race-to-top-for-schools/>

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A new \$500 million federal grant competition announced Wednesday aims to do away with an uncoordinated system of preschool programs that often leave the poorest children without options and allow bad schools to go unchecked. The [Obama](#) administration's Early Learning Challenge is the third round of its "Race to the Top" state competition, which doled out nearly \$4 billion in federal education money last year. The new competition is designed to encourage better coordination, clearer learning standards and increased access to early learning programs for low income children. "Our goal is to transform from a patchwork of disconnected programs often of uneven quality and uneven access into a coordinated one that truly and consistently prepares our nation's young people for success in school and life," said Education Secretary Arne [Duncan](#) in a call with reporters. "This is a game changer," he said.

<http://www.newsday.com/news/feds-offers-500m-in-state-grants-for-preschool-1.2899502>

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Tulsan George Kaiser, a major supporter of early childhood education, is scheduled to join key members of the Obama administration on Wednesday for an announcement at a U.S. Department of Education town hall meeting. The announcement, to be made by Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, is expected to involve early learning and Race to the Top, a national school reform effort by the administration that encouraged states to compete for billions of dollars. Duncan previously spoke of wanting to hold another round of the Race to the Top competition for funds. Instead of states competing against each other for extra money, the next round could focus on a competition between local school districts. In addition to Race to the Top, Duncan and Sebelius are expected to discuss early learning initiatives and the importance of their collaboration on early learning to improve the health, social, emotional and educational outcomes for children from birth to age 5. Their discussion also could cover an initiative known as the Early Learning Challenge Fund, which has been discussed as a way to advance a standards- and outcomes-driven framework to improve programs. In addition to Kaiser, founder of the George Kaiser Family Foundation and chairman of BOK Financial Corp. and GBK Corp., the two Cabinet members are expected to be joined at their town hall by retired Brig. Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams and Ralph Smith, executive vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=505&articleid=20110525_16_A11_CUTLIN969596

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WASHINGTON - Tulsan George Kaiser joined two key members of the Obama administration Wednesday to announce a new Race to the Top competition for early learning and suggested that Oklahoma's record in that area should give it a boost this time out. "In early learning, Oklahoma already has a national reputation," Kaiser said, citing the number of children in the state who already are participating in preschool programs. He also said the state has made significant strides since the earlier rounds of Race to the Top. In the new round announced by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, states will be asked to compete for \$500 million to fund reforms in early learning. Duncan said the bar again will be high, explaining that the competition will encourage states to develop bold plans. Although details of the competition have not been released, the announcement by Duncan and Sebelius indicated that those plans should transform early learning programs with better coordination, clearer learning standards and meaningful workforce development. They also stressed increasing access for low-income and disadvantaged children. Duncan said that access should be linked to quality programs that go beyond "glorified baby-sitting." He said the money will be awarded later this year. A spokesman for Oklahoma Superintendent Janet Barresi said she has not yet seen the requirements of the new competition. "She will be taking a close look at the details and requirements before making any recommendation," the spokesman, Damon Gardenhire, said.

Kaiser, a major supporter of early childhood education, is the founder of the George Kaiser Family Foundation and chairman of BOK Financial Corp. and GBK Corp. In remarks following those by Duncan and Sebelius, Kaiser spoke of the analytical tools he has used both in accumulating resources and his effort to distribute those in the most effective charitable purposes. "I concluded that early childhood education, especially for children from birth to 3, is both a profound moral obligation and the most effective way to reverse the cycle of poverty in America and unleash the talents of our people to preserve our international competitiveness," he told an audience made up of early learning advocates. In response to a question about parents' roles, he referred to the "nanny-state" concerns voiced in conservative states such as Oklahoma. Kaiser said many of the children who could benefit from early learning programs are already in day care, adding that parental skills remain an important component. Also Wednesday, Duncan announced a separate \$200 million competition for states that made the finals in the earlier round for Race to the Top but failed to win. Oklahoma just missed making the finals in the second round.

http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=505&articleid=20110526_16_A9_CUTLIN812912

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Oklahoman plays key role in announcement of new Race to the Top States will compete for a share of \$500 million in funding for early childhood education programs, the third of the Race to the Top competition that was announced Wednesday.

