

# Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund

## Grant Information and Overview

The mission of the Colorado Department of Education is to shape, support and safeguard a statewide education system that prepares all students for success in a globally competitive world. Students need a high-quality preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (P-12) education that prepares them to succeed in college and the workforce. Kindergarten readiness is not only a major milestone in a child's path to success but it is also one of Colorado's top education priorities.

### Collaborating for Kids

#### Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund Grant (RTT-ELCF)

In December of 2012, Colorado was awarded \$29.9 million in federal funding over the next four years to help accelerate the state's plans to improve school readiness for Colorado's children.

The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) is the lead agency for the grant with the Colorado Department of Education as a primary partner. Together the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness within CDE and the Office of Early Childhood within CDHS will use grant funds to improve access to high quality early learning programs and help develop the capacity of the people, programs, and places serving children with the highest needs.

#### Implementing School Readiness Plans and Assessments

The RTT Early Learning Challenge Fund will provide resources and supports for districts with implementation of school readiness plans and assessments in kindergarten. Senate Bill 08-212, Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), requires that all children in publicly funded preschool and kindergarten programs receive an individual school readiness plan. The plans need to be informed by a school readiness assessment.

School readiness plans will help teachers and families gather information to better support the developmental and academic progress of kindergarten children. This ongoing progress monitoring provides early information to guide instruction and will ultimately lead to optimum outcomes for these young children as they transition to first grade.

### Additional Benefits

Numerous young children, particularly those with disabilities or identified as being at high risk for challenges as they enter formal schooling, will benefit from the initiatives and resources made possible by the Early Learning Challenge Funds.

These benefits include:

- Improving the quality of early childhood programs
- Ongoing progress monitoring and individual planning for high need infants, toddlers and preschoolers in community settings
- Advancing preparation of early learning professionals and supporting their ongoing professional development

By harnessing the investments from the Early Learning Challenge Fund grant, Colorado will significantly increase our youngest children's chances for success and decrease the gap in readiness between children with high needs and their peers.

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Will school districts receive grant monies from the RTT Early Learning Challenge Fund?

Unlike the K-12 Race to the Top program, monies from the RTT-ELCF are not awarded to local education agencies. Colorado school districts will directly benefit from funds within the grant designated for school readiness assessment. Remaining funds from the grant are largely intended to indirectly impact P-12 schools by supporting high quality early learning programs, enhancing the quality of the early childhood workforce and expanding access to progress monitoring for high needs children aged birth to five.

### How will school districts access funds for school readiness assessment?

An application process will be announced in early 2013 for districts to access funds for school readiness assessments. Interested school districts should complete an online interest form which can be accessed at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dFlwaVRHRFNsZDJyZTc0VHhvOWtuREE6MQ>. Informational webinars about how the funding will work and what is included in the funding will occur on Thursday, January 24 and be repeated on Tuesday, January 29, 3:00-4:00. The link for the webinar is <http://connect.enetcolorado.org/r7fz9nfb6nh/>.

### What will the RTT Early Learning Challenge Fund support?

Specific work supported by these funds will include:

- Development, adoption, and promotion of participation in a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) for early learning and care programs.
- Support for the dissemination of and use of Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines for children aged birth to eight.
- Support for the expansion of Results Matter to include additional children in child care settings.
- Support for a stronger early childhood workforce by strengthening the professional development system through (1) implementation of a data system to track and support professional development, (2) the roll out of the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework for early learning and care providers, (3) an updated professional credentialing system, and (4) incentives that promote career advancement.
- Support for implementing a school readiness assessment system in publically funded preschools and kindergartens. This is the component of the grant that will help districts fund administration of school readiness assessments, as discussed in this fact sheet.

### Does the RTT-ELCF increase access to the Colorado Preschool Program and full-day kindergarten?

The RTT-ELCF does not directly increase access to the Colorado Preschool Program and full-day kindergarten; however, it does fund activities designed to improve the quality of preschool and kindergarten. Governor Hickenlooper's 2013-14 budget proposal and the recommendations of the School Finance Partnership address increasing access to preschool and full-day kindergarten. The RTT-ELCF efforts are complementary to both of those proposals.

## Where can I learn more?

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CDE's early learning and school readiness website: [www.cde.state.co.us/early](http://www.cde.state.co.us/early)

The Colorado Department of Education

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