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Office of Governor Bev Perdue, Ben Niolet

## **North Carolina Wins Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant**

### **State's share of \$500 Million Will Help Strengthen, Support Early Childhood Education**

Gov. Bev Perdue announces that North Carolina won a Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

North Carolina was among nine winners chosen from 37 applicants competing for a share of \$500 million. While the exact amount of the grant will be announced later, the state's application was for approximately \$70 million. North Carolina's grant will allow the state to strengthen efforts to ensure that all children are able to start kindergarten with a strong foundation for future learning.

"All children in a classroom benefit if everyone starts kindergarten ready to succeed," said Gov. Bev Perdue. "North Carolina's early childhood system is a national leader, and this grant will allow us to take dramatic steps forward toward the goal I have set of assuring that every child has the chance to succeed in school and life."

Quality early childhood programs have proven to produce better education, health, family and economic outcomes. Effective early education from birth to age five correlates with school readiness, academic achievement, college graduation, good citizenship and a productive workforce.

"North Carolina has long been a leader in early childhood education. Through awarding North Carolina this grant, the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have recognized our past and Gov. Perdue's vision for providing a bright future for all of our young people," said State Board of Education Chairman Bill Harrison. "As with Race to the Top—K-12, this early learning grant will allow our state to move further and faster."

The grant recipients were announced by the White House on Friday morning.

"Winning the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge is another milestone for North Carolina's national leadership in the field of early childhood learning and development," said Robin Britt, chairman of North Carolina's Early Childhood Advisory Council.

North Carolina's application was based on rigorous requirements of the federal grant competition, and the grant will benefit children and families across the state. It cannot be used to simply increase capacity in existing services such as the NC Pre-K program but, rather, is designed to add value to those investments and increase their impact and effectiveness.

This summer, the General Assembly made extreme cuts to Smart Start and NC Pre-K. In the wake of those cuts, Superior Court Judge Howard Manning ordered the state to offer the NC Pre-K program to all eligible at-risk 4-year-olds who apply. Gov. Perdue has outlined a prudent and responsible first step for the General Assembly to fund 6,300 more slots in the program without raising taxes or cutting other vital services. The General Assembly leadership has not acted on that proposal.

"This grant shows how successful North Carolina has been in executing our vision for putting all of our children on a path to a bright future," Gov. Perdue said. "It's time for the General Assembly to follow the court's order and do the right thing for North Carolina's children."

The state's grant application proposed several initiatives including:

- Increasing the quality of early learning programs in underserved areas.
- Expanding diagnostic screening programs to ensure early intervention for health and developmental problems for children.
- Improving and expanding systems to gauge children's progress.
- Providing incentives and resources to support and strengthen the state's early childhood workforce.
- Providing training and assistance to help early childhood educators better engage family members in a child's early development.
- Establishing a "Transformation Zone" in selected high-need counties in Northeastern North Carolina. Counties would be eligible for focused programs designed to improve the lives of young children and families.

"Today, North Carolina's youngest children moved one step closer to a brighter future thanks to the magnificent work of a dedicated group of people who made winning this grant a true 'holiday gift' for us all," said Dr. Olson Huff, board chairman of the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

The Early Learning Challenge will be led by the Early Childhood Advisory Council, created by Gov. Perdue to develop and sustain a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system to help achieve the best possible outcomes for North Carolina's young children.

The Division of Child Development and Early Education and the Division of Public Health, as well as the Department of Public Instruction are key participating state agencies and will be joined by other state and local agencies and non-profit organizations in implementing this far-reaching and transformative plan.