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Minnesota Submits Race to the Top Application

State aims to leverage \$45 million federal grant to support early learning reforms

Roseville, Minnesota – Aiming to accelerate Minnesota's efforts to provide high quality early learning opportunities to more children, Governor Dayton and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) submitted its Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge application this week. Seeking to leverage up to \$45 million in federal funds to support the state's early learning initiatives, Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius said the strong application details the state's commitment to educating Minnesota's youngest learners.

"Minnesota's best hope for the future rests on the promises we make to our children today," said Commissioner Cassellius. "I'm proud that our Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge application reflects this administration's and our state's strong commitment to provide equitable opportunities so every child has access to high quality early learning programs."

According to Cassellius, Minnesota's Race to the Top application provides a roadmap for moving the state toward an aligned system of accountable and effective early childhood education. Over the course of the last two months, thousands of stakeholders weighed in with input through a series of meetings and via a website that was created in partnership with the United Way. Additionally, both the state's Early Learning Council and the Children's Cabinet – made up of Cassellius and Commissioner of Human Services Lucinda Jesson and Commissioner of Health Ed Ehlinger - provided direction and guidance throughout the accelerated application process.

"We know that a good education is one of the most effective ways to promote good health among children," said Dr. Ed Ehlinger, Minnesota Commissioner of Health. "That's why the Minnesota Department of Health is involved in RTT and supports this important initiative."

The United States Department of Education will award Early Learning Challenge grants by year's end. Guidelines indicated that successful applications would outline plans that are ambitious, but achievable, and focused on building systems that are sustainable without supplanting existing funds or activities.

Highlights of the Minnesota's Race to the Top Application include:

- Better alignment of public and private efforts to close both achievement and opportunity gaps
- Better accountability and decision-making structure with improved governance and data systems
- Stronger focus on workforce development by supporting professional/career development of early childhood professionals
- Expectations for accountable and high-quality programs that use both existing services and new scholarships
- Targeting communities that have both high rates of early childhood poverty and significant community infrastructure on which to build successful programs
- The creation of a Children's Cabinet by Governor Dayton to align the work of state agencies on children's issues

“Every child in every neighborhood deserves the strong sendoff early learning provides,” said Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson. “This application is an important step in that direction.”

The early learning strategies are critical to advancing Governor Dayton’s 7-Point Plan for Better Schools for a Better Minnesota. The framework also furthers the Administration’s commitment toward building a state that works for all Minnesotans, whether they are at the beginning of their school career or preparing for retirement.

Since her appointment in January, Commissioner Cassellius has led MDE in collaborative work to ensure all Minnesota children have equitable opportunities to succeed in school and in life. Key agency efforts include implementing new teacher and principal evaluation and alternative teacher licensure laws enacted during the 2011 special session, and working with the Legislature on bipartisan early literacy initiatives. She has also been a leading voice in Minnesota’s efforts to create a better accountability system for Minnesota schools, acting early to secure a waiver from elements of the current No Child Left Behind law and positioning Minnesota as an early contender among 37 other states applying for similar waivers.

The United States Department of Education will award Race to the Top grants in December. The full application will be available Thursday at the UnitedFront website at <http://unitedfrontmn.org/education/>.

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