Tulsa philanthropist George Kaiser helped U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announce Wednesday that states will compete this summer for \$500 million in early childhood education grants. "Early childhood education, special for children ages birth to 3, is both a profound moral obligation and the most effective way to reverse the cycle of poverty in America," Kaiser said in a town-hall meeting in Washington, D.C., following Duncan's announcement. This is the third-round of Race to the Top education grants that will be awarded to a select number of states based on their plans to put the money to use for early childhood education. Oklahoma so far has missed out on the federal funding. "We want the early learning community in every state working together to develop plans that can help shape and drive the way America invests literally billions of dollars each to educate young children," Duncan said. "Our goal is to transform early learning programs and services from a patchwork of disconnected programs — often of uneven quality and uneven access — into a coordinated system that truly and consistently prepares children for success in school and beyond that for life." Oklahoma has long been considered a leader when it comes to early childhood education programs that provide public access to pre-kindergarten programs throughout the state. Kaiser, through the George Kaiser Family Foundation in Tulsa, has helped launch both private and public initiatives in early childhood education.

http://www.newsok.com/oklahoman-plays-key-role-in-announcement-of-new-race-to-the-top/article/3571279?custom_click=pod_headline_education

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In a media conference call today, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced a Race to the Top initiative aimed at preschool-age children. Duncan said the goal of the \$500 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge was to fund programs that show "courage, creativity, commitment and capacity." The intent is also to spread best practices in early childhood education, said Sebelius. "It is more than teaching them colors and letters," she said. "Children need social and emotional skills, and they need families engaged in their education. Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge takes a holistic approach to early learning, driving innovation and focusing on what it takes to put young kids on a path to learning opportunities and success." Both leaders talked about

the dividends from investing in early childhood. The only way to outperform the world, said Sebelius, is “to out educate them.” “We have to get out of the catch-up business, and the best way to do so is to level the playing field entering kindergarten,” said Duncan. “If we give many more children, particularly poor children, access to great childhood programs, we can dramatically change their life chances long term.” Georgia ought to be in a great position to win one of these grants given its early entry into universal pre-k. A RTT early learning grant would increase the hand of the federal government in Georgia education, but that hand would come clutching new dollars.

Here are some more details about the program: This Challenge represents the Obama Administration’s commitment to helping vulnerable children and families reach their full potential,” said Secretary Sebelius. “Our collective health and financial security as a nation will depend on high quality investments during the critical early years of a child’s life.” The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development. Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius also challenged the broader innovation community – leading researchers, high-tech entrepreneurs, foundations, non-profits and others – to engage with the early learning community and to close the school readiness gap. States applying for challenge grants will be encouraged to increase access to quality early learning programs for low income and disadvantaged children, design integrated and transparent systems that align their early care and education programs, bolster training and support for the early learning workforce, create robust evaluation systems to document and share effective practices and successful programs, and help parents make informed decisions about care for their children. Research shows that high-quality early learning programs lead to long-lasting positive outcomes for children, including increased rates of high school graduation, college attendance and college completion. **Yet, just 40 percent of 4-year olds in America are currently enrolled in preschool programs.** The most recent report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) indicates that, for the first time in a decade, states are reducing some of their key investments in early learning. The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants will encourage states to make the best possible use of current federal and state investments in child care and early learning. The Obama Administration has sought and secured increased investments in Head Start and child care so that more families have access to quality, affordable care, while also pursuing important reforms such as requiring Head Start grantees to compete for continued funding. The administration has also steered resources towards evidence-based, cost-effective home visiting programs.

<http://blogs.ajc.com/get-schooled-blog/2011/05/25/feds-announce-race-to-the-top-competition-for-early-learning-programs/>

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“Investing in early learning is one of the smartest things we can do as a nation,” said Secretary Arne Duncan earlier this morning at a town hall meeting with US Human and Health Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to announce a new \$500 million state-level Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. Secretary Sebelius explained that “the only way America can out-compete the rest of the world is if we out-educate the rest of the world ... And the only way we can do that is if every child gets a healthy start and a rich early learning experience.” The [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge](#) rewards states **that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination and assessment mechanisms, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development and family engagement initiatives.** Providing a strong educational foundation for our nation’s children doesn’t start on the first day of kindergarten. Research makes it clear that excellent early learning programs result in short- and long-term positive outcomes, including better high school graduation rates, higher college enrollment, and improved completion rates. Yet only 40 percent of 4-year olds are enrolled in preschool programs. The Obama administration has been committed to improving the quality of early learning programs since day one, and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge continues that commitment by moving the field and supporting breakthrough work that will change the quality of early learning programs across America. Vice President Biden [also noted](#) that these programs help not only kids but whole families. “Expanding access to such early education and child care programs will also make it easier for working parents to hold down a job – a key priority of the Middle Class Task Force –

giving them peace of mind that their children are in a high quality learning environment while they are at work.”

