

## Illinois Enters Race to the Top Competition for New \$70 Million Grant

Written by Katelyn Tye

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### *Funding Would Boost Early Childhood Services Statewide and Ensure Better Coordination and Excellence*

SPRINGFIELD – October 20, 2011. Governor Pat Quinn announced today that Illinois submitted an application to the federal “Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund,” which is worth \$70 million in early childhood education funding and would significantly improve the coordination and quality of early childhood services in Illinois. The application was submitted to the federal Department of Education as part of the \$500 million dollar competition. As a large state, Illinois would be eligible for up to a \$70 million award.

Illinois’ comprehensive application aims to build on Governor Pat Quinn’s strong emphasis on early childhood education by developing a more unified approach to supporting young children and their families. The funds would help ensure that Illinois children enter kindergarten with the necessary skills and knowledge for success.

“The best long-term economic plan Illinois can have is a solid education system that prepares our children for a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce,” Governor Quinn said. “This proposal gives our state an opportunity to increase access to quality early learning and development programs and to help serve many more children from low income families in high quality programs.”

The collaborative multi-agency grant requests funds to expand and intensify initiatives the

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Illinois State Board of Education, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Children and Family Services currently fund in communities of high need. Home visiting, child screening and assessment, and family support services would be enhanced based on the latest best practice to positively impact the development of children early in life. The U.S. Department of Education will announce awards later this year for states that are leading the way with ambitious, achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive early learning education reform.

The Illinois State Board of Education has proposed new Early Childhood rules that would require any school district that offers kindergarten- half or full day- to administer the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey, or KIDS, starting in the 2014-15 school year.

KIDS will provide comprehensive information about children's developmental competencies over time and inform whether Illinois' kindergarteners have the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in school. Additionally, ISBE proposes to share information about its preschool programs in a rating system already used for childcare programs registered through the Illinois Department of Human Services. The Board will review public comment and make a final decision on these proposals next spring.

"Investing in early childhood programs and collaborating with other state agencies to benefit young children is one of the most cost-effective strategies for improving education and our economy," said State Board of Education Chairman Gery Chico. "I'm confident that Illinois' history as a state with strong early childhood programming makes us a perfect candidate to earn this grant and develop practices that can be used in Illinois and replicated around the nation."

IDHS currently administers the voluntary Quality Counts Quality Rating System for child care centers and homes operating full day. The Governor's office and state agencies listed above will work together over the next four years to dramatically expand the rating system to include part and full day, school and center-based early learning and development programs and all licensed child care. Part day programs will include Illinois' Preschool for All programs and federally funded Head Start programs. The expanded 5 Star system will have state facility requirements and quality criteria that must be met for programs to be at a Star Level.

If Illinois is successful in receiving the grant, funds will support extensive professional development resources and coaching opportunities for early learning and development program

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providers to aid them in achieving higher Star levels.

Illinois' "Early Learning Challenge Fund" application is designed to provide consistency and ensure improvement in the quality of programs offered through state funds by focusing on educational and developmental components, family support and staff competency. Through greater inter-agency collaboration, Illinois aims to offer a coordinated system of high-quality early learning and development services available, particularly for children and families considered to be at risk.

For more information about the Illinois Early Learning Council and to view Illinois' application, visit [www2.illinois.gov/earlychildhood/Pages/EarlyLearningChallenge.aspx](http://www2.illinois.gov/earlychildhood/Pages/EarlyLearningChallenge.aspx)

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