



TO: The Honorable the Members of the Board of Regents

FROM: John B. King, Jr.

SUBJECT: Early Learning Challenge

DATE: September 9, 2013

AUTHORIZATION(S):

John B. King, Jr.
SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

Will the Board support the Department's participation with other state agencies to prepare a proposal in response to the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant?

Reason(s) for Consideration

In August, the United States Departments of Education and Health and Human Services released a request for proposals for a new round of the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (ELC). The Department worked closely with the state Office of Children and Family Services, Department of Health and the Council on Children and Families to submit a proposal for the first round of ELC in 2011.

The purpose of the program is to provide states an opportunity to focus deeply on birth through age five early learning and development programs and close achievement gaps by supporting state efforts to build stronger supports and programs for young children and their families. Expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities has been a key priority of the Board, including investments in the state's quality rating and improvement system (QUALITYStarsNY) in the early learning programs feeding into the state's Persistently Lowest Achieving schools, and through the recommendation of a \$75 million expansion in full-day universal pre-kindergarten programs in the Regents 2013 State Aid Proposal. The ELC provides another opportunity to further the Board's early learning policy priorities.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the full Board at its September meeting.

Background Information

The ELC is organized around five key areas:

- (A) Successful State Systems:** States must provide clearly articulated goals and strategies designed to deliver a coordinated set of programs, policies and services that are responsive to the needs of young children and their families. Under this section, states must propose ambitious plans for successful systems of early learning and development that will improve program quality and outcomes for young children, increase the number of high-needs children attending high-quality early learning and development programs, and help close achievement gaps.
- (B) High-Quality, Accountable Programs:** States must design and implement a tiered quality rating and improvement system that is based on consistent and demanding standards and establishes meaningful program ratings. New York, with the assistance of a \$4 million investment from the Department's successful 2010 Race to the Top application, has field tested and piloted QUALITYStarsNY in early learning and development programs feeding into the state's Persistently Lowest Achieving schools. It is anticipated that the state's proposal will include an expansion of QUALITYStarsNY.
- (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children:** ELC will reward proposals from states that have a set of early learning and development standards that define what children should know and be able to do at different stages of development. Towards that end, the Board adopted the Pre-kindergarten Foundation for the Common Core in 2011. In addition, a section of this application requires that states prioritize services that address health supports and services.
- (D) A Great Early Childhood Workforce:** Just as there is nothing more important to a student's education than their teacher, nothing matters more to a young child's success than the adults caring for and teaching them. The competition will reward proposals that define workforce competencies tied to the state's early learning and development standards, increase retention, and improve educator quality.
- (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress:** This section of the application includes provisions to incentivize the creation of comprehensive data systems and implementation of tools to determine readiness at kindergarten entry. Commissioner's Regulations currently require the screening of every new entrant to our schools to determine which students are possibly gifted, have or are suspected of having a disability, and/or are English proficient. A statewide survey conducted in the context of the 2011 proposal found that more in depth determinations of kindergarten readiness are quite varied in form and function regarding the domains of learning. As part of the 2011 ELC application, the Board directed the Department to develop, contingent on winning an ELC award, a comprehensive proposal for implementing a common readiness tool for

implementation in the 2016-17 school year and create a Kindergarten Readiness Advisory Council made up of expert stakeholders from around the state to advise the Department and the Board.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board direct the Department to collaborate with state agencies to develop a proposal in response to the federal ELC, including proceeding with Section (E) above in the same fashion as the 2011 ELC application.

Timetable for Implementation

Proposals are due to the federal government on October 16, 2013. The grant period for the grant is December 31, 2013 through December 31, 2017.