

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

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Highlights from the District of Columbia's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Application

On Wednesday, October 19, 2011, the District of Columbia submitted an application to the US Department of Education as part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. The application was developed over two months of intense work and collaboration between multiple government agencies and stakeholders representing childcare centers, home-based childcare providers, Head Start programs, and Pre-K programs in community-based centers, public schools, and public charter schools.

The Deputy Mayor for Education led the application writing effort in close collaboration with the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services to ensure the inclusion of and collaboration between agencies from both the Education and Health and Human Services clusters. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education was selected as the Lead Agency to administer and manage the implementation of the grant, should the District be selected as a recipient. The DC Departments of Health, Human Services, Mental Health, Health Care Finance, the Child and Family Services Agency, and the State Early Childhood Development Coordinating Council also signed on to the application signaling their intent to fully participate in the District's plan and assist in implementing the important work of the activities outlined in the proposal.

The District's reform agenda is guided by a theory of action that informs the selection of strategies and activities for implementation as follows:

Adequate investment in and full implementation of quality early care and education programming for children birth to age 5 will result in children entering Kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

The District believes that three essential reform pillars are necessary to support this agenda. These reform pillars support the overarching vision of the District and are the areas around which goals, strategies and activities have been developed:

1. **Mapping & Alignment** – Achieving a vision as ambitious as DC's requires careful alignment of human and fiscal resources as well as carefully targeted use of those resources toward meaningful goals.

2. **Professional Development** – An early learning and development program is only as good as its early childhood educators. Developing and facilitating standards-based professional development in critical areas (i.e., learning, health, family engagement) will ensure the delivery

of high quality services to all children, including those with high needs. Additionally, creating a comprehensive workforce development training system that will monitor professional learning for program personnel and align individuals with appropriate training opportunities to improve performance and effectiveness is essential to keep the early childhood professional enthusiastic and growing.

3. Quality Assurance – Developing a District-wide definition of quality that can apply to programs in all settings is essential to moving programs toward that bar. Implementation of a carefully-designed monitoring, incentive and support system will ensure that all programs are on a path to continuous improvement.

Highlights from the District’s plan include:

- An enhanced Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that will be open to all programs serving children birth-age 5 in the District.
- Incentives, including quality supports and technical assistance, Center of Excellence and Peer Provider Network funds for high-quality programs, and quality rating “branding” for participating programs.
- Alignment of the DC Early Learning Standards to the Common Core State Standards, the creation of Standards Entry Point documents, and high-quality professional development to assist providers in making effective use of the Standards.
- A Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework to assist all early childhood educators in identifying their own professional competencies and working to systematically improve their professional skills.
- A Kindergarten Entry Assessment, to be designed as part of a collaborative effort and rolled-out beginning in 2014. This assessment will allow all teachers in DCPS and DCPCS to identify the readiness of their students for school within the initial months of the school year.

The US Department of Education will announce grant winners by December 31, 2011. However, District government leaders from all participating agencies and offices are dedicated to improving the quality of early learning and development opportunities for all children in the city and have acknowledged their commitment to implementing aspects of the plan whether not the District wins the Early Learning Challenge.