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/25/major-investment-helping-students-get-right-foot>

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A new state-level grant competition will direct \$500 million in federal funding to improve child care and early childhood learning as part of the Obama administration’s signature Race to the Top program. The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge encourages states to make the best possible use of current federal and state investments in early childhood learning by creating comprehensive plans to transform early learning centers with better coordination and clearer learning standards. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, whose departments will administer the competition jointly, challenged the broader innovation community—including leading researchers, high-tech entrepreneurs, foundations, nonprofit organizations, and others—to engage with the early childhood learning community to close the school readiness gap. States applying for challenge grants will be encouraged to increase access to high-quality early childhood learning programs for low-income and disadvantaged children, design integrated and transparent systems that align their early care and education programs, bolster training and support for the early learning workforce, create robust evaluation systems to document and share effective practices and successful programs, and help parents make informed decisions about care for their children. Race to the Top is President Obama’s signature education program, and the administration has made clear that it wishes to boost the quality of early childhood learning and health. Duncan and Sebelius pointed to research showing that high-quality early childhood learning programs lead to long-lasting positive outcomes for children, including increased rates of high school graduation, college attendance, and college completion. Just 40 percent of 4-year-olds in America are currently enrolled in preschool programs or early learning centers. The most recent report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) indicates that, for the first time in a decade, states are reducing some of their key investments in early childhood learning. “Investing in early learning is one of the best things we can do as a nation,” Duncan said, calling the funding a “game-changer” in advancing birth through third-grade learning.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2011/05/25/feds-announce-500m-for-early-learning-competition/>

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GOLDSBORO -- Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve, recently pointed to the benefits of early childhood education for individuals and to the economy as a whole. "The payoffs of early childhood programs can be especially high," he said. "For instance, preschool programs for disadvantaged children have been shown to increase high school graduation rates. Because high school graduates have higher earnings, pay more taxes and are less likely to use public health programs, investing in such programs can pay off even from the narrow perspective of state budgets; of course, the returns to the overall economy and to the individuals themselves are much greater." So what are our North Carolina legislators thinking when they cut the funding of vital preschool programs, Smart Start and More at Four, and reorganize them to disrupt continuity with our K-12 system? The key to our future work force is our investment in at-risk children birth to 5 years of age. There is data to show that North Carolina is failing to address the needs of preschool children and is therefore allowing one-third of our children to drop out of school and struggle to become productive responsible citizens. We cannot afford to allow one-third of our future work force to fail to become contributors to our economy. We are competing with the Chinese, who are pouring money into programs. China is investing in early brain and child development. If China develops one-tenth of its potential work force, it will surpass the United States in economic capacity. We cannot afford to cut our investment in our youngest children at this critical time. We need a "growth" strategy for our future, not a shortsighted "deficit" strategy. The statistics paint a depressing picture of our future work force. One in three 5-year-old children does not have age-appropriate language skills. One in three third-graders cannot read at grade level, putting

them at high risk to drop out of school. The best way to address these embarrassing statistics, and assure a healthier work force for our state, is to invest in at-risk preschool children.

In spite of our excellent Smart Start program in North Carolina, which has become a national model, we have never served more than 47 percent of preschool children identified to be at-risk for school failure. "More at Four" was designed to bridge the gap between birth-to-3 and kindergarten. It was appropriately assigned to the state Department of Public Instruction, to assure continuity from preschool to kindergarten. Our Early Intervention program has always moved at-risk children from the Department of Health and Human Services to Education after the third birthday. Moving More at Four away from Education makes little sense to professionals who work with at-risk children at the community level. As a pediatrician who cares for many at-risk children, I would hope our legislators could follow the advice of Bernanke and adopt a "growth" strategy that increases our investment in our youngest children. Our current preschool programs are super; they just are not funded well enough to provide the outcomes we need in the current global economy. We must do the right thing now for our youngest at-risk children and invest more, not less, in their future and our future.

