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**From:** Chris Reeve (CReeve@cde.ca.gov)  
**To:** CReeve@cde.ca.gov;  
**Date:** Fri, September 30, 2011 6:51:52 PM  
**Cc:** CMaben@cde.ca.gov;  
**Subject:** Call for support - California's Draft Application for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to you on behalf of State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) Tom Torlakson to **ask for your support of California's draft application for the federal [Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant \(RTT-ELC\)](#)**.

As you know, on August 23, 2011, the U.S. Department of Education and Health and Human Services released the final application for the RTT-ELC. Upon review of the final application, the SSPI believes that California can develop a strong draft application for consideration of submittal by the Governor. One that provides California with a great opportunity **to build upon the extensive early learning efforts that the state and local communities have undertaken to date.**

The purpose of this grant is to improve the quality of early learning and development programs, prepare children for school readiness, and to close the achievement gap for high need children from birth to five years of age. **California has the opportunity to receive \$100 million** in federal funding over a four-year period to achieve the goals of the RTT-ELC.

In order to present a strong and compelling application, California must demonstrate the broad and important support of the state's early care and education system, of which you are a part. As an integral part of this system and this important effort, **we respectfully request your submittal of a letter of support for California's RTT-ELC application to the CDE.**

**We are asking for letters of support to be submitted to the CDE no later than Tuesday, October 11th.** We recognize this is a tight timeline, however, it is because the final application is due to the Governor Thursday, October 13th for final consideration. Final application deadline is Wednesday, October 19th. Please know that your support is integral to the application's success and that we would greatly appreciate your ability to meet the October 11th date.

Attached is a concept paper for the draft application and a sample support letter. A website will also soon be established to provide a real-time resource to keep up to date with these efforts.

We hope that you and your organization will help support California's application for the RTT-ELC. During these difficult budget times, **this is a one-time opportunity we cannot afford to miss.** One that will provide California with much needed funding to implement a locally-driven effort to close the achievement gap and strengthen the state's early learning and development system

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions at (916) 319-0590 or via this email.

Thank you,

Chris Reeve  
Legislative Representative  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson  
California Department of Education  
(916) 319-0821  
creeve@cde.ca.gov

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## California's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant Overview

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**Please note that a final decision to apply for the RTT-ELC has not been made.** The California Department of Education (CDE) along with the Executive Staff of the State Board of Education is leading the effort to develop a draft application for the Governor's review and decision in October.

**Background:** The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) seeks applications *“that demonstrate a State’s commitment and capacity to building a statewide system that raises the quality of early learning and development programs so that all children receive the support they need to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.”*<sup>1</sup> The RTT-ELC provides California with an opportunity to build upon the extensive early learning efforts that the state and local communities have undertaken to date. At the same time, California’s application must recognize the challenges inherent in developing and implementing change efforts in the state given the stark financial realities it faces as well as its size and diversity. With these assets and challenges in mind, California is formulating a draft RTT-ELC application that will follow several key design principles. These principles include:

- Support the development and expansion of successful local programs focused on increased outcomes for high-need children;
- Encourage the voluntary networking and alignment of these local efforts led by the CDE and supported by participating state agencies;
- Invest RTT-ELC funds in clear, one-time investments that support capacity building and sustainable infrastructure, particularly at the local level;
- Promote sustainable programs that are able to maximize the benefits of one time RTT-ELC funding without creating future pressure on the State’s budget; and
- Utilize a State Advisory Council (SAC), comprised primarily of state agency MOU signatories, to integrate and mobilize the existing assets, programs, and resources of state agencies in support of early learners.

Several key program pillars are emerging from these design principles, building on:

- “ELC Regional Leadership Consortia” –supporting localities to become regional leaders;
- Existing initiatives and momentum, especially with key school readiness programs;
- California’s research-based Early Learning and Development System centered on the Foundations (standards); and
- Strengthening the skills and knowledge of early childhood educators to support positive child outcomes.

California’s draft RTT-ELC application is expected to include the following key components:

**Establishment and Cultivation of ELC Regional Leadership Consortia:** In contrast to an approach which would mandate top-down reforms, California will be proposing a locally-driven system where it will identify ELC Regional Leadership Consortia that are already at the forefront of developing a Quality Rating and Information System (QRIS) implementation, are willing to focus their QRIS to common statewide elements, and have the capacity and desire to mentor other communities. The Leadership Consortia will be supported and networked by the CDE and the SAC, and will work together to develop strategies that transform their own service delivery systems by building on common, recognized best practices.

**Building on Existing School Readiness Initiatives:** ELC efforts will build upon the substantial investments being made throughout the state in school readiness initiatives. A key focus of the ELC application will be on coordinating and aligning local investments in QRIS systems to inform early childhood state efforts.

**Focused one-time investments in Early Childhood Workforce Development:** These will build upon existing efforts that include the adoption of a core of eight early childhood courses by 102 of the State’s 105 community colleges and the early learning foundations and competencies that are close to being finalized by CDE.

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<sup>1</sup> For more background on the RTT-ELC see: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>

**[Please print on letterhead]**

[DATE]

Edmund G. Brown Jr., Governor, State of California  
Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Michael Kirst, President, State Board of Education  
c/o Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant State Working Group  
Child Development Division  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Brown, Superintendent Torlakson, and Board President Kirst:

I/We are writing to express [insert organization]'s strong support of California's application for the federal Race to the Top (RTT) Phase Early Learning Challenge Funds. This exciting and much needed opportunity provides California the ability to utilize already established local and regional early care and education programs as a foundation to greatly enhance and strengthen the state's early learning and development system. California's proposal will give the state a plan that reflects and builds upon the excellent work underway in our communities. The end result will be a high quality and sustainable early learning and development statewide network, grounded in local resources and supported by the California Department of Education. Key highlights of the plan include:

- Creating a strong network of Early Learning Challenge Leadership Communities, made up of local and regional early care and education programs that are or have agreed to adopt and implement a Quality Rating and Improvement System that will help to improve and enhance the developmental services our children deserve, especially high-need students;
- Highlighting the success of these locally proven programmatic efforts and emulating their great work through practices to be adopted for use across the state;
- Using the results of RTT programs to drive changes in regulations and laws impacting all ECE programs statewide, as appropriate; and
- Building upon existing efforts to form a coherent and integrated early learning workforce development system.

California has long recognized the critical nature of investments in our youngest learners. With California representing 13 percent of the nation's children and 21 percent of California's children living in poverty, the state is an indispensable part of any national effort to close the achievement gap. California's Early Learning Challenge proposal represents an excellent opportunity for our state and nation to take a major step towards educational excellence for all.

If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, please contact (name, phone, e-mail).

Sincerely,  
[Name, Title, Organization]