



**TO:** Roger Breed, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Education

**FROM:** Melody Hobson

**SUBJECT:** Discussion of Race To The Top -Early Learning Challenge Grant Application

**Proposed Board Action:**

Grant Commissioner authority to sign Nebraska's Race To The Top Application.

**Background Information:**

The Race To The Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant is a competitive funding opportunity from the federal government administered jointly by the United States Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Governors must submit applications from their state and must designate a lead agency to administer the grant. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has been designated as the lead agency for Nebraska's application. The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services are collaborating to prepare a high quality application that also includes the University of Nebraska System as an integral partner. The total amount of the grant application will be approximately \$50,000,000 to be used over 4 years.

**Estimated Cost:**

**Supporting Documentation Included:**

See attached document.

**For Additional Information on this item:**

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**RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE**  
*Nebraska’s Early Learning and Development Reform Plan*  
*Project Design*

Building on the strong foundation and commitment of Nebraska to its families, children, and educators, the Early Learning and Development (ELD) Reform Plan provides a platform to align services, leverage resources, and use the expertise, incentive, and policy of the state’s leadership to make high quality early learning (including preschool and childcare) programs available to all families and young children. The strategies that the Plan undertakes are carefully aligned with the existing state priorities to assure success in achieving the stated outcomes of the Plan during the four-year period of the grant and sustaining changes in the future. Nebraska has set forth four ambitious goals for its early childhood system:

- **Strong Children.** Children enter kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, health and dispositions they need to be successful, especially Children with High Needs.
- **Strong Families.** Nebraska families are engaged and empowered to understand the importance of the early years and promote their child’s learning and social-emotional development.
- **Strong Early Childhood Programs.** Increased access to high quality early learning programs for all children and families, especially Children with High Needs.
- **Strong Early Childhood System.** Strong, central state leadership of an aligned early learning and development system with unified approach, sustainable policies, and integrated resources to support young children, their families, and early childhood educators.

These goals will be met through the state’s Early Learning and Development (ELD) Reform Plan. The Plan is organized around four core components (that address the RTT-ELC areas of reform) and three main guiding principles.

**Guiding Principles:**

- Early childhood policies, practices, and services are delivered through an **innovative partnership** between the state Departments of Education (NDE) and Health and Social Services (DHSS), the two agencies that are at the heart of most state interactions with young children and families. The Plan leverages the reach, expertise, and resources of the Departments to work in a collaborative, rather than competitive, system to ensure a comprehensive and aligned early childhood system.
- In order to most effectively and efficiently increase school readiness of Children With High Needs in Nebraska, the initiatives and resources of the Plan are prioritized and **geographically targeted** to areas of the state with children and families experiencing the most need.

- Families are valued and supported as children’s first teachers, all components of the state plan are focused around the family and child to ensure easy access to services and information and support for parents to be successful in their all important role.

### **Core Components of Nebraska’s ELD Plan :**

#### **1) Enhance state leadership alignment and support for High Quality Early Childhood Programs.**

##### ***Key Objectives:***

- *Align and coordinate early learning and development throughout the state through the leadership of Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, the Early Childhood Advisory Council, and Plan management structure*
- *Develop and implement sustainable early childhood policies based on research and evaluation results that support families, children, ELD programs, early childhood workforce, and other providers. (Strategies include research work of Buffet Early Childhood Institute, incentives for participation in QRIS, support for families enrolling in a program participating in the QRIS)*
- *Implement a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System to increase and recognize quality of programs and provide meaningful information to families*
- *Revise and use statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards*
- *Support effective use of comprehensive assessment system which includes screening, formative assessment ,a measure of environmental quality, and a measure of teacher child interactions (Results Matter child, family, and program outcomes measurement system )*

#### **2) Develop high quality early childhood educators through system reform, training support, and resources.**

##### ***Key Objectives:***

- *Develop and implement Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials*
- *Provide integrated system of professional development supporting all ELD programs and workers through training, coaching, materials, online resources, and demonstration sites*
- *Provide training, coaching, and materials to providers participating in QRIS system in order to support continuous improvement and advancement along the levels*

#### **3) Support a comprehensive system of wraparound services for early childhood care.**

##### ***Key Objectives:***

- *Identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness through community-based work of Health and Community Resource Consultants*
- *Provide training and support around early childhood learning and development issues to professionals who provide childhood education and care*
- *Engage and support families*
- *Develop and support partnerships between schools and ELD programs to promote alignment and smooth transitions for positive child outcomes*

**4) Build a unified data system to support programs that are accountable and use data to guide instruction and program development**

*Key Objectives:*

- *Understand the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry by implementing a statewide Kindergarten Assessment*
- *Build or enhance an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies*