

Federal program awards state \$52.6M grant

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Posted: 12/17/2011 04:06:05 AM PST

Updated: 12/17/2011 07:56:11 AM PST

After losing out on Race to the Top funding for K-12 education, California on Friday was awarded a \$52.6 million federal grant to improve early childhood education.

"This grant will help more California children get good care and a good start at learning, which we know is key to their long-term success, at school and beyond," said Tom Torlakson, state Superintendent of Public Instruction, in a news release. "I'm proud of the teamwork that led to this win for California, and I'm grateful to President (Barack) Obama for recognizing the potential of regional partnerships to improve child care programs across our state."

California beat out 26 other states, plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, in its competitive bid for a share of \$500 million in Race to the Top -- Early Learning Challenge grants. The other winners were Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington.

In California, the money will fund Quality Rating and Improvement Systems being developed in 15 counties, including Contra Costa, Santa Clara, San Francisco and Santa Cruz, said Sean Casey, executive director of First Five Contra Costa.

Agencies including First Five commissions, county offices of education and county governments will join together to work with child care programs and school districts. They will create rating scores based on common standards related to the learning environment, teacher effectiveness and parent engagement.

"Being included in this is, I think, a real testament to what we've done here in Contra Costa," Casey said Friday. "We've been able to jump-start what I think is becoming a state and national movement. It really is a recognition that investing in early childhood education really is as important a social investment as Social Security is for the senior years."

The California Democratic Congressional Delegation promoted the state's application, telling the U.S. Department of Education the grant would be expected to help 1.8 million children, including 60 percent who are English language learners.

"This is great news for the students of California," said Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, in a prepared statement. "Schools and education programs have been hit hard by the current economic crisis and the belt-tightening in Washington, D.C. and across the country. Educators and parents know that a strong early learning program is absolutely critical for the success of children. And, today's Race to the Top grant for California, which I was proud to support, will

help ensure that our children are receiving the best education earlier to ensure future academic success."

The grant is expected to span four years. Details about how it will be allocated and implemented still need to be worked out, Casey said.

ONLINE:

More information about the Race to the Top -- Early Learning Challenge is available by visiting www.cde.ca.gov

Race to the top awards

\$500 million

Total federal grants awarded to California and eight other states.

1.8 million

Children expected to be helped by Race to the Top funding, of whom 60 percent are English language learners.