

Education-Funds Contest Expands to Preschool, More States

By John Lauerma - May 25, 2011 10:04 AM CT

The Obama administration's funding competition for states to boost education standards will be expanded to preschool programs, and will let nine of the states that failed to win money in earlier rounds apply for grants.

The [Race to the Top](#) Early Learning Challenge will offer a total of \$500 million to states that create plans to set higher standards for preschools and expand and improve their staff, the Education Department said today in a [statement](#).

The latest round of funding brings the value of the program to about \$5 billion, said [Justin Hamilton](#), a department spokesman. Race to the Top has already awarded as much as \$400 million to 11 states and the District of Columbia that stiffened standards and instituted merit-pay linking teachers' compensation to student achievement. Boosting early learning can make a lifelong difference in children's chances for success, Vice President Joe Biden said in the statement.

"For kids, high-quality early learning programs mean they will enter school better prepared with a greater chance of finishing high school and college," said Biden, who is also chairman of the administration's Middle Class Task Force. "Expanding access to such early education and child care programs will also make it easier for working parents to hold down a job."

Nine more states that didn't win money last year will be eligible to apply for an additional \$200 million in funding for their elementary, middle and high schools, according to a separate [statement](#).

Nine States

The administration began awarding Race to the Top funds last year to states that scored the highest on a 500-point scale for reaching goals. In all, 46 states and the [District of Columbia](#) applied for the grants.

Nine of the states that didn't win grants -- [Arizona](#), [California](#), Colorado, [Illinois](#), Kentucky, Louisiana, [Pennsylvania](#), New Jersey and South Carolina -- can seek funding ranging from \$10 million to \$50 million, the Education Department said today.

These states were selected to reapply because they have demonstrated "capacity and commitment around bold reform plans," according to the statement.

"These funds will encourage states to continue their courageous work to challenge the status quo and build on the momentum for education reform happening in our classrooms, schools and communities," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said today.

New Jersey lost out on a grant last year because of a mistake on its application. [New Jersey](#) Governor Chris Christie fired Education Commissioner Bret Schundler after the error was discovered.

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