

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge

Improving learning for Rhode Island's youngest children

What is the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge?

In December 2011, Rhode Island was one of nine states awarded a grant from the \$500 million Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge fund, a competitive grant program jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Rhode Island was awarded **\$50 million over four years** to improve early learning and development opportunities for Rhode Island's young children with a particular focus on high need children.



Rhode Island's grant application focused on four main categories of action:

- developing high quality, accountable programs
- promoting early learning and development outcomes for children
- building a great early childhood workforce
- measuring outcomes and progress

How will Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge funds be used?

The funds awarded to Rhode Island will be used to support and sustain the reform strategies outlined in the state's October 2011 application, which are designed to strengthen and improve the early learning system in Rhode Island. Reform strategies include:

- Expanding BrightStars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs.
- Providing intensive support to programs to achieve research-based quality benchmarks.
- Developing a comprehensive professional development system for early care and education professionals, including expanding access to higher education.
- Supporting early care and education professionals to learn how to use research-based tools and strategies to improve children's learning and development.
- Improving developmental screening rates and supporting community-based, evidence-based interventions on early literacy, social-emotional development and family engagement in health settings.
- Developing a statewide, common kindergarten entry assessment aligned with the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards to better understand children's skills and knowledge at school entry.
- Building a statewide, cross-departmental early learning data system linking to the Rhode Island Department of Education's statewide longitudinal data system for K-12.

Visit www.earlylearningri.org to learn more about the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge and to sign up for the Early Learning Council e-newsletter

Can the grant funds be used to serve more children in early learning programs and classrooms?

No. Because of the need to ensure sustainability of the system, Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant funds cannot be used to expand direct services for children. **Funds cannot be used to expand access (seats/slots) to full-day kindergarten or to expand access to child care subsidies, Head Start, Early Intervention, preschool special education or state Pre-K.** States are also prohibited from using funds to support the direct delivery of health services.

Early Learning Challenge **funds will be used to strengthen the quality of the existing system**, including child care programs (both centers and family child care), Head Start, Early Intervention, preschool special education and state Pre-K. Resources available through the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant will directly support these early childhood programs through professional development, scholarships for higher education, quality improvement grants, technology grants, funding for evidence-based programs, and enhanced child care subsidy payments to providers who meet higher quality benchmarks and serve children from low-income families.

Who's managing the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant?

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council, co-chaired by Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, led the process to develop the state's application, and the Council will continue to provide overarching leadership and oversight for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant.

Five participating state agencies share responsibility for implementing the reform strategies and achieving the grant outcomes, including:

- Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education - lead state agency
- Rhode Island Department of Human Services
- Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families
- Rhode Island Department of Health
- Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services

How can I learn more about the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant?

For more information about the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge you can visit the Early Learning RI website at www.earlylearningri.org. News, information and other updates will be posted on this website throughout the four years of grant.

For specific questions about the implementation of this grant you can contact Melissa Emidy, Executive Staff Assistant, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, at melissa.emidy@ride.ri.gov or 401-222-8165.

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