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2011/05/21/1212759/early-childhood-programs-are-at.html>

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Discarded initiatives would have put Minnesota in running for federal early-ed funds

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan yesterday announced plans to spend the lion's share of a third round of Race to the Top education stimulus funding on early-childhood education. Duncan plans to use \$500 million of the \$700 million Congress appropriated last month to fund Early Learning Challenge grants to encourage states to create comprehensive, high-quality pre-K systems for disadvantaged kids. Just a few weeks ago, Minnesota could easily have positioned itself to win one of the competitive grants. Yet by the end of the Legislature's regular session Monday night the virtually revenue-free initiatives that would have put the state in the running had died quiet, ideologically motivated deaths. The new stimulus dollars will go to states that create coordinated systems aimed at increasing the number of disadvantaged kids enrolled in high-quality early-ed programs. To be eligible, states must set clear standards and meaningful programs for pre-K teacher development. At the start of the legislative session, Minnesota was poised to check every box on Duncan's list.

Bipartisan consortium sought expansion of ratings

For starters, after five years of research and a successful pilot, a high-profile, bipartisan consortium of policymakers and business leaders asked the Legislature to expand its quality early-ed ratings system statewide.

The brainchild of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF), the Parent Aware rating system would have identified high-quality early-ed programs, steered the fragile families that rely on public child-care subsidies toward them and rewarded providers that deliver top results. Persuaded by research showing that every dollar the state invests in top-notch early childhood education returns \$16 to the economy, MELF's private-sector boosters put up \$20 million to create ratings and study their impact. Among the findings: Test scores rose and mobility virtually disappeared among children enrolled in St. Paul programs that participated in the pilot phase of "Parent Aware."

Bill was revenue-neutral

Authored by Rep. Jennifer Loon, an Eden Prairie Republican, the bill to expand the ratings statewide was revenue-

neutral, meaning its implementation would not cost a cent, and it enjoyed the backing of Gov. Mark Dayton, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and pretty much everyone on the political continuum between them.

The bill died in a March dawn-hours vote at the hands of social conservatives who feared it would create a “nanny state” that would attempt to replace parents. “MELF has been recommending early education quality ratings and scholarships linked to high ratings, because we found in our pilots that those reforms actually work,” Executive Director Duane Benson said in response to Minn. Post’s inquiry yesterday. “They build early education quality and get young children ready for school. “We haven’t been focused on Race to the Top, and will leave those discussions to others,” he added. “But ratings and ratings-based scholarships are clearly the right thing to do for anyone who cares about getting more kids prepared for kindergarten.”

Second big initiative: consolidate programs

The other major initiative that would have put Minnesota squarely in the running was a proposal developed by pre-K policymakers to consolidate the state’s early ed-related programs under a new assistant commissioner of education. In part because it would streamline a hodge-podge of programs now housed in four state agencies, the move could have cost virtually nothing. The realignment was stripped from one of the two omnibus education bills Dayton vetoed Tuesday. Also gone from the final legislation were privately funded early-ed scholarships that would have helped Minnesota’s poorest families pay high-quality programs identified by the Parent Aware ratings.

Indeed, if there was one bet that seemed bankable at the start of the session, it was that 2011 would be the year the Legislature gave pre-K a place at the policy table. With support from both parties and several policy-advocacy groups with high-profile business and civic leaders on their boards, it seemed like the one arena that might be immune from politics. Watching the legislative agreement unravel was crushing, said Vallay Varro, executive director of one of the groups, MinnCAN. “Fifty years of research demonstrate that students from high-quality pre-K programs score significantly higher in reading and math, are less likely to drop out of school, repeat grades or need special education, and are more likely to enroll in college,” she said after the ratings were stricken from one bill. “We cannot continue to turn a blind eye towards quality early learning opportunities if we are serious about making sure every Minnesota child gets the kind of start they need to be successful in school and in life.”

A final, bitter irony: Minnesota won’t be eligible for any of the other \$200 million in third-round RTTT funds because it did not make the list of finalists for the first round and failed to apply for a second round.

2010 adjournment without action on reforms

Embroiled in a bitter stalemate between then-Gov. Tim Pawlenty, Capitol DFLers and the state’s largest teachers union, last year’s Legislature adjourned without acting on reforms that were required under RTTT, such as a new teacher-evaluation system, tenure reform, creating alternate paths for teacher licensure and placing top teachers in struggling schools. Alternative certification passed easily and early on in this year’s session, but the other items on that wish list are still AWOL. GOP legislative leaders grouped versions of many of the reforms that enjoyed bipartisan support at the session’s start with vouchers, dramatic aid shifts and cuts and other measures Dayton had vowed to veto. In a statement released yesterday, the governor said he had directed Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius to prepare a new RTTT application anyhow, seeking a pre-K grant. This time, he got the immediate support of Education Minnesota. “I encourage the Legislature to think about the future of Minnesota’s children – as well as the millions of

federal dollars that are at stake – as they consider their budget priorities and we work toward a compromise budget solution,” Dayton said.

http://www.minnpost.com/learningcurve/2011/05/26/28653/discarded_initiatives_would_have_put_minnesota_in_running_for_federal_early-ed_funds

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Early Education Programs to Compete for \$500M in Fed Grants

Education Secretary Arne Duncan & Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius make announcement

Preschools are now eligible to join the scramble for a piece of the multi-billion dollar [Race to the Top pie](#), according to a Wednesday White House announcement. The Obama administration plans to dole out \$500 million in state-level grants aimed at boosting the quality and availability of early learning programs. "For kids, high quality early learning programs mean they will enter school better prepared with a greater chance of finishing high school and college," said Vice President Joe Biden, Chairman of the Administration's Middle Class Task Force, in a release. "Expanding access to such early education and child care programs will also make it easier for working parents to hold down a job -- a key priority of the Middle Class Task Force -- giving them peace of mind that their children are in a high quality learning environment while they are at work." The Early Learning Challenge is the latest program of the Race to the Top school-improvement competition, which has led many states to change education laws and practices to reflect Department of Education prescriptions. Race to the Top has been controversial since its 2009 inception. Critics have alleged that the program sets unfair standards for teachers, gives incentives for more charter schools, and touches few minority students. The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will be administered jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in the Wednesday announcement that the health and financial security of the U.S. will depend on investments made in the first years of a child's life and that kids who fall behind by age 5 won't be able to compete for future jobs. Sebelius added that the administration is taking a "holistic" approach, focusing on kids' health as well as their education. Guidance, eligibility, range of awards and number of early learning grants will be announced in coming weeks. The application will be released later this summer with grants awarded to states no later than Dec. 31, 2011, according to the Department of Education's [website](#)

<http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/State-Early-Education-Programs-to-Compete-for-500M-in-Federal-Grants-122616654.html>

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RttT to Award \$500 Million to Boost Early Learning Programs

ED also reported that some states will be eligible for \$200 million in funds available this year through Race to the Top. A district-level RttT program is also in the works.

The Obama administration today revealed a new federal funding program designed to bolster early learning programs with \$500 million in federal Race to the Top grants. The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge will award funds to states that submit plans for overhauling their early learning systems with "better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development." Race to the Top is a federal program focused on driving changes in public schooling through competitive grants to states, with an eye toward reforming academic standards, investing in teachers

and education leadership, improving achievement in schools whose students have performed poorly on standardized tests, and developing data systems that follow students from "cradle to career." The program was launched as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 and initially funded to the tune of \$4.35 billion, distributed over two rounds of applications through 2010. Congress provided another \$700 million in fiscal year 2011 appropriations, from which \$500 million will go toward the new Early Learning Challenge. Unlike previous RttT programs, the Early Learning Challenge will be administered jointly by the United States Department of Education (ED) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). According to information released by ED and HHS, "States applying for challenge grants will be encouraged to increase access to quality early learning programs for low income and disadvantaged children, design integrated and transparent systems that align their early care and education programs, bolster training and support for the early learning workforce, create robust evaluation systems to document and share effective practices and successful programs, and help parents make informed decisions about care for their children."

<http://thejournal.com/articles/2011/05/25/rttt-to-award-500-million-to-boost-early-learning-programs.aspx>

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More DETAIL on CHINA:

A "FOUNDATION" for LEARNING:

The similarities between U.S and China preschool initiatives are more significant than the differences. Both programs aim for universal pre-school education. The major difference is that in China the government is focusing initially only on ages 6 and 5 only in terms of providing funding support and parents must use private schools and home schooling for the pre-school education of their younger children..

About GKE USA & Learning Bean China:

The GKE Universal Pre-School Global Learning Initiative

"One World, One Classroom"

<http://www.GKEFoundation.org/GKE%20PRESS%20RELEASE.pdf>

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